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## The Channeling Power of Television and the Viewing Experience

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## THE CHANNELING POWER OF TELEVISION AND THE VIEWING EXPERIENCE

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*I come home from class, turn on the TV, boot up my laptop (with a high-speed, wireless internet connection, of course), make sure my cell phone is handy (for what would I do if I did not hear it ring?!), fix lunch, and begin reading emails. My roommate soon comes home, we share our days, and I fill her in on whatever sitcom-rerun I am watching. She heads upstairs to her computer, turns on her TV to the news, and waits for her boyfriend to call her cell phone so they can decide what DVD to rent tonight. We are twenty-something college students. It is important to be informed on politics and society: what happens on Capitol Hill, across the world, and in Hollywood. I care about appearances, what other people think, and I consider myself unique. I grew up watching shows like Full House and Saved by the Bell, I wanted to be just like Punky Brewster; The Real World needs to cast ME, and I can not help but watch (though to my own disdain) the "Reality" shows that dominate Primetime today. What I see on television impacts my views of "cool" and not and therefore how I shop and what I buy. At the same time, I am a time-starved individual constantly bombarded with things to do that further complicate my daily life thereby distracting me from the media vehicle that I love most: my TV.*

### Literature Review and Background Information

The television serves as an important centerpiece to American homes and impacts how people view their world. From small black-and-white sets to wall-sized plasma screens, television media has grown into gargantuan conglomerates that dominate the expansive media landscape today. Five companies—Disney, News Corporation, Time-Warner, Universal-Vivendi, and Viacom—pace the race to grab consumers' attention (Dretzin, 2001). These conglomerates and their subsidiaries strive to increase profits and thus, critics contend, bias their output to drive their own profits. Viacom, for example, is considered the most commercialized of these "big 5" companies; it owns CBS, MTV, BET, VH1, ShowTime, Blockbuster, Simon & Schuster Publishers, Paramount Pictures, and 160 radio stations in the twelve largest markets (Dretzin, 2001). To further emphasize this "bias," radio stations function on the "payola" system in which record labels pay stations to play their music. In addition, the abundance of specialized television networks, radio stations, and magazines lead consumers to *think* they have a variety of choices, but this in fact is only a façade that covers corporate concentration. Is this profit-driven situation "disgusting" and "greedy," or merely the successful product of a capitalistic free-market?

An informed shopper is paramount to a capitalistic economy. Eighteen to twenty-four year-olds undergo a generational passage that affects their thought processes as they begin to question the perceptions they form during their childhood and adolescent developmental periods and begin to form new perceptions that are distinctly their own. This transition phase is important to marketers because the better they poise their products toward this group the greater chance they have of building loyal customer partnerships. These partnerships are vital to securing product and brand sales worth billions of dollars throughout the consumers' lives.

New Consumers, those touched by an "internet-enhanced" society as opposed to "old consumers" of fifty years ago, lead increasingly busy and complicated lives. This is marked by an increase in commercial competition, an increase in social competition, less family division of labor due to the rise in single-parent households, and simply too much to do. These factors force people to try to find more time by utilizing new technologies and appliances that shorten tasks, networking business systems, buying on credit, multitasking, using the internet to shop at *any* time, and consulting experts prior to making decisions (Lewis & Bridger, 2001). Parkinson's law, in which work increases to fill the time available, suggests time-crunched Americans are further starved as they use these time-saving tools. The struggle to find time impairs people's attention; ninety-nine percent of data the brain receives does not reach the conscious mind (Lewis & Bridger, 2001). These time and attention scarcities create an intolerance of advertisement-supported media to the extent that consumers are willing to pay money to avoid

advertisements (Aitchison, 2004). Marketers thus face consumers who are willing to spend their money but not inclined to listen to a sales pitch. They must fight to gain trust and attention in order to affect consumers' purchase decision process.

