PERCEIVED REALITY DEPICTED IN MEDIA BRANDING OF HIGHER ONLINE EDUCATION

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Jenel K. Nels

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study examined if the media branding by a particular for-profit university affected the behavioral decisions of non-traditional students seeking higher education. The research also sought to understand if the branding which elicited that behavior modeled the reality of the educational experience. The philosophical framework of this research centered on Robert Craig's socio-psychological tradition from the 7 Traditions of Communication Theory. It utilized French media philosopher Jean Baudrillard's 1986 essay, “Ecstasy of Communication,” as a guide in that it points to television as the most direct communication for both sending and receiving information. The study's theoretical basis was grounded in Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, particularly his essay (2001) "Theoretical Integration and Research Synthesis," as it explored the symbolism present in media and its relation to human thought. The data for this study was obtained through two surveys distributed through the internet. One survey group included non-traditional adults considering a return to higher education, while the other survey group included students of the for-profit university in which this study was focused. The results show that the non-students desired to model the behavior portrayed in the media branding of the for-profit university and they considered contacting the school after viewing its television advertisements. However, the research also determined that the existing students did not feel the media branding accurately portrayed the reality of the educational experience. The findings bring a call to action for more media literacy education in relation to understanding the semiotics of media branding in television advertisements.
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OR GOAL AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

THE PROBLEM/GOAL

Importance of the Study

A successful career often means more time at work and less time with family. It also means more competition to remain afloat and successful. No one wants a younger, more educated person to fill-in one day and do the job better. This leads some people to seek higher education, and for some of them, an online education offers the most convenient option. For-profit universities with online degree programs shine in this arena.

The names of for-profit institutions such as Kaplan University and University of Phoenix are known around the world in part to their media branding. The creators of the advertising for the for-profit universities pick images and words that represent the lives of their target audience. This is done in part to elicit a behavioral reaction among consumers. Every person in every culture experiences a range of emotions at any given time, whether it's anger, happiness, sadness, excitement, etc. The media messages of these advertisements seek to play off these emotions to arouse the viewer based on the specific demographic the client desires to reach (Potter, 2008, p. 58). The problem lies in the number of people who buy into the message based on the semiotics portrayed in the advertising.

Statement of the Problem

The objective of this research study was to determine if a correlation existed between the media branding of for-profit universities and its successful enrollment of its online education system. The branding by for-profit universities portray a specific message in an effort to reach a specific demographic of potential students. In many cases, the audiences are conditioned to the
point that when the person sees the message and believes it speaks to him/her, the person tunes everything else out and pays attention only to the message being portrayed. The biggest for-profit university in the nation, University of Phoenix, provides a great example of this with its *I Am A Phoenix* campaign. If a person saw a commercial from this campaign and equated it with success and happiness, that person would be likely to pay attention. This is of particular interest if that person is considering a return to higher education. Since he/she already felt a connection to the *I Am A Phoenix* campaign, he/she might be more abt to contact that university over a university with only a printed information packet. With that said, this research also explored the role of media literacy as it pertains to Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory.

**DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED**

**Brand:** For the purpose of this study, the term brand is defined as the image companies land in front of consumers through multiple venues hoping to attract attention and construct a reality of truth (Giltin, 2002, p. 69).

**Media Literacy:** "a perspective from which we expose ourselves to the media and interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter" (Massey, 2002, p. 31).

**Online Education:** the process of completing an education through an internet community, rather than a classroom.

**Semiotics:** "the study of signs. It is not purely a method of textual analysis, but involves both the theory and analysis of signs, codes and signifying practices," (Chandler, 2002, p. 259).

**Sign:** "A sign is a meaningful unit which is interpreted as standing for something other itself," (Chandler, 2002, p. 260).

**Tagline:** For the purpose of this study, the term refers to the word/words repeated within media to establish name recognition between a message and a company.
**University of the Globe:** For ethical purposes, this study will use the title University of the Globe to refer to the actual university used in this study. The goal of this study is not to prove a right or wrong by the university, therefore the researcher changed the name of the university to protect the anonymity of the school.

