EMPOWERED STORYTELLING?

An Examination of Narrative Transportation and Empowerment in Storytelling
and its Impact on Millennial Consumers

By

Tyrha M. Lindsey

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Dissertation Directors: Dr. Geraldine Rosa Henderson and Dr. Christine Ringler

Storytelling is powerful and can be transformative. We make sense of who we are and the world around us through narratives and the act of storytelling. Content providers, from Silicon Valley to Hollywood and Madison Avenue, continue to search for ways to create authentic stories that emotionally move consumers in a positive manner, especially as it relates to the Millennial consumer, who continues to be an enigma to marketers and advertisers. This generation is multifaceted, introspective, and empathetic as well as possesses an open-mind to others (Tanenhaus 2014). Burgeoning television networks like OWN (Oprah Winfrey Network), UP TV, ASPIRE TV, and events such as the "International Faith and Family Film Festival at Megafest" and Oprah's "The Life You Want Weekend" are all current platforms that are presenting positive and emotionally engaging narratives as well as empowering programming. Having the ability to articulate an impactful story that encourages Millennial consumers to be better, as well as live to their fullest potential, is paramount to building connections with these consumers that invite loyalty and are sustainable.

This research examines narrative transportation theory, the process by which consumers become absorbed or lost in a story. Specifically, this research takes a look at the impact that storytelling, which incorporates the emotion of empowerment, has on Millennial consumers. Typically, the cognitive processes of this theory accentuate the

strong emotional responses, which the literature groups together into the category of producing empathy. Yet, we argue that the transformative power of storytelling can evoke more than just empathy from the receiver of the story. There may be a gamut of positive emotions Millennial consumers experience when viewing empowered narratives. Moreover, the storyteller's involvement in creating narratives that empower may positively impact consumer purchase intent and message recall of Millennials. Using qualitative design and inquiry, this research uncovers insights as to why narrative transportation works and what makes it so emotionally impactful.

PREFACE

"After nourishment, shelter, and companionship,
stories are the thing we need most in the world."

-Phillip Pullman (Gillespie 2013)

Believe it or not, the emotion of empowerment is all around us. Most of the time, this expression of empowerment can be experienced through the storytelling that goes on in our everyday life. In my own life, I see it every Sunday in church when the Pastor presents a rousing sermon aimed to inspire the congregation. It is the skillful manner of his storytelling that he is able to masterfully illuminate stories from thousands of years ago and communicate them in a manner that is incredibly relevant to the lives of his congregants today. Although the story takes center stage, it is wonderfully complemented by music from the choir and organ, creative lighting and visuals as well as the dynamic crescendos and decrescendos of his voice.

During that same week, I can witness a breathtaking performance of the Dance Theatre of Harlem at New York's City Center auditorium. The dancers' rhythmic and graceful movement of a classical ballet choreographed by the famed Arthur Mitchell immediately pulls you in to the love story of the dance. It is through the soulful articulation of the body, complemented by beautiful costumes, elegant lighting, and captivating music that you find yourself absorbed in the storytelling of the ballet.

Towards the end of the week, while in the Dallas Love Field Airport, I found myself mesmerized by a breathtaking glass mural in the windows dedicated to the beauty

of flying. What looks like a portrait of the legendary Amelia Everhart, with poems by Langston Hughes, Phyllis Wheatley and more, surrounding the portrait and scribed in the blue tinted glass window, all work together to illuminate the message of the glory of flying and how one is never alone in the sky. The sunlight shines through this magnificent piece of public art that if you do not open your eyes and your heart, you would simply walk by it on your way to Baggage Claim.

I have come to learn that stories and the love and care that are a part of the act of positive storytelling are all around us. Yet, being open to experience love and empowerment in life is not easy to do. In a world that is cluttered with media images, advertising campaigns, and social media bombardments that exude constant selling tactics, negativity, and even bullying, what does it now take to get the attention of consumers, especially Millennials? I believe it is authentic, well-crafted, and produced stories that reflect humanity as well as empower us to excel and live our lives to achieve our fullest potential.

> "In my all of my experiences, it is the marketers and
> advertisers that create campaigns that show love
> to their consumers that get a tremendous return on their investment."
>
> -Vince Hudson
> SVP Global Marketing
> Diageo (2015)

I first witnessed this phenomenon of presenting authentic and positive storytelling that married entertainment, empowerment, and education, while working as a Special Events Manager for the National Speaking of Women's Health Foundation (NSWHF), at that time primarily funded by Procter & Gamble and Wal-Mart, and is now currently owned and operated by The Cleveland Clinic. I planned 15-20 women's health conferences all across the United States, which were what we called, high-touch events.

Meaning that we paid attention to all of the details in our events that mattered to women as well as delivered an elegant and interactive experience that embraced how women wanted to be treated. Set in four and five-star hotels, a "Speaking of Women's Health" (SWH) conference offered women a pampering experience that touched the mind, body, and spirit. During every event, women (ages 25-65+) could learn about their health, safety, and personal well-being from the best medical and lifestyle speakers in the country.

The staff of NSWHF called what we did edu-tainment. We presented a high-touch live event that was entertaining and educational simultaneously. Whenever we produced the event in a hotel, our event decorator was able to elevate the beauty of the hotel and incorporate into it our lavish décor packages that were rooted in lush sunflowers, captivating red roses, with exciting lighting designs, upbeat music and more. SWH attendees were the everyday woman who worked, took care of their homes and families, and used the events as their getaway. Attending a SWH conference was her self-indulgent treat as well as an opportunity to focus on herself. Throughout the day, she laughed and even cried; met friends, old and new; participated in health screenings; dined on healthy cuisine and left with a bountiful gift bag as a beautiful reminder of her day. Yet, what made these annual conferences even more interesting to me was that the women remembered what they learned and incorporated the teachings into their everyday lives. We conducted extensive surveys and witnessed the analytics that revealed that when the SWH events returned the next year, attendees lost tremendous amounts of weight due to learnings from a nutrition session during the previous year. Others experienced decreases in blood pressure or cholesterol due to the lifestyle lessons learned

from the previous year. I received hundreds of letters from women all across the United States sharing with me how their SWH conference experience changed their lives for the better. This was 17 years ago and I vowed to use my doctoral journey to attempt to understand this phenomenon.

Since that time, I have been fortunate enough to lead integrated marketing and communications campaigns for top brands and non-profit organizations that exude the fundamental tenets of what I learned at the SWH conferences, which was to entertain, empower, and educate simultaneously. I have discovered as a practitioner that this is a one-two punch for successfully delivering campaigns to consumers that involve social and health issues. More so, with my work in multicultural marketing and communications, this powerful combination registers even better with consumers of color, who embrace this delivery method and digest the messages in a sustainable manner.

What is it about this delivery method that seems to positively resonate with everyone who experiences it? Is it the tone of empowerment that is so rarely experienced outside of sacred spaces? And, why are these types of affirmative messages able to stay with the receiver for longer periods of time and can positively affect behavior?

With this dissertation, I attempt to delve into uncovering the antecedents, from a consumer behavior perspective, for this phenomenon in the realm of marketing, advertising, and communications. The transformative experiences we produced through the SWH conferences resulted in positive and sustainable health outcomes from our attendees. In 2017, Oprah's "The Life You Want Weekend," "Circle of Sisters," "TED Talks," and other types of empowerment events, continue in the tradition of SWH

conferences across the United States. How can these transformative experiences and impactful storytelling transfer to advertising, social media, mobile, and entertainment? This research is my initial attempt to better understand this phenomenon and how storytelling can move beyond entertaining and towards healing.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my Mother, Gloria J. Lindsey. My Mother was not only my hero, but, she was my "She-ro." As an Educator, Wife, Mother, Sister-Friend, and Philanthropist, my Mother's vision for her life and family, along with her extraordinary love, has fueled my life and my doctoral journey.

I stand on my Mother's shoulders in completing my dissertation and PhD degree. She started her PhD degree at the University of Pittsburgh, but put that dream on hold when she got married. Hence, when I started my doctoral journey at Rutgers in the Fall of 2012, my Mother was simultaneously battling a rare bone cancer called, multiple myeloma, in Stage 4. For the past five years, she courageously and gracefully fought her cancer while championing and empowering me during my schooling at Rutgers. From reading and proofing research papers to giving me loving advice, my Mother was relentless in making sure I met school deadlines so I could graduate on time. What a blessing that she could call in from her hospital bed during my dissertation proposal on February 23, 2016 to hear me publicly share my vision on research that I have been curious about for the past 13 years. It is with great peace of mind that I submit this work knowing that my Mother was incredibly proud of me and my research.