These advanced lifestyles increase peoples' standards of living which affect their tastes and preferences to what material goods and entertainment programs they enjoy and deem appropriate for their children. Baby Boomers who grew into this environment give their children choices and view "consumer decisions as learning opportunities" (Schor, 2004). Busy, dual-working, and single-parents are time-starved, in general have more disposable income than their parents, and structure their children's leisure time to compensate for their absence. Children are first adopters and avid users of household technologies, they are the most brand loyal, and most hip to trends; they consider brands as signs of coolness. In addition, children shop at younger ages than their parents did and more often shop alone. As a result, marketers direct their efforts straight to kids in hopes to trigger the "nag factor"—where parents buy their child's wishes to avoid incessant demands—and "guilt money"—when parents buy their children material goods because they feel guilty they do not have enough time to spend with them (Schor, 2004). Children are thus raised in an advertising-driven, materialistic environment that adds to their time-attention scarcity and impacts their consumer perspective.

The search for identity drives commercial culture. Cornell University marketing professor Rob Kwortnik believes "choice is rooted in self-identity" (Frumkin, 2004) because people's consumer decisions mirror their self-image and outward perspective. The 1950's popular sentiment "keeping up with the Joneses" is now to surpass the Joneses, because people would rather stand out than just "fit in" with their peers (Bianco, 2004). This present drive to be "better" in every life arena thus encourages material consumption. People, however, still place a premium on authenticity because this makes them not only materially further than their neighbor but also of greater perceived quality. Unique subcultures (that define style, image, and attitude) develop in small communities or groups and are discovered and introduced into the media, eventually turning "mainstream." This mainstream culture is initially "refreshed" but then reverts back to conformity, further heightening the need for authenticity and integrity (Dretzin, 2001). Therefore, the sub-cultural individual's desire to be unique and independent drives the mainstream culture, and both fuel commercial output as marketers feed these consumer demands. Marketers also instigate "indie" trends by paying "cool" kids to wear their product, hoping the style diffuses through youth social networks (Dretzin, 2001). These "fads," however, rarely turn mainstream.

In reality, does corporate America supply what the people ask for, or do the people buy the image produced by corporate America? New York University professor Douglass Rushkoff also asks "is this our expression or is this our purchase" (Dretzin, 2001) in response to the above unique-creation/mainstream-output cyclic connection. The Music Television Network—MTV—lies at the forefront of defining youth culture through its music videos and "reality" series. These programs are entertainment advertising as they *sell* a particular image (the clothing and attitudes portrayed), and product (the music itself). Hence "the reality is the media" (Dretzin, 2001) as people act as they are told. In this fashion, youth since the 1970's (as compared to those of the 1950's) strive to keep up with the media, rather than the media keeping up with the youth culture. Considering the mega-corporation that owns MTV, its other subsidiaries, and its bottom-line goals, omnipresent advertising is vital to affect the consumer mindset to propel sales growth.

Awareness affects choices; these choices and changes in taste evolve over time; changes in consumer behavior are a function of taste, economies, and convenience (Frumkin, 2004). To affect consumer behavior marketers design messages to prompt action by creating an environment that facilitates message delivery (Dominiak, 2004). How the consumer experiences this message delivery time affects their identity and thus their consumer decisions (Lewis & Bridger, 2001), which are based on the most economical, convenient, and tasteful option. Marketers appeal to consumer emotions to induce authentic feelings that make the consumer recognize a need in their life, prodding them to seek information and (hopefully) purchase the product.

Today's crowded marketplace breeds loud, obnoxious, controversial media because shock is an attention-getter (Dretzin, 2001). Howard Stern, Eminem, and white rage bands like Limp Bizkit draw fans who enjoy the *illusion* of conflict that the artists produce. The "Mook," an in-your-face make stuck in adolescence—like Tom Green or the guys of *Jackass*—and the "Sexpot," a female who wears revealing clothes and uses seductive gestures—like pop idols Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera (Dretzin, 2001)—appear in child and young-adult programs and movies to appeal to this outrageous style. Keying on these identities for a younger crowd, new *Trollz* are set to hit the marketplace at Trollz.com in March. These evolved 1960's Troll dolls combine the attitudes of *Friend's* Phoebe, *The O.C.'s* Summer, *Pooh's* pal Eeyore, and *Sex and the City's* Carrie Bradshaw, with the look of "tween idols" Avril Lavigne, Hilary Duff, and Jessica Simpson (Sheff, 2005). Trollz creators hope to inspire