**ORGANIZATION OF REMAINING CHAPTERS**

This study is organized into five chapters, the first of which is this introduction. Chapter 2 includes a historical account of the rise of for-profit universities in literature review which also outlines the philosophical assumptions and theoretical basis of this study. It also briefly discusses media literacy and its role in understanding branding as it pertains to media. Chapter 3 outlines the scope and methodology of the study and Chapter 4 outlines the results of study following a quantitative analysis of two sample groups. Chapter 5 provides a conclusion to the research as well as recommendations for future study.
Chapter 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter explores literature pertaining to the topic of media branding, social learning and media literacy. The core of this literature review focuses on the University of the Globe media campaign and its use of semiotics. The University of the Globe is a successful for-profit online university based in the United States with students all over the world. This study is new research generated to understand the impact of media branding used by this university.

PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND THEORETICAL BASIS

The foundation of this study lies in the socio-psychological tradition as defined by Robert Craig's (2007) 7 Traditions of Communication Theory (p. 143). The socio-psychological tradition explores how interpersonal communication influences behavior. It appeals to the beliefs that social contexts are often biased. This is important particularly for the fact that the socio-psychological tradition is predicted, tested and explained through cause-and-effect relationships.

In this study, theories rooted in the socio-psychological tradition help to provide explanations for the quantitative results measured as it relates to human behavior. The socio-psychological tradition provides a focal point for the research of the expression, interaction and influence that result from the University of the Globe’s media campaign as analyzed using Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory. This approach guides the research to uncover the truth behind manipulation tactics communicated in the University of the Globe brand. It follows an objective approach in that it acts on the assumption that the truth is accessible through unbiased observation.

In outlining the dominance of the University of the Globe brand, this study also argues that levels of media literacy impact consumer decisions as it relates to knowledge in advertising. The critical communication tradition, also outlined by Robert Craig (1999), provides additional
support for this research as it challenges the everyday notion of what is "real" in relation to media messages (pp. 146-149). This tradition of theory helps define if and why potential students make assumptions about the University of the Globe based solely on its branding. The critical communication tradition seeks to bring forth the power dynamics buried within the University of the Globe media representation. This approach is useful as this study challenges the means of unjust discourse present in the University of the Globe branding.

In his 1986 essay, “Ecstasy of Communication,” French media philosopher Jean Baudrillard points to television as the most direct communication for both sending and receiving information. Baudrillard argues that signs, rules and objects serve as a form of obscenity which feeds the media. These visuals are broadcast nonstop throughout the world playing out scenes described by Baudrillard as "secret rituals known only by the actors" (Baudrillard, 1986). Jean Baudrillard is a postmodernist who believes reality is constructed through cognitive behavior as it relates to personal reality. His theory is relative to this study in that this research uses television commercials as a source and then tracks the cognitive reaction it evokes among the participants. This combined with elements of the critical communication tradition help establish what is real in terms of the media message as understood by the people who view it.

Baudrillard's work looks at human communication in general. He believes all objects serve meaning on some kind of psychological level. This is in part because each object represents a sign, which represents a time, a place and/or a culture (Baudrillard, 2005). Baudrillard's work exploring mass communication looks to seek wisdom by analyzing objects and their place in the universe. Critics believe the people who question this concept do so because they do not understand the message in the signs. Critics attribute the miscommunication to cultural and language differences (Merrin, 2005). A general principle present within
Baudrillard's theory is that electronic media is the outlet of signs which alters human behavior. This study uses this philosophy in conjunction with social cognitive theory to not only recognize the signs within media that affect behavior, but to also understand the truth behind the message. This approach also sets a framework for further study of cognitive behavior as it relates to media literacy.