I am also dedicating this work to my Father, William O. Lindsey. Since my Mother's death in the Fall of 2016, my Dad has taken up her strong desire to see me finish my dissertation and receive my PhD degree. I am forever grateful for his love and support as well.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Sidney L. Warren, brother, Rusdyn C. Lindsey, sister-in-law, Dr. Amber Chenevert-Lindsey, cousins, Drs. Denise McCray and Patricia L. Griffen, along with my Links Big Sister, Denise Durham-

Williams. Their love, guidance, and unwavering support have been magnificent and

tremendously empowered me during my doctoral journey.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"Tell me a fact and I'll learn.
Tell me the truth and I'll believe.
But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever."
– Indian Proverb (Dunford 2009)

The Millennial generation continues to be an enigma to marketers and advertisers. Marketing executives work every day to compete for the attention and authentic engagement of Millennial consumers in a constantly evolving and dynamic environment. Within this space where data is king, marketers and advertisers are beginning to recognize that there is an audience for positive, authentic, and motivational storytelling with a purpose. They are finding that this type of cleverly crafted storytelling can break through the field of competition for the attention and engagement of Millennial consumers, and ultimately, increase profits. There is a litany of descriptions in the marketplace for this type of storytelling that include: positive programming, feel good TV, faith-based programming, family entertainment, and inspirational lifestyle programming. According to the Pew Research Center, 70.6% of the U.S. population is Christian (Pew Research Center 2017). In 2014, Variety.com reported that there are 200 million Americans within the community of faith in the U.S. who support positive, faith-based programming to the likes of $2.1 trillion a year (Poland 2014). Of this Christian-based population, 23% is comprised of Millennials (Pew Research Center 2017). Moreover, today's Millennial population (ages 20-34) in the U.S. is over 80 million and has significant economic power as they enter their prime spending years (Strauss et al. 2006, Tanenhaus 2014). Their current and future market power is undeniable. Therefore, this audience cannot be ignored by marketers and advertisers.

An example of positive, cleverly crafted, and transformational storytelling in an advertising campaign was Dove's "Campaign for Real Beauty." This highly publicized campaign was viewed as a change agent in the industry because it focused on encouraging women to embrace their beauty and strengthen their self-esteem. To date, Dove has experienced an increase in sales from $2.5 billion to $4 billion since the launch of the campaign in 2004 (Ciambriello 2014). Additionally, in a survey conducted by Sheknows.com, 71% of female respondents indicated that marketers should use their ads to promote positive messages to women and girls; and 52% of female respondents purchased a product they saw in a positive ad (Ciambriello 2014). In 2015, similar women and girls ad campaigns like Under Armour's, "I Will What I Want," Always' "Like a Girl," and Dove's "Love My Curls," are a part of a growing trend called, Fem-vertising (see Appendix A). We believe this type of storytelling connects with Millennials who are what *The New York Times* calls the "generation nice" (Tanenhaus 2014, 1). They are a compassionate and socially aware group of individuals who are also more tech savvy than older generations as well as love social media (Kiersz 2014; Strauss et al. 2006). Coupling these dynamics with the value shifts of the monumental social and cultural changes brought about by the expansion and convergence of media, results in this sector of the population uniquely identifying self, community, and the world through a different lens (Thomas 2013). This societal change is especially promising for this diverse generation given the evidence that advertisements, films, and TV programs that are constructive, relevant, and entertaining can play an influential role in addressing issues that matter to this prominent audience (Strauss et al. 2006).

We suggest that at the foundation of authentic and impactful storytelling is narrative transportation, where consumers lose themselves and become absorbed in a story. Furthermore, we believe the emergent themes of our data collection are fully captured in the theoretical framework of narrative transportation theory. Rooted in transportation theory, this emotional process is able to capture the Millennial consumers' attention, feelings, and imagery (Gerrig 1993; Green and Brock 2000). Green and Brock (2000, 2002) suggest that narrative transportation is a principal device used in persuasion. This is due to its strong emotional nature, which enables consumers to experience changes (positive or negative) in attitudes, behaviors, intentions, and beliefs (Adaval, Isbell, and Wyer 2007; Adaval and Wyer 1998; Pennington and Hastie 1988). Additionally, this type of storytelling may have some effect on gender and women may be more emotionally affected than men. Research by Green and Brock (2000) reported that women experienced greater transportation into narratives than men due to their high emotional involvement.

Narrative transportation also has the ability to create transformative experiences for the receiver of the story. When Millennial consumers are a part of the narrative transportation process, they can become so engrossed in the storytelling of the narrative that it can have a profound effect on them to the point where the experience can be life changing or transformative for them in a positive way.

Understanding why narrative transportation works so well still remains an empirical question. The literature purports that it is the pronounced empathy or openness consumers experience during the narrative transportation process, which impacts attitudes, brand, and product evaluations (Argo, Zhu, and Dahl 2008; Green, Brock, and

Kaufman 2004). Can empathy be the only emotion in play every time a story is told? How do the effects of other positive emotions possibly impact Millennial consumer purchase behavior and intent towards a brand, product, or service?

Commercialism within a Non-Traditional Storytelling Context

Millennials live in a world where they are constantly exposed to various forms of media, commercialism, and entertainment. Smart phones, Apps, TV, iTunes, Twitter, Playstation, Netflix, text messaging, and Instagram, are just a few of the myriad channels and devices that continuously entertain Millennials, as well as promote selling messages to them. Specifically, Caucasian Americans, on average, watch 140 hours of television per month (35 hours per week) (Nielsen Report 2013). African Americans on average have four televisions in the household and watch 213 hours of television per month (Nielsen Report 2011). Latino Americans watch 33 hours per week and stream over 6 hours of video per month. (Nielson Report 2012).

This research works to uncover the impact of non-traditional storytelling that often times occurs within commercialized narratives in marketing and advertising and has a profit motive. Typically, Millennials view commercials on a continuum. In this research, we recognize this and also the fact that there are varying degrees of commercialism within each advertisement. For example, many recent advertisements portray a story regarding the human condition and there is no direct selling proposition given regarding a particular product or service. Recent examples of this include Budweiser's Superbowl ad that features the immigrant story of the company's founder. Or, P&G's "My Black Is Beautiful," commercial discussing the conversations African

American parents have with their children regarding the bias that exists in America as it pertains to communities of color. Hence, we are interested in learning about the impact that commercialism has on this style of storytelling. Often times, the selling aspect of this type of storytelling may not be the number one goal. Instead, using the narrative to make a statement regarding the company's values and beliefs is the pinnacle of this strategy. The company's objective to make a deeper connection with the consumer may also be a priority. In doing so, the timing and disclosure of the company's social imagery, or logo for the purposes of this research, within this non-traditional storytelling context may enhance or hinder the narrative transportation experience. As a result, the Millennial consumer does not even know that they are being marketed to until the end of a commercial, program, or a public service announcement, when the brand or logo is revealed. Recent examples of this include commercials by Under Armour, featuring American Ballet Theater ballerina, Misty Copeland, or Microsoft's Windows 10 commercials promoting their software. Both ads feature engaging and empowering stories about the human condition and it is not until the last five seconds that the respective logos are revealed for the brands. This manner of storytelling may be less commercial and non-traditional compared to what is normally seen in the marketplace, which is more traditional, direct selling, and highly commercial. This terminology will be used within the context of this work.

With this dissertation research, we hope to illuminate the positive effects of narrative transportation on Millennial consumers' behavior beyond attitudes and brand evaluations. To our knowledge, the literature has not looked into the effects of narrative transportation on purchase intentions, behavior, or recall effects. Often times the

negative side of consumer affective abilities is chronicled in the literature. Furthermore, understanding of the nature of commercialized narratives and how they can increase narrative transportation is another contribution of this research. Ultimately, with the transformative nature of narrative transportation, reducing its emotional power to empathy is limiting. Discovering a new emotional outcome of narrative transportation is what this work sets out to do.

Following the introduction, the methodology and the findings from the qualitative studies will be presented supported by theoretical frameworks from the psychology and marketing literature. Afterwards, a general discussion as well as recommendations for future directions on this topic and potential managerial implications will be discussed.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

To examine this notion of storytelling within highly commercialized and less commercialized advertising, and its relationship to the attitudes, behaviors, and purchase intent of Millennial consumers, we used qualitative design and inquiry. We used two datasets to better understand the Millennial response and interpretation from these two ways in which marketers tell stories.

Dataset 1

Using depth interviews (Berent 1966) over the course of a three-year period, preliminary evidence was found based on interviews conducted in 2014-2015 on 20 diverse participants, 10 females and 10 males, at a Northeastern University and at a non-profit organization in Harlem, New York (See Appendix B). One-on-one personal interviews with the students at the university were conducted on campus. The interviews at the non-profit were conducted in a meeting room at their main office in Harlem. The 20 participants received a $15.00 Target gift cards for their participation.

The participants were shown four sixty second TV commercials that featured storytelling in both non-traditional and less commercialized and traditional, direct selling and highly commercialized formats. An example of the more traditional direct selling commercial included the Target 2014 holiday ad, which was devoted to promoting Christmas products. The commercial featured a young girl in the spirit of Alice in Wonderland as she discovers Target products, with their prices promoted, that would be great holiday gifts. An example of an ad that was non-traditional and less

commercialized was from Under Armour's, "I Will What I Want," campaign. The

commercial features Misty Copeland, the first African-American female principal dancer

for American Ballet Theater. Ms. Copeland is dancing in the commercial while wearing

Under Armour attire and a 13-year-old girl reading a negative letter explaining why Ms.

Copeland will never be a professional ballerina. In 2014, Under Armour received the

Marketer of the Year award for its "I Will What I Want" campaign (Schultz 2014). The

YouTube video of this commercial has received nearly 10 million views. The findings

from this first dataset established that different levels of empowerment were occurring

with these respondents as they were exposed to, engaged with, and reacting to these two

types of messages: traditional and highly commercialized versus non-traditional and less

commercialized. In the section below, we describe empowerment before proceeding with

the findings of dataset one.