Cabbage Patch Doll-esque fervor through their website, books, toys, DVDs, and cartoon series in a multimedia spectacle that uses these big-haired so-ugly-they-are-cute icons to enthrall four to eight year old girls. While lending their eyes and ears most frequently to such color and controversy, consumers concern themselves with “what’s right for me” and thus direct their attention to companies that also cater to their specific needs (Bianco, 2004). Whatever the specific emotion used, “the nature of advertising [is to] keep you hungering for more of the stuff that’s supposed to finally put you there [to desired position], but never does” (Dretzin, 2001). Once marketers stimulate the consumer, all else equal, price pulls shoppers into stores (Steidtmann, 2002).

### Present Relevance

Nobel Prize-winning economist Herbert Simon says “a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention” (Lewis & Bridger, 2001). People consume information, and information, explains Simon, consumes people’s attention. As communication technology grows, media outlets evolve and provide audiences with more options for entertainment and information acquirement, at the same time that these audiences evolve to more savvy consumers who lead complex lives. Americans spend \$778 in consumer media spending per year, and that amount is forecasted to rise to \$1000 in 2008 (Aitchison, 2004). The average American in 2003 spent ten hours a day consuming media and increased communications expenditures by two and one quarter percent from the previous year, doubling that amount twenty-five years ago (Aitchison, 2004). People multitask to manage their bevy of technological gadgets (televisions, computers, PDAs, cell phones, DVRs, music devices) and pay to personalize their media content. After purchasing a DVR device people watch twenty- to thirty-percent more television, but skip seventy-percent of the advertisements (Bianco, 2004). Therefore, attracting the target’s attention and conveying a message becomes a greater challenge to marketers. Publicists turn to product “cameos” and placements to pitch their goods *during* movies, television programs, and other media displays. In an effort to “engage” the consumer, marketing plans devoted three billion dollars to product placements in 2003 (Feuer, 2004). A greater understanding of consumer markets thus enables marketers to tailor their strategies to satisfy consumer needs and incite purchases.

“Millennials” (Baker, 2004a), today’s generation of college-agers, define their own preferences and values as they move away from their childhood homes. Affordable and available technology—computers, digital devices, video equipment, high-speed internet, internet cafes—creates diversion from the television as an information source. This technology also creates a more interactive arena where people control what they see and hear, wielding themselves more power, and thereby necessitate incentives to pay attention (Baker, 2004a). These incentives may be entertainment, special deals, or beneficial media configurations. The television remains an important factor despite the technology upsurge because it is an easy, passive, not-too-intrusive way to “invite someone” into the home; television serves as a companion to people as they perform various tasks.

Greater than fifty-percent of thirteen to twenty-four year olds watch television and use the internet at the same time (Baker, 2004a) and internet use grows at the expense of television and print media (Bowman, 2004). Most television advertisements are thus linked to the web in some way, advertisers advertise across multiple mediums to reach consumers where they are; and media owners sell ad packages that force companies to advertise in this fashion (Baker, 2004b). This expansive coverage is necessary to reach consumers; the “mass market” effect of the “big three” television networks (ABC, NBC, CBS) of yesterday is gone, the media-communications world is too specialized (Bianco, 2004). American Express Chief Marketing Officer John Hayes responds to these media realities by making the “changes consumers are making, like spending time in front of the computer instead of the TV set” (Bianco, 2004). He implemented two four-minute “webisodes” that feature Superman and Jerry Seinfeld, catering to the young, urban professional crowd of *Sex and the City* and *Seinfeld*. Similarly, Coke moves toward “experience based, access-driven marketing” with cokemusic.com, the third most popular site among teens, despite not promoting it (Bianco, 2004). Ultimately, the advertising-entertainment-information link seeks to connect with consumer attention in order to impact behavior.

### Key Themes

The mission ahead is to define the television-viewing environment of eighteen to twenty-four year-olds, a group managing the rites of passage from teen to adulthood by striving to be “knowledgably cutting edge.” This demographic group possesses significant disposable income and is extremely brand sensitive (Dretzin, 2001). Constant advancements in communications technology require current research regarding people and the media. To fully understand the media’s net effect on this transitioning population, this honors thesis will explore and explain these important themes:

- (1) How much television do 18-24 year-olds watch?
- (2) To what programs in particular do they have an affinity or emotional attachment?