A dissertation presented by Hillary Leonard to the University of Utah in 2005 supports the philosophy as it is used in this study. The researcher explored the "fantasy" depicted by advertisements and marketing media in relation to honeymoons. The study focused on the planning of the honeymoon, the actual trip and the emotion that followed when it was all over. Using Baudrillard's theory as a guide, the researcher hypothesized that people become more interested in the fantasy than actual real-life, which could eventually lead them to believe the fantasy as reality. The results of this study found that nearly all the respondents reported their honeymoons exceeded their fantasy expectations. The researcher concluded because the honeymoon signified the beginning of marriage and a union, that the respondents reclassified the fantasy in their own minds instead of labeling the honeymoon a disappointment. The researcher quoted one respondent who stated his honeymoon was not his fantasy, so he created a new fantasy as it went. In other words, he altered his behavior to make reality parallel his fantasy. The researcher also concluded that people kept souvenirs from their honeymoon to remind them of the fantasy and emotion tied to it (Leonard, 2005). This study provides an example of how Baudrillard's theory regarding human behavior alters reality as it relates to emotional images and objects, specifically in this study, the semiotics portrayed in the University of the Globe media and how it relates to a students’ behavior.
Another key factor in this philosophy of communication is understanding behavior. Aristotle believed it is the job of humans to develop reasoning power. His teachings imply the end means is not the emotion generated, rather it is something that is known. This serves as an ethical foundation for this communication philosophy as it explores the behavioral effect of media branding visible in the University of the Globe campaign. This is of great significance as it pertains to social cognitive theory and the fantasy of online higher-education created by media. It is important for this study to identify the signs within media that alter social behavior in an effort to better understand what people interpret as reality.

An example of ethical behavior in the media is visible in journalism. A dissertation written by Thomas Lawford Westbrook and presented to the University of Texas at Austin (1994) examined the cognitive moral development of journalists, particularly in relation to ethics. The researchers found journalists to be ethically strong, however, they also determined that one story with an ethical impact could completely reset a journalist’s thinking (Tankard, 1994). This is important to understand because it states the volatility of ethics. One message could alter the ethical implication in the media. The person viewing this message does so with his own ethics in mind, his own reasoning power as believed by Aristotle. This ethical philosophy serves as a foundation for this study when analyzing the message in the University of the Globe brand and its cognitive effect on behavior. Like that of a journalist, marketing executives for organizations such as University of the Globe select specific objects, words and phrases in an effort to attract potential clients. The ethics around those advertisements generally focus on one appealing topic. Marketers rely on the strength of that one message to affect a person’s reasoning power. If a potential student buys into the message, it results in enrollment and tuition for the university; however the ethical implication lies in potential missing truths
behind the message.

THE LITERATURE

The Background

Anyone who watches television, drives on a road, uses the internet or listens to the radio, more than likely has seen at least one advertisement for the University of the Globe. Its tagline appears in television commercials on the nation's top networks. It also appears in print advertisements embedded on website search engines. People also see it on sponsorships and hear it through word of mouth. The university's media campaign hits every medium. Its visibility saturates the minds of the public creating a state of automaticity for some non-traditional students considering a return to higher education. This all comes despite the university's for-profit status.

The University of the Globe is a for-profit university with students throughout the world. It defines itself in its brand displayed in its media campaign. Its combination of television, radio, billboard and internet advertisements create a communication hybrid designed to reach all platforms. This branding is similar to that of a campaign by American Express in 2007. Researchers explored the effect of American Express' decision to combine media advertising and internet advertising. They found the cross-communication between the mediums not only increased the message strength, but it also increased the brand strength. The researchers concluded that synergy is fundamental to successful media campaigns (Wang, 2007).

The brand is the core of a product and competitive branding is a necessity in the world of higher education. The University of the Globe uses similar synergy of that featured in the study of American Express. However, the University of the Globe expands its message to visual campaigns as well. This cross-communication establishes its image and its global name
recognition.

**For-Profit Online Education**

To better understand the attraction of the University of the Globe, it is important to first understand the overall trend of online higher-education in the 21st century. In 2009, 2.14 million students pursued bachelor degrees through online education. That is up from .78 million students in 2004. Among those totals, the University of the Phoenix leads the way in enrollment with 400,000 students. Kaplan University, another for-profit university, finished a distant second with an online enrollment total of 90,000 students (Online learning: By the numbers, 2010).

To understand the attraction, it’s important to first understand the history of leading institutions such as the University of Phoenix. The University of the Phoenix was founded in 1974. It was established in an effort to provide more options for lower income students and adults seeking opportunities in higher education. The idea to create the university was developed following some training courses for teachers and police officers dealing with delinquent teenagers. The adult students enjoyed the courses so much that they signed up for more and suggested the courses to their friends. This educational vision grew through word of mouth. The university was originally headquartered out of a California home on a budget of only $26,000, but as the demand for higher-education grew, so did the university. After just two years of operation, revenues for University of the Phoenix totaled nearly $3 million. Today, it operates more than 200 campuses and serves more than 400,000 students. It’s estimated to be worth about $10 billion (Bartlett, 2009).