Empowerment

Traditionally, marketers and advertisers have worked to convey messages of their

brands, products, or services that are aspirational. From category to quality and price,

achieving the materialistic goals of aspiration may be impossible to obtain by many

consumers (West and Broniarzyk 1998). Nevertheless, marketers use this strategy to

create an illusion that consumers can achieve these wishful objectives. Employing an

empowerment strategy can illuminate a brand's message to consumers that they can

achieve whatever they put their minds to (Bahadur 2014). Therefore, empowering

Millennial consumers enables marketers to offer control and power, which can be a

promising source of creating a competitive advantage (Hunter et al. 2008). This rationale

comes from the thought that firms can consciously institute an empowerment strategy within their marketing of products and services to consumers, if they believe it will lead to increased consumer satisfaction. If consumer satisfaction is positively impacted, the firms will experience increased sales, which in the end, creates a competitive advantage for the firm.

The marketing literature relating to consumer empowerment primarily focuses on choice (Gourville and Soman 2000; Langer and Rodin 1976; Wathieu et al. 2002), control (Langer 1983; Wathieu et al. 2002; Wertenbroch 1998), decision-making (Iyengar and Lepper 2000; Koriat, Lichtenstein, and Fischhoff 1980), and power (Conrad and Caldwell 2006; McGregor 2005). In a financial literacy context, McGregor (2005) suggests that empowerment is me-power and involves giving the receiver the perception that one has the inner power and strength to take action. Specifically, the author believes that when consumers are empowered, they are able to find their own self-worth and see value in their potential and personal abilities to ultimately control their destiny (McGregor 2005). This type of environment that supports empowering consumers is one that is safe, trusted, and where consumers feel comfortable in exploring their attitudes, values, and perceptions. It leads to consumers discovering their reflective state, which can be referred to as an "aha" moment (McGregor 2005). Wathieu et al. (2002) looked at consumer empowerment within the overall context of consumer control and choice. When firms empower consumers, they are ultimately giving them the dominant position in their decision-making processes, which can be perceived as a benefit to the consumers and lead to satisfaction. The researchers suggest that progress cues, information about other consumers, and control over the choice consumption set can give consumers the

subjective experience of empowerment. Moreover, empowerment can also create

optimism, self-confidence, and a sense of control in everyday life (Page and Czuba

1999). In a world that can be incredibly daunting at times, empowerment in storytelling

may fulfill a salient need by Millennial consumers for positivity and encouragement in

their everyday lives. Essentially, the Millennial consumer's ability to expand their control

and shape their choice set is a significant determinant in experiencing empowerment.

> I internalize empowerment to mean support. When empowerment is
> visualized in commercials/media, I feel as though the brand is aiming
> to support me as the consumer. It makes the brand more personable.
> (Chris, Student)

> I define empowerment as meaning a collective and collaborative effort
> towards a goal. When I see empowerment in media and commercials,
> I automatically aim to support the brand and company. (Yvonne,
> Student)

In the psychology literature, empowerment has been studied in various disciplines

including mental health (Corrigan et al. 1999; Rogers et al. 1997; Wowra and McCarter

1999), family and health services (Anderson et al. 2000; Singh et al. 1995), leadership

(Bartram and Casimir 2007; Spreitzer, De Janasz, and Quinn 1999), and organizational

behavior (Conger and Kanungo 1988; Matthews, Diaz, and Cole 2003; Spreitzer 1995).

Researchers have identified a range of dimensions involved in empowerment including:

meaning, self-determination, competence, powerlessness, and control of the future

(Rogers et al. 1997; Spreitzer 1995). They have also defined this emotion as

psychological empowerment, and have determined that it is a multidimensional construct

that ultimately helps people take control of their lives (Page and Czuba 1999; Rogers et

al. 1997). Early research in the area by Rappaport (1987) defined empowerment as the

connection between a consumer's personal capabilities and the will to take

action in a public domain (Zimmerman and Rappaport 1988). While Segal, Silverman, and Temkin (1995) defined empowerment as the process where consumers take control of their lives and can gain the ability to influence organizational and societal structures. In all, the varying perspectives and definitions in the literature on empowerment shed light on how incredibly multifaceted and complex this emotion is.

Rogers et al. (1997) developed an empowerment scale that was initially created for mental health services. As a result of their work, their concluding definition was an individual "who has a sense of self-worth, self-efficacy, and power; can recognize the importance of the group or community to effect change, but the empowered person also values autonomy" (Rogers et al. 1997, 1046).

> Empowerment means to be strong, proud, confident. It is the end goal of life! (Dave, Program Participant)
>
> Empowerment means to be fulfilled with yourself. I am not sure if I see it in the media enough. *(*Andre, Program Participant)

For the purposes of this research and after combing the literature for relevant definitions appropriate for the marketing discipline, we define empowerment as a multi-layered emotion that creates optimism, inner-power, confidence, and an inherent call to action that encourages positive and transformative behavior for consumers. It may also be powerful enough to encourage consumers to look beyond their selves and make a positive impact on their larger community. Empowerment has the ability to emotionally pull at the heartstrings of consumers. It has the power to touch the soul and enable a consumer to see unimaginable possibilities and positive outcomes.

Additionally, given this definition, an empowerment appeal within a storytelling context may be attractive to today's Millennial consumers who want a stronger value proposition from brands. Kotler, Kartajaya, and Setiawan's (2010) values-driven marketing matrix 3.0 reinforces this trend towards more values based marketing strategies as being the dominant focus in the industry. Within this framework, the goal is to create a strong consumer interaction by providing a collaborative and human experience that delivers value propositions that are authentic and matter, as well as functional, emotional, and spiritual (Kotler et al. 2010).

> In today's world, having faith is a big deal, because I feel like in a
> religious, like in a Christian culture, it's kind of like constantly
> being slammed and not being ashamed of that and always showing
> -- not being afraid to say, hey, I do believe in God, and I have
> faith. I think that's a big deal. (Jane, Student)

Furthermore, experimental design work was initially incorporated into this research. During a Qualtrics survey pre-test of the empowered storytelling commercial stimuli in 2015, we queried 192 diverse participants at a Northeastern University on their thoughts and definitions of empowerment. We asked them "What does the word empowering mean to you?" "Why did you find the ads empowering?" and "What elements in the ads made them empowering?" The results of these questions made us fully aware that Millennials definitely have a strong perspective regarding the emotion of empowerment and included:

> The word "empowering" means how people are motivated by some
> other outside influence that gives them the "power" to do
> something. (Joe, Student)

> Empowering means giving another person the hope and
> encouragement to continue on and succeed in a difficult situation.
> (Sue, Student)

We were also made aware of this notion of commercialism and observed that participants were definitely affected by a company's social imagery, whether positive or negative, in an empowered storytelling context. Often times with the empowered storytelling stimuli, the participants did not even know that the commercial was promoting a brand or product.

> The Under Armour ad I could not detect until it (the logo) was revealed. I am still not quite certain what the product is advertised in the My Black is Beautiful commercial. (Juan, Student)

Overall, such themes as motivation, encouragement, strength, looking beyond yourself to help others, self-determination, and being your best, greatly assisted in creating the foundation for dataset 2.

Dataset 2

For dataset 2, we queried 11 diverse Millennial participants, 6 females and 5 males, who were students at a Mid-West University (See Appendix C). The participants were shown two sixty second TV commercials produced by well-known sports apparel brands. The Nike "Find Your Greatness" ad was an example of empowered storytelling that was non-traditional and less commercialized. The Skechers "Air Cooled Memory Foam" commercial was an example of a traditional, highly commercialized, and direct selling ad (See Appendix D). In the Nike commercial, a young 12-year-old overweight boy from London, Ohio is featured jogging on a road in a rural area. The ad is complemented by a voice-over narration on how ordinary people can find their own truths and inner power so they can become extraordinary and great. The commercial does not direct sell or promote any Nike products to the viewer (See Appendix E). As for the Skechers commercial, actress, Kelly Brock, is featured promoting the new air-cooled

memory form technology in the shoes. Ms. Brock wears the shoes and promotes its features, while hanging out at the swimming pool housed in a gorgeous mansion. At the end of the commercial, a handsome man with no shirt comes out of the water and flirts with the actress (See Appendix F).

In all, the interviews of our participants were an hour in length. We did not directly define our primary constructs of interest of empowerment, storytelling, and commercialism to our participants. Instead, we developed our questions based on the empowerment scale (Rogers et al. 1997; see Appendix G); the narrative transportation scale (Green and Brock 2000; see Appendix H); and items on the ad and media transportation scale (Wang and Calder 2009; see Appendix I). All interviews were recorded by an audio device on an iPad. The student participants received extra credit and $15 restaurant gift cards for their participation.

We essentially wanted to know the following: At what point does the receiver of the story become fully involved in the storytelling? What components of empowered storytelling are the most impactful? Does the consumer understand the emotion of empowerment? Are they open to seeing it in marketing and advertising activities? Does a firm benefit by incorporating storytelling that exudes the emotion of empowerment in their marketing and advertising efforts?

The process by which the empowerment occurs is through narrative transportation. The extant literature on narrative transportation theory defines it as the process of telling a story, where the receiver of the narrative becomes fully involved and transported into a fictional world. Fundamentally, this process of being so grossly absorbed into a story is rooted in comprehension and the intellectual capacity of

consumers to understand the narrative. Early research on the subject dealt with the recall of text and summarization of protocols in the working memory (Kintsch 1974; Kintsch and Van Dijk 1978). Involved in this processing is the "tripartite of attention, imagery, and feelings" (Green 2004, 311). It can affect attitude, beliefs, and changes in perception (Green and Brock 2000; Green et al. 2004).

Research by Gerrig (1993) examined the effects of transportation in the written text and its persuasive nature on consumers. He described the mental process involved as similar to that of a traveler who goes around the world transported by some means of conveyance. When the traveler returns to his place of origin, he is transformed in some way by the journey (Gerrig 1993). According to Green and Brock (2000, 2002) this transportation of a traveler or of an individual into the world of a story is the principal device of narrative persuasion. Green et al. (2008) complemented this work with defining narrative transportation theory as the process when individuals lose themselves in the story.