- (3) How passive or active are people watching the shows, the commercials? To what extent is this attention?
- (4) What is the television-viewing environment and is there a difference between emotionally attached and casual viewing experiences?

By answering these questions it will be possible to provide insight to the degree of attention paid to television output, what people do while watching, and thus what frame of mind people are in as they receive broadcasted messages.

### Survey Results and Discussion

The whole viewing experience gives greater insight to consumer behavior than television ratings alone. This loyalty versus market share comparison highlights the importance of connecting with a consumer's identity to ultimately influence their purchases. To study beyond these basic ratings number, an exploratory study was conducted to survey subjects about their television viewing behaviors and habits and their opinions of advertising. Eighty-eight respondents completed survey journals, and more were returned but too late to be included in the data set. See survey attached.

We asked basic demographic information to create a profile matching any significant correlations between each of these factors and their television viewing habits, and to display a group that may represent the population. Respondents marked the line corresponding to their appropriate descriptor.

This study focuses on 18 to 24 year olds; however older subjects were accepted to involve a different demographic group for comparison purposes. Out of the 88 respondents, 70.0% belong to the 18-24 cohort, 29.1% age 25 and older.

The following chart shows the gender breakdown:



The respondents' ethnic composition is as follows:



White Americans comprise the largest respondent ethnic group, yet there is definite diversity to the sample.

In order to understand who might receive broadcasted messages, respondents indicated both the number of people in their household (including student apartments and college dormitories):



Furthermore, no children under age 18 live in 83.5% of respondent households, while 16.5% have 1 to 4 children present. The 18-24 year old cohort does not typically live with children under 18.

Our respondents also indicated their education level, based on the highest degree attained:



The focus of this study is on 18 to 24 years olds, regardless of education; however, due to respondent availability, nearly all of our core respondents happen to be undergraduate students.

Finally, respondents are asked to indicate their hometown, state, and country:



This study is conducted from Fayetteville, Arkansas, but includes people from 16 states representing all regions of the United States, and from 6 countries outside the United States.

The respondents actively watch television an average of 11 hours a week, with 20.6% watching 3 hours or less, and 16.1% watching 20 hours or more. “Active Viewing” refers to their favorite shows they watch each week and while they may get up during the program, they make an effort to catch most of it. These shows engage the viewer in either “flow time”—a short period when she becomes so focused on the activity that time passes unnoticed and has great propensity to recall images and information—or “occasion time”—should the show elicit such emotional attachment that the viewer views the show as a momentous occasion and is prey to advertisements that sell related products or messages (Lewis & Bridger, 2001). While people have a wide variety of interests, the following are *the* top programs, as indicated by the respondents:



Of particular interest, Molly’s *Law and Order* is watched by 6.8% of respondents and Laura’s *Alias* is watched by 4.5%.

While these favorite shows indicate those that people have a strong affinity toward, the AC Nielsen Ratings represent the total number of viewers, regardless of each individual’s connection or attachment to the show (Nielsen Media Research, Inc., 2005):



Several shows appear on both lists but there are still differences, indicating the importance of gathering television viewing information beyond frequencies. Marketing efforts and advertising costs can therefore be better designed

by including an ethnographic perspective to the traditional ratings. For example, Sportscenter and ESPN programs represent the top affinity program, but do not appear on the Nielsen lists (for Primetime Broadcasts as illustrated above, or for Syndicated programs). The later discussion on television media's influence and involvement in viewers' identities and purchases lends support to the effectiveness of using athlete endorsers and athletic-related sponsorships.