From a media, advertising, and entertainment perspective, Green (2004) delved into the positive benefits of narrative transportation and the transformative experience it can produce as a result of the desirable and altered states consumers encounter. First and foremost, pleasure and enjoyment are at the heart of the consumer experience of narrative transportation. It is the combination of cognitive and affective processing that enables narrative transportation to be so effective (Green et al. 2004; Raney 2004). The ability to escape, or flow into another world for an optimal experience where the consumer can lose track of time, is another key characteristic of this theory (Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Green 2004). These narrative worlds are safe and non-threatening (Green et al. 2004;

Nell 2002). The altered pleasurable state consumers find themselves in when experiencing narrative transportation enables them to consider their past selves and create a vision for their future selves (Green 2004; Leary and Buttermore 2003). Moreover, narrative transportation enables consumers to trust, feel safe, empathize, and enjoy. The process allows for expanded learning capabilities, leaves behind stress and anxiety, and can be helpful in managing mood. It is similar to positive affect, which encompasses our primary reactions to stimuli and results in feelings that enable one to have a positive mood. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) stated that positive affect may lead to fantasies, feelings, and fun by consumers. Entertainment products like movies, television, and plays arouse these perceived whimsical feelings among consumers and may actually fulfill their salient emotional desires and needs. Positive affect also impacts learning and decision-making. It influences social interaction and can lead to assisting others, kindness, and personal compassion. Ashby and Isen (1999) suggest that positive affect greatly influences the outcomes of cognitive elaboration, including memory recall, rehearsal, creative problem solving, and even enhanced attention. They explain that the release of dopamine in the brain is responsible for these outcomes. Isen (2001) states that positive affect augments learning and can lead to innovation, creativity, and cognitive flexibility. It can also encourage an open mind and organization. All of these positive attributes created by narrative transportation can result in an openness, which enables consumers to take in new information and see truths about themselves (Green et al. 2004). Therefore, narrative transportation can be possibly complemented with such positive emotions, like empowerment, and have a similar impact on consumer behavior.

> It was real. It was calm, but it was empowering. It was sympathetic. And still gave the idea across that you don't have to look like a supermodel to have that specific product. (Martha, Student, responding to Nike ad)

The Craftsmanship of Storytelling

The marketing literature has chronicled three salient components of stories that are needed in the storytelling process – relatable characters, conceivable plots, and verisimilitude (Van Laer, Visconti, and Wetzels 2014). Relatable characters are those portrayals where the receiver of the narrative can emotionally identify with and understand the experiences of the lead players (Escalas, Moore, and Britton 2004; Escalas and Stern 2003; Slater and Rouner 2002; Stern 1994). Conceivable plots refer to the storyteller creating a world and a sequence of events that may resemble real life and where the receiver of the narrative can mentally recreate them and they can possibly take on a new meaning in their mind (Escalas 1998; Escalas 2004a; Green 2006; Green and Brock 2000). For the purposes of this research, the conceivable plots must also incorporate a complementary message or point of view that can be empowering as well as motivating to the receiver. Finally, verisimilitude suggests the articulation of truth, realism, and the likelihood that the events within a story may actually occur (Ang 1985; Bruner 1986; Van Laer et al. 2014). This articulation of the truth in the context of the storyteller evoking empowerment can be the transformative aspect of the storytelling process where the receiver realizes their inner power from the story. Fundamentally, the higher the verisimilitude the more likely narrative transportation increases for the receiver of the story (Green 2004). This authentic type of experience with the receiver of the story is paramount for the success of the storytelling process.

> The character looked like he didn't have a lot of pure athletic ability, but he was trying anyway, so he has a big heart, it seemed. Ambition. I don't know the word for it. But (inaudible) the little guy, the underdog. (Al, Student, responding to Nike ad)

> The theme. I don't know. It's kind of hard to come across, cause she's talking about being comfortable, and breezy. And then she's like outside in the hot with this hot guy coming out of the water, and saying how it's comfortable. So, I guess comfortable, cushiony shoes. Cause the cushion was cushiony. (Linda, Student, responding to Skechers ad)

The Consumer Experience with Storytelling

The perspective of the consumer of the story is crucial to the storyteller and the overall narrative experience. The literature has chronicled five salient components of narrative transportation from the perspective of the receiver of the story, which are: prior knowledge of the story, mindfulness, level of transportability, the demographics of the receiver (e.g., gender, age, education level), and self-expansion (Green et al. 2004; Van Laer et al. 2014). Specifically, prior knowledge of the story refers to the familiarity the receiver of the story has with the genre, subject matter or topic of the narrative (Green 2004; Van Laer et al. 2014). Being able to fully interpret the story from the consumer's perspective is crucial for narrative transportation to be most effective (Slater, Rouner, and Long 2006; Van Laer et al. 2014). Mindfulness refers to the conscious, focus, and present attention the receiver gives to the story. When the receiver's attention is high, narrative transportation will increase (Gerrig 1993; Nielsen and Escalas 2010; Polichak and Gerrig 2002), and when they are distracted narrative transportation will decrease (Green and Brock 2000; Van Laer, De Ruyter, and Cox 2013; Zwarum and Hall 2012). The demographics of the consumer can also affect narrative transportation ability. If the consumer is young they can become more affected by narrative transportation than an

older and more mature person because of their lack of real-life experiences and inability

to critically evaluate information (Van Laer et al. 2014). Also, higher education levels

increase narrative transportation due to the fact that highly educated people read more

and are good at inference making (Van Laer et al. 2014). Gender also plays a role in the

effectiveness of narrative transportation because women tend to be more compassionate

and empathetic than men as it pertains to becoming emotionally involved with the

characters and plot of a narrative (Ang 1985; Argo et al. 2008; Van Laer et al. 2014).

Self-expansion is also an outcome of narrative transportation as a result of the process of

self-identification with the characters and situations portrayed in a story. The idea of

self-expansion leads to self-focus and self-efficacy, which enables individuals to possibly

experience a transformation from the storytelling because they have received new

knowledge that can enrich their lives (Green et al. 2004; Van Laer et al. 2014). From a

parasocial perspective, narrative transportation can produce the illusion of intimacy

where there is a strong feeling of companionship and personal identity between the

receiver of the story and the characters (Green et al. 2004; Singhal and Rogers 1999).

With storytelling that involves empowerment, the self-expansion characteristic may

possibly be complemented by this empowered emotion, which inherently involves self-

efficacy, as well as an awareness and consciousness beyond the self. For the purposes of

this research, all of these components work together in impacting the receiver's

comprehension of the narrative and can affect consumer attitudes, behaviors, intentions,

values, and beliefs.

> I felt more intrigued, more interested in watching it. It was more
> of a storyline. I guess it was more relatable. (Martha, Student,
> responding to Nike ad)

Emotional, because you see, typically in a running commercial it's somebody that's fit, that loves to work out. You see this kid that's probably between like 13 to 15 on a country road running, and you're seeing that just because he doesn't look like he's going to be great doesn't mean he's not going to be great. It's not something specifically in your DNA that makes you great. It's your drive that you have. You don't have to be famous, or you don't have to try to go that extra length to be famous. To be great means to just start from space one and work your way up. (Jane, Student, responding to Nike ad)

Narrative Transportation as an Effective Form of Persuasion

Millennials have been digitally wired since childhood. Reared on video games and digital devices, storytelling in the real world versus the virtual world may have limitless parameters in the lives of Millennials, who mastered using the smartphone by age 10 (Tanenhaus 2014). Therefore, the persuasive power of narrative transportation may impact this generation more than its predecessors. The extant literature has illustrated the effects of narrative transportation, from cognitive and affective perspectives as well as relating to persuasion. From an emotional perspective, narratives inherently educe emotions and feelings, both positive and negative, as well as impact a consumer's desires (Escalas et al. 2004; Van Laer et al. 2014). In narrative transportation, various personal prerequisites are required, especially emotionally. Argo et al. (2008) posits that the more empathetic an individual is the more the person will immerse themselves into the world of the story.

I think it sucked me in after the guy started talking because it was focused on this overweight kid who was trying to better himself. And opposed to most Nike commercials, it's always like a super fit, athletic, attractive person. This one was more geared towards normal size people or people who like the brand but maybe feel like the brand is only for already athletic people. So, this commercial will appeal to like people who are just starting out or want like a brand of shoe that they know is good. (Patty, Student, responding to Nike ad)

Narrative transportation can elicit both critical and fictitious thoughts (Moyer-Gusé and Nabi 2010; Van Laer et al. 2014). Escalas (2004b) found that the cues in stories, like characters, enable the receiver of the narrative to create his or her own storylines. This cognitive process also allows individuals to absorb incoming information in a manner where they can see themselves in the situation (Debevec and Romeo 1992). Individuals who use this type of cognitive process are able to learn and recall information better than their counterparts. Narrative transportation can also influence beliefs, attitudes, and intentions. The more a consumer is transported into a story, the more it enables the individual to experience a type of verisimilitude, which prompts the consumer to adopt mannerisms and ideas consistent with the story and message being conveyed (Braverman 2008; Green and Brock 2000; Van Laer et al. 2014). Consumers who are transported into narratives are more likely to perceive the storyline as real and it can affect their attitude in a positive or negative way (Escalas 2004a, 2007; Van Laer et al. 2014; Wang and Calder 2006). These viewers of stories are also willing to carry out actions witnessed in the narratives in a same or more intense manner. Similarly, the more consumers are transported into a narrative the larger their willingness to emulate the intentions and characteristics of the lead players of the story in their own lives (Van Laer et al. 2014). This may also ring true with regards to consumerism and the perceptions made by consumers towards firms.

> That's tough because it was basic to me. It wasn't anything memorable to me about that commercial, except for the end where the hot guy came out of the pool. (laughter) I mean, that's pretty much it. And that's probably how I would describe that to my friend. But like, hot guy came out of the pool. I think he was talking about shoes. (laughter) But it was just, I think overly sexual, I think, in that it probably totally didn't have anything to do

with the shoe, other than it was a hot day and the pool was
comfortable. (Patty, Student, responding to Skechers ad)

Role of Commercial Narratives and Social Imagery in the Narrative Transportation

Process

Van Laer et al. (2014) suggests that there needs to be a distinction in the

marketing literature between commercial and non-commercial narratives. The former are

narratives primarily told with the sole goal to persuade, sell, and incorporates a profit

motive. Often times, this type of selling is demonstrated when the featured talent is

directly addressing the camera with the selling message. The latter are narratives that

uphold the structure of their genre (e.g., comedy, drama, romance) and the inherent

values of the story, whether entertaining, educational, or both (Van Laer et al. 2014). The

authors also believe that the less commercialized a story, the more narrative

transportation increases. In this type of environment, the consumers witness the values

and authenticity of the company in a less critical and unobtrusive manner versus

traditional advertising (Boerman, van Reijmersal, and Neijens 2012). Therefore, in an

empowered storytelling context, the narrative can maintain the inherent values of a story

and can be highly commercialized by strategically using non-verbal social imagery, like a

company's logo, throughout the telling of the story. Consequently, when a story is told in

a more commercialized context and it is immediately revealed to consumers that the

persuasive motivation behind the narrative is sponsored by a brand, narrative

transportation can be decreased or hindered (Holt 2002; Van Laer et al. 2014).

The social imagery used in the empowered storytelling context that is less or non-

commercial can communicate verisimilitude, cultural relevance and authenticity,

especially regarding the firm and its values. By definition, social imagery is visual

representations or impressions that reinforce certain perceptions within society (Lutlifyya

et al. 2009). Specifically, as a complement to this definition, social imagery can be seen

in the marketplace through the use of stills, tags, logos, language, and moving pictures

that can influence social learning and impact consumer attitudes, feelings,

understandings, and behaviors towards others (Dill and Burgess 2012; Howard,

Flennaugh, and Terry, 2012). Specifically, the non-verbal elements used, from logos to

photographs, may also have a profound effect on consumers and their storytelling

experience. Social imagery can also perform as social signals that can motivate and

influence certain behaviors among consumers due to their alluring powers (English and

Solomon 1995). Within these various articulations, social imagery is often perceived as

truth and cultural meaning to the viewers due their power and ability to assert and

confirm a particular reality and authenticity in the minds and hearts of consumers (Batra

and Homer 2004; Dill and Burgess 2012).

> It made me think more of Nike. The fact that they went and found
> that particular guy, and you could put him in the story. It says a
> lot…..Saying that Nike doesn't doubt the little guys? It was
> encouraging to me, because if this guy, who -- you know, he's not
> all that athletic, if he's out there doing it, and you know, I can do
> it, so it gives me motivation. (Al, Student, responding to Nike ad)
>
> This commercial wasn't talking about a specific product. It was
> just talking about motivation. So, technically, there's nothing to
> buy in there, but maybe, you know, I can say they're doing great
> things, let me go buy a shoe from them, and then I'm going to go
> to the discount section, or the sale section, so that I can afford it.
> But a part of that, Nike's a good company. (Issac, Student,
> responding to Nike ad)

For companies, social imagery can play a very significant role in the area of impression

management due to its ability to transmit the company's self-expression and symbolize

its value to consumers (Batra and Homer 2004). As authentic cultural resources,

companies can enhance their credibility by creating storytelling that possess creative

ingredients, from visuals and messaging, and result in giving the receiver of the story the

capabilities that they can be in control of their choices (Holt 2002). Within this post-

modern perspective, companies can have authenticity as well as transparency by placing

themselves and their social imagery in world environments that are relevant and relatable

to consumers. Hence, the impact of this genuine presence by companies in storytelling

can be powerful, especially to the memory of consumers. This is due to the stronger the

activation of a company's social imagery within the storytelling, the better the likelihood

that the company will be remembered by the consumer (Boerman et. el 2012).

Ultimately, consumer evaluations and beliefs from a company's social imagery can

influence purchase intentions. This type of influence can take place through both verbal

and non-verbal articulation of the company's social imagery elements in advertisements,

promotional materials, and more. Specifically, it is believed that the non-verbal elements

may even be more impactful due to inferences that consumers make from viewing the

company's social imagery (Batra and Homer 2004).

> From the start, because you don't see anything and then you kind
> of slowly see him running towards you. And then it's just
> someone talking and it's very quiet, so you're intrigued into what
> they're going to say, what the purpose of it is. Especially since
> there's no branding at all until the very end, so it's kind of
> interesting and surprising that it's a Nike commercial. Because
> usually any other of their commercials it's like they've got their
> logo at the bottom, you see all these athletes wearing it and talking
> about it. (Janice, Student, responding to Nike ad)

> I think the difference between those commercials, like when I look
> at Skechers now I'm kind of thinking they don't really have a lot
> of, like they don't have much depth to their brand, as opposed to
> Nike, who at least they're trying to look like they have depth to

their brand. They didn't really have anything positive in that commercial I think. They were just kind of like basic. (Jane, Student, responding to Skechers ad)

In better understanding the impact of relatable and relevant characters within an empowered storytelling context, our Millennial participants shared that they could identify more with the leading character in the Nike ad more than the one in the Skechers commercial. First, the featured talent in the Nike ad was not well-known, nor a celebrity. He was just a normal young man who was overweight and was exercising. Alternatively, the leading character in the Skechers commercial was a beautiful and sexy actress who worked to seduce the men in the ad (as well as the viewer of the ad). Moreover, it was implied in the ad that the viewer would easily recognize the featured actress. However, all of the participants in this study did not know or recognize the actress.

Not really. I guess in a sense -- it plays on the sex sells thing, which I get. But it also plays on the fact that women can only sell things if they're half dressed. Because to me the short shorts but everything else was covered, yeah, you're trying to attract the shoes, but why do you need to have those shorts on? Why does she need to be lounged in a chair next to a pool? They're supposed to be comfortable shoes. Why not running? Why not jogging? It might be more entertaining if they had a bear chasing them. And your feet don't hurt when you're running up a rocky mountainside. I don't know. (Martha, Student, responding to Skechers ad)

I was watching this commercial and this lady was talking about putting on shoes, and then all of this craziness happened. She was in this mansion, and there were man-servants. Everyone was young and attractive, and rich, and you know, she sat down on the fluffy, white couch, bed, or whatever. Yeah, it was craziness and over the top. (Al, Student, responding to Skechers ad)

Furthermore, the articulation of truth and authenticity within the empowered storytelling message in the Nike ad resonated more with the participants compared to the Skechers ad. For the latter, many of the participants thought the entire setting for the

Skechers story was unrealistic. They recognized the authenticity more in the story execution of the Nike ad.

> "This is ridiculous." They couldn't up with a better idea? It just didn't make sense to me. They just threw in a hot guy to make everybody pay attention in a pool. And I'm like, "Okay." (Linda, Student, responding to Skechers ad)

The characteristic of being able to relate to the character and to the plotline told in the Nike ad received a strong response from the Millennial participants in comparison to the Skechers ad. Essentially, they could relate to the story of working hard to make yourself better and great in life. In comparison, the Skechers plotline was simply that of promoting the comfort in the company's new memory foam shoes. Moreover, it appeared that the participants became absorbed in the telling of the story in the Nike commercial sooner (i.e., within a matter of seconds) in comparison to the Skechers ad. This behavior seemed to be due to the unique narration and visual combination in the Nike ad that peeked the curiosity of the Millennial participants at first and then fully absorbed them with its impactful message.

> It was more truthful. It's -- kind of pulls at your heartstrings a little bit. It kind of gives you a better story, a better background. Almost like a race, you're watching it from the far end, but there is a finish line, and they're working towards it. (Martha, Student, responding to Nike ad)

> "...all these superstars, sports celebrities, I know who all they are and I'm like, well, they have money. They can afford top of the line shoes. I'm not any of them. I have a budget. So, seeing a normal kid who looks like he can afford these shoes makes me think I can go to the store and buy these shoes too." (Patty, Student, responding to Nike ad)

Findings

The strongest emergent themes from our data are motivational and encouraging, altruistic, and communal in nature. According to the definition of empowerment defined in this research, the multi-dimensional aspects of the emotion, from optimism to confidence, were greatly captured in the responses of the participants. Moreover, the altruistic and communal attributes of our definition were truly revealed in the answers the participants gave regarding empowerment as well and led us to believe that our Millennial participants definitely understood the emotion of empowerment.

Encouraging and Motivational – Food for the Soul

"But everybody's like Cristal, Maybach, diamonds on your timepiece.
Jet planes, islands, tigers on a gold leash."