To appreciate the extent to which people make an effort to watch these favorite programs, we asked them if they change their work or school schedules to avoid conflict with their favorite program, if they consistently make an effort to record it for later viewing, if they attempt to get household chores out of the way so they can concentrate on the show, and if they arrange their social schedule around the program. These questions follow a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree. The following chart displays the average answers among the respondents:



While these averages may not seem particularly high due to a polarized sample, analysis of specific answers provides clearer insight. For example, 52% of the respondents are willing to complete chores before the program airs to better focus on their show. Interestingly, despite peoples' busy, complex, and increasingly technologically touched lives, 65% do not record their show with TIVO, a VCR, or other device to view later. People therefore either like to watch programs "live," lack the necessary recording technology, or are too busy to record the show at all. Given that 67.5% are not willing to change work or school schedules, and that 52.3% are not willing to arrange social plans, the data reveals that attention is strongly pulled in many different directions and thus channeling attention to the television is difficult. However, once people sit down, on average, they watch 89.8% of that program and 65.4% watch the entire show. Most of these people then divert themselves during the commercials because they on average watch 46.4% of them, yet 21.3% watch 80% or more.

Using T-Test analysis to compare demographics to survey responses, women are more likely than men to complete household chores in order to concentrate on their show, as are people who live in households of 3 or less. These respondents in households of 3 or less are also more likely than the others to use a DVR or other device to record their show for later viewing. Comparing the 18 to 24 year old cohort to the 25 and older group, as respondents increase in age, they are less likely to arrange their social schedules around this show.

In addition to active viewing, people "randomly" watch television—defined as shows they have no specific attachment to or time when they do not pay careful attention—an average of 11 hours a week. Yet nearly 40% tune in to 3 hours or less in this manner while 8% catch over 40 hours. The respondents casually catch an average of 53.5% of the particular program they recorded in their survey, with 9% watching 90% or more. Regarding the commercials during this show, respondents watch an average of only 24%, with no one seeing more than 80%.

These random hours serve as a comparison to the active data. Further, they represent for the individual either "leisure time," where people are so preoccupied with other activities that their attention is diffused and advertising messages are difficult to process, or "time to kill," which is unexpected free time where people are more likely to spend money" (Lewis & Bridger, 2001). Given these two very different mindsets during the same category of television viewing, it is important to determine the specific conditions of this viewing experience to best formulate attention-getting strategy.

To further understand the specific viewing behaviors, observation, interviews and personal experience identified "distracters," or activity respondents engage in while watching television. A set of questions tests this



activity using 5-point Likert scale with 1 representing never and 5 very frequently. This chart compares the average answers to these distracting questions for active and random viewing:

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Activities involving other technologies rarely interfere with favorite programs—86.6% rarely to never use such gadgets and 90.3% attempt to digitally personalize their viewing. Eating, on the other hand, is easy and passive, as 51.7% frequently do so while actively watching their program and 63% while randomly viewing. Random viewing time is used to relax, cook, and eat, or serves as background while people do other work. In addition, the internet is not a tool most people use to add value to any programming. This reveals that marketing efforts that hope to connect different communication devices are not yet effective or desired.

With the exception of eating, exercising, and personalizing viewing, people are significantly more active during the randomly viewed programming than during their affinity programs. To break the distracters down by demographics, men are also more active during the affinity programs than women, as they read, play video games or use other gadgets, and surf the internet more than women. Women, on the other hand, cook and eat while randomly viewing more than men. Considering ethnic background, African Americans are most active during affinity or random viewing, particularly by playing video games or with other technological gadgets. Asians very frequently, and African Americans and people of multiracial descent frequently, do homework or work related assignment while watching random television, more so than the other ethnic groups. Reflecting the 18 to 24 year olds' lifestyles, this group eats, talks, and surfs the internet more during their affinity shows than does the 25 and older group.

While certain distracters affect attention to television, television stimuli may still influence consumer purchases. Respondents used a 5-point never-to-frequently Likert scale to indicate how often their style—personality, appearance, fashion—mimic that of their show's characters and how often they make certain purchases with these characters' style in mind. The average answers to these inquiries follow:

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These low averages reveal that, in general, the respondents rarely to never copy style from their favorite shows. While their responses are strong, this data is limited in that it does not reflect subconscious thought or actual behavior. 18 to 24 year olds' purchases are more influenced by their shows supporting that they are brand and image sensitive, as compared to the 25 and older group. In addition, an analysis of the Active-viewing responses

against the Random-viewing responses indicates that people mimic styles on television more so from affinity programs than random ones. They also consider affinity programs' characters' style for high involvement and fashion purchases more frequently than they do random programming characters. Finally, people more frequently purchase goods featured in affinity programs than goods featured in random programs.