The song, "Royals," by Lourde, creatively expresses the types of lavish and exaggerated depictions Millennials view in the media every day. Yet, in actuality, that lifestyle is <u>not</u> their reality. In our 24/7 news cycle, witnessing the economic and political issues of our times are stressful. In addition, seeing images of NFL's Baltimore Ravens Ray Rice domestic violence scandal or watching Kim Kardashian's public displays of her "bottom" are consistent across all media, from magazines to social media. Or, watching news stories on the shooting of the unarmed African-American young man, Michael Brown, in Ferguson, Missouri (among countless others) bombard the media channels every day. Yet, these images <u>are</u> the reality of Millennials and their everyday lives. Hence, how do you stay motivated and encouraged in this type of societal environment?

The evolution of one's self-concept and self-identity in a manner that helps to motivate and encourage yourself during the good and bad times is essential for Millennials. We believe this identity crisis embodies today's Millennials, who want to be accepted and treated as equal in society. Millennials continue to obtain a better understanding of self as well as demands comprehension of how one identifies themselves in conjunction with societal systems and structures (Thomas 2013).

From a behavioral perspective, the Millennial generation is one that is multifaceted, introspective and empathetic as well as possesses an open-minded connection to others (Tanenhaus 2014). Empowered storytelling possesses characteristics such as encouraging and motivational in life and supports the work by Maddi and Kobasa (2002, 2004) called, The Hardiness Model. This framework summarizes the 3Cs of commitment, control, and challenge as three strategies for coping with the stressful circumstances of life and turning potential problems into growth opportunities (Maddi 2012). For this model to work successfully, encouragement and motivation must be firmly implemented at its foundation.

> Encouraging. I guess that'd probably be the best way to describe it…I guess it was kind of trying to -- knowing where it was going, but also listening to where it was going to end up. That there are struggles, but you can push past and get through as long as you're determined to do so. (Martha, Student, responding to Nike ad)

> It encourages me to really let it be known and really express that it's okay to be different and be great in your own way and not to have to really take the person that you idolize and make yourself be them, because you won't ever 100 percent be them. You'll act and do things and dress things like them, but you won't be them. You'll be like -- you're different in a good way. (Janice, Student, responding to Nike ad)

Our findings reveal that Millennials view empowered storytelling as encouraging and motivational. In the world they are living in, perhaps this type of storytelling is a breath of fresh air and the well-needed pick me up to get them through their day. Hence, Marketers and Advertisers may be missing the mark when understanding the true consumer motivations of today's Millennials.

> It motivates me to be me. It shouldn't have to change how I live, how I act, how I treat myself, or how I treat others. It shouldn't -- it should just kind of open your eyes as to you're great, just the way you are. Don't characterize yourself or put yourself as different from everybody else just because you're not doing all of the things that they're doing. (Janice, Student, responding to Nike ad)

> It doesn't really motivate me, but maybe it could motivate someone by making them feel like if they get those Sketchers shoes, they'll be young and attractive and rich, and where it's always sunny... It really wasn't encouraging to me. (Al, Student, responding to Skechers ad)

Altruism– It Ain't All About Me

Unlike the generations that preceded them, the "do-goodish Millennials" collectively are intrinsically motivated by different passions and purposely "favor companies that embrace the values of good citizenship" (Tanenhaus 2014, 7). The Brookings Institute reported that 91% of Millennials expressed increased trust and loyalty for those firms that supported "solutions to specific social issues" (Tanenhaus 2014, 7). Hence, their heightened awareness of altruism makes Millennials a generation of compassion and depth, which perhaps Marketers and Advertisers are not fully taking advantage of for their gain.

> Well, if you're working together, you can definitely get more done for a community. (Sara, Student)

Furthermore, with the interventionist approach within the context of consumer welfare within economic and societal perspectives, Barry's notion of "altruistic collaboration" purports "that a society should strive to benefit all of its members even at the expense of efficiency and personal enhancements" (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2012, 255). It appears from our research that Millennials in the 21st Century agree with this sentiment as well as look beyond themselves to help others and make their lives better in some way.

> People work... See, when people come and -- when people work together as a group or as a team, they can really achieve great things in life. But to do that, they have -- there should be an understanding, because everyone is caught up in everyday trouble, everyday life things going on around. So I feel like everywhere that is people working together, there should be communication. Communication is always key of life. (Issac, Student)

It has been articulated in the extant literature that the primary affective consequence of narrative transportation is its ability to produce empathy in the receiver of the story. Yet, in this research, we argue that it is quite possible to have additional affective outcomes beyond empathy. With this study, we believe that the emotion of empowerment produced from an empowered storytelling message can lead to the development of a stronger emotional outcome. This is due to the self-expansion characteristic innately possessed within narrative transportation that is combined with the altruistic and communal nature of empowered storytelling. Our data clearly indicates that for our Millennial participants the emotion of empowerment includes looking beyond yourself to help others as well as to make the lives of others better in some way.

> Things just usually work out, if people work together. Teamwork. Things just usually go better, you know, with teamwork. They can put their different qualities together, and then accomplish something that they couldn't by themselves. (Al, Student)

Communal Nature - Keeping it 100 and Letting the World Know

Millennials grew up and currently live in the Digital Age where the Internet and social media are an integral part of their lives. They truly cannot live without it. Hence, the virtual tribes and communities Millennials become a part of are like an extension of their real family and friendship relationships (Henderson et al. 2013). Having the ability to share or *post* the daily happenings to this "virtual family" is imperative to Millennials. This shareable content is truly what binds Millennials to their virtual family and friends. Therefore, content that is meaningful and ignites one's soul is paramount to Millennials.

> Cause I think that the Nike commercial was a good commercial. I would want other people to see it too. And when you retweet it, all of your followers can see it as well. (Linda, Student, responding to Nike ad)

The global phenomenon of hip-hop illuminated the paradigm of "connective marginalities that links culture, class, and historical oppression among the youth around the world," (Motley and Henderson 2008, 246). Within this type of connectedness lives a strong bond where "hip-hop is malleable and is adapted to speak" to the multitudes as well as ties together consumers from around the world (Motley and Henderson 2008, 252). We believe that empowered storytelling has this same effect, especially as it relates to how Millennials share this type of messaging in a social media context.

> You could tweet pictures and have a caption of like, "Greatness doesn't matter." Or it shouldn't characterize fit people from not-fit people. You don't have to show off, like have all your muscles shown off to like be characterized as, "Oh, I'm great because I work out and I eat clean." Just going that kind of route….Yeah. Twitter, you can like Instagram photos. I know people when they start to work out, they start to show results. They post their results and share their stores, so you could kind of do it that way. (Janice, Student, responding to Nike ad)

> I'd probably give him verbally, say Nike's got a new commercial;
> it looks pretty interesting. You should watch it. Or YouTube it
> myself and say, here, watch this commercial. Show it to your
> friends. (Patty, Student, responding to Nike ad)

In the spirit of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, we see empowered storytelling lending itself towards collectivism and communal inspired behavior from the Millennial participants, which enables them to emotionally connect more with the message. This type of storytelling also provides the receiver a more expansive narrative transportation experience that we believe is more extensive than empathy, which can truly be more of an individualistic event within a storytelling context (See Table 1). In the book, *Contagious: Why things catch on*, by Jonah Berger from the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, Berger uses the acronym of "STEPPS," as the six ways to make something contagious, especially via social media. "E" is for "Emotion," which he believes in a social media context, you focus on feelings and how can you use emotion to kindle a fire. The last "S" is for "Stories," which is defined as whether the story is not only viral, but valuable (Berger 2013). Therefore, within a marketing and advertising context, the emotion of empowerment supports this notion of providing a valuable and emotional reason for the social sharing of messages, pictures, videos, and posts for Millennials.

> Probably post it on her Facebook wall, but kind of make it private,
> because I wouldn't want people to be like, why are you doing that?
> But, yeah, I would probably post it like, hey, here's -- she wanted
> to start working out because my dad's very health conscious. He's
> very aware of what he puts in his body. He just had major back
> surgery, and he's still going and working out, now that he's able
> to, I mean. So, I would tell her, as a motivational tool. I would
> utilize that, on her Facebook wall. Yeah. I guess she has
> Instagram now, so, I didn't know. But I would probably put

motivational things on her wall to help her kind of stay focused on being more healthy. (Jane, Student, responding to Nike ad)

I think I would probably Facebook it. I would probably just put a little link, (and say) if you like Sketchers, this commercial might appeal to you. It doesn't appeal to me. But not all my friends have the same taste, so maybe they like the commercial, where it's bright and airy and generic, I think, is what I would say, the commercial was very generic to me, very uninspiring. I wasn't inspired to go out and buy shoes like I was the other shoe. So, something like that. So, some people might focus on the pretty girl and her really bright, pink shoes and that might do it for whoever Skechers is trying to grab. (Patty, Student, responding to Skechers ad)

Message Recall

This initial research on the impact of an empowered storytelling message also sheds light that message recall can be stronger for this type of storytelling in contrast to traditional direct selling messages. In this study, after approximately 35-45 minutes when the Millennial participants were asked to recall the first and second commercials they viewed with their corresponding messages, most of the participants could recall the details more in the empowered storytelling message versus the traditional direct selling message. This is to say that their responses included very detailed descriptions of the story, character, and message of the Nike ad. Such detailed recall could imply that the cognitive processing of empowered storytelling could be retrieved in long-term memory in a more efficient manner due to the participants' emotional connection to the empowered storytelling message. The human memory is so dynamic in nature, especially as it relates to our processing of narratives. In particular, our declarative memory has the ability to get constantly updated as well as altered with our life experiences. These units of experiences become stories which lead to the concept of human beings having story-

based memory.   Our stories are the ways we hold on to as well as connect life experiences in our minds. Therefore, an empowered storytelling message may impact story-based memory, which is different from semantic memory, in a stronger manner due to its emotional connections to the receiver of the story. This is how story-based memory complements episodic memory because what we tell and why are decisions based on what we remember (Schank 1995).

Furthermore, from observing the non-verbal communications of the Millennial participants, their physical demeanor, from posture to facial expressions, changed in a positive manner when recalling the empowered storytelling message. Specifically, participants sat up straighter and possessed a sentimental grin when recalling the message in the empowered storytelling ad as if it touched them in some meaningful manner. This reaction was in stark contrast to the recollection of participants when discussing the Skechers commercial. There was literally no obvious change in body language when recalling that ad.

Impact of Empowered Storytelling on Millennial Women Versus Men

As previously mentioned, research by Green and Brock (2000) reported that women experience greater narrative transportation than men due to their high emotional involvement. In fact, we discovered that Millennial women and men articulated their verbal and non-verbal responses to the empowered storytelling stimuli in a very elaborative and expansive manner. From their detailed descriptions and openness in sharing their personal thoughts, it appeared that both genders were equally moved by the empowering message in the empowered storytelling narrative.

In conclusion, the data revealed that empowered storytelling can indeed provide a transformational experience for the Millennial receivers of the message. It can also present an emotional connection for Millennials that can be soul stirring, thought provoking, and memorable.

CHAPTER 3: DISCUSSION

The qualitative investigation from this research has illuminated the impact that the Millennial participants experience when watching an empowered storytelling message versus a traditional direct selling message. The numerous benefits and positive outcomes from the narrative transportation experience leaves room to explore the emotion of empowerment as a part of this impactful process. The responses from the participants have more depth and open up their self-awareness when receiving an empowered storytelling message. Moreover, their emotional connection that manifests from an empowered storytelling message is authentic, more self-expansive, and exudes an altruistic nature.

Theoretical Contributions

Research in narrative transportation has been consistent in revealing that this theory works well. However, researchers have yet to determine why narrative transportation is so powerful. Historically, it has been reported that the success of narrative transportation is a result of its strong affective consequences, which often get grouped together into the emotion of empathy. Is empathy truly the only way to categorize the strong affective consequences of narrative transportation? This research begins to make theoretical contributions to the literature in the area of empowerment as an emotion and this notion of the impact of non-traditional and less commercialized narratives within a marketing context. Regarding the former, our findings reveal that the emotion of empowerment can be an outcome of narrative transportation theory and has two characteristics of altruism and its communal nature that add to the current definition

of the emotion in the literature, especially for marketing. Furthermore, these additional traits make empowerment a perfect emotion in a marketing sense, especially as it relates to its potential relevance to consumer behavior within social media and digital marketing. In all, there are limitations regarding the transformative power of narrative transportation. Historically, research conducted in this area has been focused on the written story and there has been a failure to recognize the diverse modes in which consumers view ads and have brand experiences (Phillips and McQuarrie 2010). McFerran et al. (2010) purport that while there has been a great deal of evidence showing transportation effects on persuasion, the role of narrative transportation in marketing stories is less known. Hence, what about the effectiveness of verisimilitude in commercialized stories that do not have an overt goal of selling?

In regard to the impact of non-traditional and less commercialized narratives within a marketing and advertising context, this research does support one of the propositions by Van Laer et al. (2014) in their meta-analysis of narrative transportation theory in JCR that less commercialized narratives can have a stronger impact within an advertising context versus narratives that are devoted to constant selling and promotion. With this research, we have proven there is strong and lasting impact of non-traditional and less commercialized narratives on the Millennial consumer. In terms of verisimilitude, we showed that it is incredibly potent within this type of non-traditional storytelling and the Millennial participants found it more relatable and relevant to their own lives.

Finally, we also confirmed that narrative transportation can be successfully studied beyond the use of the written format, which is how most of the field currently

studies this theory. Our use of incorporating real world TV commercials as our stimuli moves the research of narrative transportation theory into environments that are more reflective of how Millennials see storytelling in their everyday lives.

Managerial Implications

Identifying more sustainable marketing strategies in a tremendously competitive global environment, creating brand affinity and loyalty, at a deeper and more meaningful level, is a must for today's marketing and advertising executives. Learning more about the emotion of empowerment may reveal a great deal to marketers about the characteristics and values of their Millennial consumers. In addition, better understanding today's communications vehicles used for telling stories, from mobile phones and TV to Twitter and Instagram, may have important implications for future marketing and advertising campaigns.

Additionally, marketers and advertisers are constantly struggling with how to connect with consumers, especially Millennials, in an authentic and sustainable manner. With the incredible usage of social media amongst this audience as well as with Generation Z, being able to create memorable and shareable campaigns that cut across all promotional channels and last, continues to keep marketers and advertisers up at night. Marketers and advertisers are realizing that adopting strategies, which incorporate storytelling with empowerment, can have tangible and intangible benefits, such as increased product awareness, word-of-mouth, affinity, and repeat purchases (Bahadur 2014). Having this research insight on the narrative transportation process that evokes the emotion of empowerment, could give marketers and advertisers another tool in their arsenal for strategically creating campaigns that authentically connect with Millennial

consumers across all channels, provide sharable content across multiple social media platforms, and can be sustained in the marketplace, as well as ultimately, increase revenue.

Moreover, with the strong focus on the trend of CX, which stands for "Customer Experience," within businesses today, this research could support the utility of using empowered storytelling as a part of the CX process within the customer journey. The rationale behind this thinking is due to the fact that CX is a strategic approach where companies must evaluate all of their systems and processes to maximize efficiencies so the consumer's experience with the firm, from interacting on social media and websites to the retail and billing experience is flawless and satisfactory. Within CX, the thought is to empower customers and employees with options and information in an effort to positively impact decision making and purchase outcomes. Marketing Scholar and past Executive Director of the Marketing Science Institute (MSI), Katherine Lemon, recently posited at the 2017 MSI's Board of Trustee's meeting that "there is a complexity within CX that exists today that is 'messy, ugly, and hard.' The customer journey flows through multi-channels with a tremendous amount of touch points. Understanding the circumstances in which the customer is experiencing and interacting with the firm takes an enormous amount of patience and even empathy, especially if companies want to truly understand and simplify their CX process," both externally and internally (Lemon 2017). It is believed that through the use of empowered storytelling within the CX process, firms could strategically control and articulate their narratives to all of its stakeholders in a manner that that could bring positive and sustainable results in the areas of customer satisfaction and loyalty, employee retention, customer complaints, and sales growth.

Additional utility of this research could be deployed as a powerful strategy to address a host of social issues Millennials are facing in their lives and in the lives of their families including- preventive health, disease states like cancer and heart disease, or domestic violence, bullying, and race relations. Hence, marketing executives for such issues in the public and private sectors would benefit from building relationships with content and programming producers and writers to collaborate in telling non-commercial narratives that are impactful (Russell 1999).

Using the strategy of incorporating empowerment in stories could also work in managing employees, educating students, working with patients, and more because it is a way of communicating information in an authentic, purposeful, and compassionate manner. With this type of narrative transportation process, the storyteller consciously wants the receiver to be motivated and encouraged to be better and achieve more.

The values-based matrix by Kotler et al. (2010) also reinforces this trend towards marketing that empowers and can impact consumer values. Essentially, in today's marketing landscape, values-driven marketing is the dominant focus. Within this context, the goal is to create a strong consumer interaction by providing a collaborative experience that delivers value propositions which are authentic and matter as well as are functional, emotional, and spiritual (Kotler et al. 2010). Continued work in this area is necessary to uncover how to connect with consumers in a functional, emotional, and spiritual manner.

Essentially, storytelling can do more than just bring enjoyment and pleasure. This powerful vehicle can also be used to heal, motivate, and empower Millennial consumers to excel in all aspects of their lives. Overall, embracing the ability to evoke empowerment in narratives may produce incalculable dividends to the marketplace in the long run.

Future Directions

Future research on this topic can delve into the various components of empowered storytelling. Further examining copy and scriptwriting may assist in better understanding the vocabulary that resonates with this type of storytelling. In addition, further analysis on imagery, music, tone, lighting, distribution channels, and other aesthetics that make storytelling with empowerment effective may be useful to practitioners. For example, research may uncover that the emotion of empowerment has its own vocabulary so that when writers express the feeling of joy, they may want to use the word "celebrate" instead of the word "happy" in their scripts. Delving into this emotion more may also create its own lexicon of elements that can assist marketers and advertisers in portraying this emotion in narratives.

It would also be very interesting to incorporate eye scanning, fMRI, and neuro-imaging scanning into this analysis to better understand the cognitive processing of empathy versus empowerment. Historically, the effects of narrative transportation theory stop at its ability to arouse emotions and educe empathy. Having the ability to incorporate eye and neuro-imaging scanning into this research would visually reveal the differences between empathy and empowerment.