Random viewing, therefore, is just that. People do not see their style mirrored in these shows, and these shows do not significantly influence their purchases.

Another scale seeks to "conceptualize involvement as a consumer response to a product, message, medium, or situation (Traylor & Joseph, 1984)." Consumer purchases reflect their identity and how well their show reflects this identity gives further insight to the show's influence on their purchases. Mark B. Traylor and W. Benoy Joseph developed this *General Scale to Measure Involvement with Products* using a 7-point Likert scale; however, we used 5 points for consistency with the rest of the survey (1 represents agree, 5 disagree). Use the following chart to evaluate the average responses to actively and randomly viewed shows:



The statements that refer directly to the individual—"This program helps me express who I am" and "This program is me"—are most strongly disagreed with, as 54.2% responded so to each. On a conscious level, the respondents either truly do not see themselves in these shows or are unwilling to indicate such. The random results to these statements are even more decisive, as 71% disagree with both expression statements. While people tend to disagree that these active and random shows are *them*, they recognize that others form different opinions of them: the respondents answer more neutrally to the 3 judgment statements. Furthermore, a T-Test analysis comparing the Active questions to Random questions signifies that people identify with affinity programs more than random programs. The age analysis also shows that 18 to 24 year olds consider themselves or desire to be more unique in their opinions and preferences than does the 25 and older group. The active shows still to some degree represent the individuals who love to watch them, thereby connecting with their identity, and thus there exists a *potential* to influence purchases.

The final scale records *Public Opinion Toward Advertising* in which "overall global attitudes toward advertising are depicted as a function of a series of beliefs reflecting three personal use and four societal effects (Pollay & Mittal, 1993)." We use a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree.

The means once again reveal relatively neutral results due to a polarized sample; however, the frequency percentages show much stronger agreement or disagreement with 16 of the 30 statements. Specifically, 71.2% consider agree that "some products/services promoted in advertising are bad for our society," 52.8% believe "advertising is making us a materialistic society," and 64% believe that "because of advertising, people buy a lot of things they do not really need." The 25 and older group also feels more than the 18 to 24 year olds that advertisements promote undesirable values and a materialistic society.

Despite these negative beliefs, the most striking result reveals that 76.9% that "overall, consider advertising a good thing." In addition, 68.6% feel that "advertising is essential." While a lot of people claim advertising detracts society, they still find them important and often beneficial. Further, women gain more information from advertisements than do men and hold a more favorable opinion toward advertisements.

Reacting to tangential interests inspired by recent brain research (Hotz, 2005), respondents were asked to indicate their political beliefs, as rated on a 1 to 5, "very liberal in my political views" to "very conservative in my political views." Though no significant results seem relevant to this television attention study, the analysis results of

the political views related to television viewing behavior, involvement, identity, and public opinion toward advertising can be made available to the marketing and political communities.

In conclusion, the ethnographic perspective to television viewing gives a clearer and more comprehensive idea of peoples' attentive capacities when added to the traditional Nielsen frequency ratings. These data thus present the television viewing environment as defined by five items: distracters, purchases, identity, how much of the program people actually watch, and how much of the program's commercials people actually watch. In sum, distracters are what people do while they watch and the frequency of such activity; purchases reflect the extent to which television can influence consumer decisions; identity represents the extent to which a show mirrors the viewer's self-image; how much of the program people actually watch gauges their attention to it; and how much of this program's commercials people watch helps prioritize advertisement placements—here, in the show itself, or with an entirely different communication device.