Finally, understanding the effects of modality and storytelling continues to be a necessity. As Millennial consumers are able to freely share content as well as watch programming and more in many different environments, continuing to better understand which modality is most effective is essential. This research revealed that the primary devices used by the Millennial participants were mobile phones, laptops, iPads, and some television. They were primarily watching entertainment programs on Netflix and Hulu as

well as getting news and educational information from Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. If our Millennials connected with a story or any type 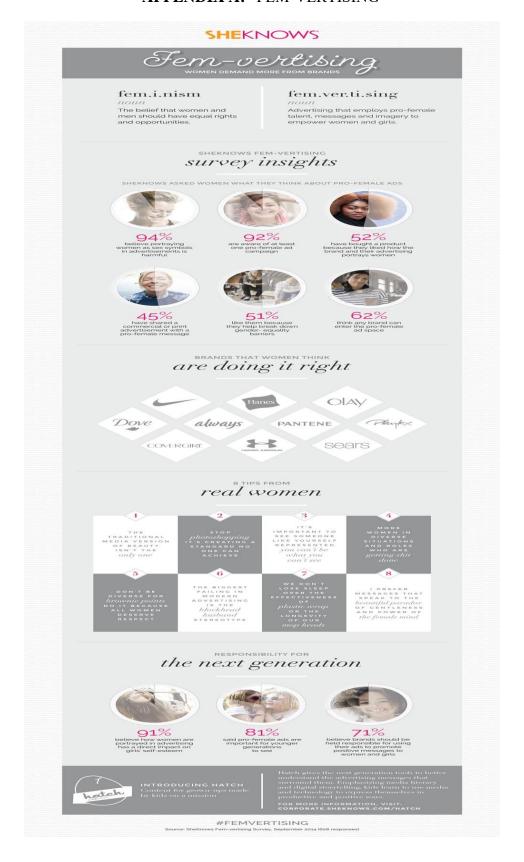of message, they used Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat to share the message with their friends and Facebook and YouTube to share the message with their older family members.

Furthermore, expanding this work to include storytelling by way of the performing arts, live events (e.g., concerts, Cirque du Soleil, conferences, TED Talks), and even religious pulpits, could be impactful in identifying more insights as to how the emotion of empowerment can positively affect the consumer attitudes, behaviors, and purchase intent of Millennial consumers.

In all, storytelling that exudes the emotion of empowerment can strategically assist marketers and advertisers in strengthening their connections with Millennial consumers. Obtaining a better understanding on how storytelling that incorporates the emotion of empowerment must evolve and be reimagined by marketers and advertisers is imperative given the Millennial audience that is demanding more from firms. In the final analysis, it may be the companies that are able to build an authentic connection with Millennial consumers and assist them in better interpreting the world around them that will garner limitless benefits _and_ profits (Holt 2002).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: "FEM-VERTISING"

APPENDIX B: INFORMANTS FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH (2014-2015)

Pseudonym	Race/Gender	Age in Years	Identifier
Karen	Caucasian Female	20	Student
Maria	Latino Female	21	Student
Asia	Asian Female	20	Student
Shawna	African American Female	21	Student
Yvonne	Caucasian Female	21	Student
Chris	Caucasian Male	21	Student
Juan	Latino Male	20	Student
Sidney	African American Male	21	Student
Robert	Caucasian Male	21	Student
John	Caucasian Male	22	Student
Joe	Caucasian Male	19	Student
Sue	Caucasian Female	20	Student
Dave	African American Male	19	Non-Profit Program Participant
Tony	African American Male	19	Non-Profit Program Participant
Ace	African American Male	19	Non-Profit Program Participant
Edward	African American Male	19	Non-Profit Program Participant
Andre	African American Male	21	Non-Profit Program Participant
Franny	African American Female	24	Non-Profit Program Participant
Tracey	African American Female	24	Non-Profit Program Participant
Tia	African American Female	28	Non-Profit Program Participant

Denise	Latino Female	19	Non-Profit Program Participant
Tabitha	African American Female	24	Non-Profit Program Participant

APPENDIX C: INFORMANTS FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH (2017)

Pseudonym	Race/Gender	Age in Years	Identifier
Al	Caucasian Male	24	Student
Bill	Hindu Male	28	Student
Edward	African American Male	19	Student
Isaac	African Male	23	Student
Sara	Caucasian Female	20	Student
Martha	Caucasian Female	32	Student
Janice	Caucasian Female	19	Student
Mary	Caucasian Female	20	Student
Patty	Mixed Female	27	Student
Jane	Caucasian Female	33	Student
Linda	Caucasian Female	21	Student

APPENDIX D:

OVERVIEW OF TV CLIP STIMULI USED

Description of *Nike's Find Your Greatness* commercial: This commercial features a young man running in the country with narration on how ordinary people can find their own truths and inner power so they can be extraordinary and "great." The commercial does not direct sell or promote any Nike products to the viewer. Length of the commercial was sixty seconds.

Description of *Skechers Memory Foam commercial*: This commercial features actress, Kelly Brock, promoting the "memory foam" technology featured in the new line of Skechers shoes of the same name. Length of the commercial was sixty seconds.

APPENDIX E: SCRIPT FOR NIKE'S "FIND YOUR GREATNESS" COMMERCIAL

{FEATURES YOUNG BOY RUNNING DOWN A ROAD IN A RURAL AREA. THE VOICE-OVER NARRATION SAYS THE FOLLOWING SCRIPT.}

FIND YOUR GREATNESS.

SOMEHOW WE'VE COME TO BELIEVE THAT GREATNESS IS ONLY FOR THE CHOSEN FEW, FOR THE SUPERSTARS. THE TRUTH IS, GREATNESS IS FOR US ALL. THIS IS NOT ABOUT LOWERING EXPECTATIONS; IT'S ABOUT RAISING THEM FOR EVERY LAST ONE OF US. GREATNESS IS NOT IN ONE SPECIAL PLACE, AND IT'S NOT IN ONE SPECIAL PERSON. GREATNESS IS WHEREVER SOMEBODY IS TRYING TO FIND IT.

FIND YOUR GREATNESS.

APPENDIX F: SCRIPT FOR SKECHER'S "AIR COOLED MEMORY FOAM"
COMMERCIAL

KELLY BROCK

{WALKING DOWN A STREET.}

NOW THAT SKECHERS INTRODUCED AIR COOLED MEMORY FOAM, PEOPLE ARE WONDERING WHAT IT FEELS LIKE.

{WALKS INTO A MANSION AND IS SEEN WALKING IN THE MEMORY FOAM SHOES AND EVENTUALLY LOUNGES BY THE SWIMMING POOL}

POOL BOY
REFRESHMENT?
KELLY BROCK

{TAKES COCKTAIL FROM THE POOL BOY.}

SO REFRESHING…

{TAKES A SIP FROM THE COCKTAIL.}

THIS ABOUT SUMS IT UP.

KELLY BROCK (VOG)

{PHOTOS OF A VARIETY OF SKECHERS SHOES ARE NOW SEEN.)

TRY SKECHERS. NOW WITH AIR COOLED MEMORY FOAM.

{CUT TO A HANDSOME MAN WITH NO SHIRT GETTING OUT OF THE SWIMMING POOL.}

KELLY BROCK
IT KEEPS YOU COMFORTABLE. EVEN IN THE HOTTEST OF SITUATIONS.

-THE END-

APPENDIX G: MODIFIED EMPOWERMENT SCALE

Items
Factor 1**:** Self-esteem-self-efficacy
I generally accomplish what I set out to do
I have a positive attitude about myself
When I make plans, I am almost certain to make them work
I am usually confident about the decisions I make
I am often able to overcome barriers I feel
I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others
I see myself as a capable person
I am able to do things as well as most other people
I feel I have a number of good qualities

Factor 3: Community activism and autonomy
People have a right to make their own decisions, even if they are bad ones.
People should try to live their lives the way they want to.
People working together can have an effect on their community.
People have more power if they join together as a group.
Working with others in my community can help to change things for the better.
Very often a problem can be solved by taking action.

Factor 4: Optimism and control over the future
People are limited only by what they think possible.
I can pretty much determine what will happen in my life.
I am generally optimistic about the future.
Very often a problem can be solved by taking action.

Notes:
7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)
Scale anchors are in bold.

APPENDIX H: NARRATIVE TRANSPORTATION SCALE

Items
1. While I was reading the narrative, I could easily picture the events in it taking place.
2. While I was reading the narrative, activity going on in the room around me was on my mind. (R)
3. I could picture myself in the scene of the events described in the narrative.
4. I was mentally involved in the narrative while reading it.
5. After I finished the narrative, I found it easy to put it out of my mind (R)
6. I wanted to learn more how the narrative ended.
7. The narrative affected me emotionally.
8. I found myself thinking of ways the narrative could have turned out differently.
9. I found my mind wandering while reading the narrative. (R)
10. The events in the narrative are relevant to my everyday life.
11. The events in the narrative have changed my life.

Notes:
R=Reverse scoring
7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)
Scale anchors are in bold.

APPENDIX I: AD AND MEDIA TRANSPORTATION SCALE

Ad Transportation Items
1. I felt caught up in the context of the ad.
2. Watching the ad was relaxing.
3. My mind was only on the ad and not on other things.
4. The ad improved my mood, made me feel happier.
5. I lost myself in the content of the ad while watching it.
6. I thought the ad was entertaining.
7. The ad captured my attention.

Media Transportation Items
1. I felt caught up in the program.
2. My mind was only on the program and not on other things.
3. The program improved my mood, made me feel happier.
4. I lost myself in the story while watching this program.
5. I thought the program was entertaining.
6. The program captured my attention.

Notes:
7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)
Scale anchors are in bold.

TABLE 1: COMPARISION OF EMPATHY VS. EMPOWERMENT

DEFINITION OF EMPATHY IN THE LITERATURE (Argo et al, 2008, Van Laer et al. 2014)	DEFINITION OF EMPOWERMENT FROM FIELD DATA
Openness	Motivational
Understanding	Encouraging
Compassion	Confident
Personal	Can-do /inner power
	Against all odds
	Strength
	Helping others in a way that makes their lives better
	Connection to faith and spirituality
	Altruistic
	Communal / community oriented

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