*Imagine the television. Three guys sit on 2 mismatched sofas watching the NFL Draft on ESPN. One is eating a turkey sandwich and talking to his girlfriend on the cell phone. Another is "studying" for one of his college courses (his book is open in front of him, but he does not seem to notice). The third guy is leaning back in a chair just chilling. They are all 19 and 20 years old and each one likes to strut his own "unique" style. At the same time, they keep tabs on popular culture to know what fashions, lingo, activities, and music are "in." Whether these guys are still sitting on the sofa, in the kitchen, or elsewhere in their house, they always have an ear open to what player gets picked by what team. Therefore, they catch a lot of information that comes through the TV. The key here for marketers is to create a message so memorable or important to these guys that they remember it when the Draft is over, and still remember it after they play an hour of video games.*

*A second college student sits at her desk in her dorm room. A small TV with a DVD player sits to the left, her cell phone sits in front of her, and she is playing Tetris on her laptop, which is connected to the internet. She is so involved in her game that she does not even look at her suitemate who stops in to say "hi." The way to channel her attention is to create a message that startles or in some way excites her curiosity enough to make her look at the TV. Once she looks away from the Tetris game, she is likely to process the message's information and to find it useful. She may further look up this product or message on the internet or choose to call a friend about it. This is a prime opportunity where marketers can successfully use an integrated communications strategy.*

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#### **Faculty comment:**

Dr. Molly Rapert was Ms. Jakosky's mentor. In her letter to the *Inquiry* board, she said:

I am particularly excited about Laura's choice of a thesis topic. Most of the television viewing audience has heard of the A C Nielsen ratings and understands the role this data plays in media buys, product/ad placements, and other marketing strategies. However, only minimal attention has been paid to the critical gap between what the A C Nielsen data is intended to measure and how marketers utilize the data. Laura's prediction that the affinity people feel for a television program plays a much stronger role on their purchase decisions as compared to the sheer number of viewers holds strong implications for the marketing world. This is a complicated topic and I was impressed that Laura jumped into it wholeheartedly. She continued to broaden the domain of inquiry as she became immersed in the literature ... to the point that it was teetering more on dissertation material than an honors thesis. She was committed, enthusiastic, energetic, and driven throughout the entire process. In sum, just a joy to work with.

From the moment I met Laura, I was immediately impressed with her enthusiasm, work ethic, composure, communication abilities, and commitment. All too often, it seems that a first impression is usually attenuated over time as you discover the "faults" of the individual. It is exactly the opposite in Laura's case. During our relationship, I have

become more impressed with each passing semester. Every encounter I have with her not only confirms my previous beliefs, but enhances them. She continues to surprise me with her dedication, quiet leadership, and positive attitude. Indeed, Laura is one of those unique individuals, possessing:

- a strong work ethic
- an enthusiasm for learning
- thorough conceptual skills
- exemplary communication skills
- a clear, focused commitment to every endeavor which she undertakes

To begin, Laura has an exceptional work ethic. I have watched her peers in the program struggle at various points with time constraints, grade pressures, and general lack of sleep. Laura faces an extraordinary number of constraints due to the leadership role she plays on the Women's track team-, yet she seems to thrive on the challenge of excelling, very much exceeding the expectations of faculty and peers. She has embraced new learning opportunities, actively seeking out the chance to apply her classroom knowledge in other settings whether service activities, classroom opportunities, WCOB experiences, or track pursuits. In the course of time that I have known Laura, I have never once seen her without a smile on her face or an encouraging word for those around her.

Laura is a great student in the classroom. She has a refreshing enthusiasm for learning combined with exceptional communication skills. I find her written communication skills to be creative, concise, professional, and interesting. Verbally, I have watched her interact with a variety of individuals including classmates, faculty, staff, and executives. In each situation, she exhibits a positive, enthusiastic attitude. She actively engages those around her, encouraging their participation and motivating their work,

Laura is a delightful individual with a positive attitude that pervades her behaviors every day. She has a great commitment to learning both inside and outside the classroom. She embraces challenge, moving outside of her normal "comfort zone" to capitalize on all of the advantages of life around her. Laura remains flexible in the face of adversity, maintaining a positive attitude when constraints appear. At all times, she seems motivated by what some might consider "barriers". I believe she turns barriers into opportunities to become more confident, patient, and adept.

It is my pleasure to recommend Laura's work to you. Clearly, I am impressed with her accomplishments. Tangible evidence of her performance can be found with her accomplishments in the track domain combined with her outstanding grade-point average; yet, more importantly, the manner in which she achieves this academic success is impressive. Her humble, modest demeanor makes her "accessible" to the broad spectrum of peers/faculty, allowing her to serve as a positive role model for all.