Understanding the creation of the University of the Phoenix helps one to understand the overall popularity of online for-profit education. The University of the Phoenix appeals to anyone looking to better his/her education at his/her own pace. Its founder gave up a promising
career as a professor to bring his vision of higher education for working adults and low-income students to life. His career-orientated coursework provided a new educational option that did not interfere with the lifestyles of prospective students. Considering the University of the Phoenix accounted for nearly $10 billion in its thirty years of existence, one could argue its founder capitalized on a vision he knew would attract a specific demographic.

In the beginning, university officials sought out to reach this demographic through word of mouth. Over time the university’s message expanded to billboards, television and the internet. In 2010, the University of the Phoenix surpassed California State University as the second largest higher-education system in the country (Wilson, 2010). About seven-percent of students in the nation now enroll in career-focused programs each fall and the number grows to ten-percent when counting students who enroll year round (Wilson, 2010).

In addition to earning profit for itself, the University of the Phoenix is also a powerhouse on Wall Street. It accounted for 95-percent of its parent company, the Apollo Group’s, $3.1-billion dollar revenue in 2008 (Miley, 2009). It leads a growing trend of successful institutions that mix education with a business' bottom-line. In 2009, the for-profit higher-education institution of Kaplan University accounted for 58-percent of the Washington Post company’s revenue. In fact, Kaplan University turned a profit for the media entity, while the company’s signature newspaper and magazine publications lost money. The financial magazine Barron’s estimated Kaplan University accounted for $5-billion of the Washington Post’s $8.5-billion worth (NPR, 2010). In addition to Kaplan University, the Washington Post company owns an 8-percent stake in Corinthian Colleges, a for-profit college with about more than 100 campuses in the United States and Canada (Burd, 2010). Of the roughly 3,000 for-profit institutions, 40-percent are owned by publicly traded companies (Wilson, 2010).
The monetary success of these for-profit universities also brings forth their critics. Recently, the U.S. Higher Learning Commission opened an investigation into the Apollo Group's recruiting and admissions practices. According to an article written in the *Guardian*, government officials discovered the company's U.S. universities "exaggerated" student's futures and career-expectations following graduation. The University of Phoenix was part of that investigation, but the article does not include their comment (Boffey, 2011).

In a separate investigation, another recent undercover operation by the U. S. Government also discovered deceptive recruiting practices by for-profit universities. As part of this investigation in 2010, the U.S. Government Accountability Office sent several people undercover as prospective students. The undercover students applied at 15 for-profit universities in six states. The government selected the colleges based off how much financial aid the colleges received. The investigation found four of the 15 universities encouraged “fraudulent practices” and all 15 made “deceptive” statements (GOA, 2010). Among some of the practices uncovered, the report states university officials encouraged at least four prospective students to falsify their federal aid documents so they qualified for more loans.

The Coalition for Educational Success filed a lawsuit following the report. The coalition’s lawsuit claims the government issued the report in an effort to damage the reputation of for-profit universities. In response, the government reissued its report in November of 2010 to clarify some wording, but the U.S. Government Accountability Office still stood by its overall findings (Yerak, 2010, p. 20).

Also in question is the overall leadership success of for-profit university students. A study by the Career College Association in 2007 found on average, graduates of career-orientated colleges only earn about $9,230 per year more than a person with only a high school
Behavioral Effect of Media Branding in Online Education

diploma (Blumenstyk, 2007). It is unclear what types of jobs these graduates receive or how much money they make on average, but if you couple the Career College Association’s pay statistics with the cost it took to attend that career-college, on average the student took home less money than a high school graduate.

Despite all this criticism, for-profit universities remain a top choice for college candidates in 2011, particularly Black and Hispanic students. An article published in the journal *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* specifically classifies for-profit institutions as a threat. According to its list of Diverse Top 100, the University of Phoenix took the top spot for awarding bachelor's degrees to African-Americans, more than Florida A&M and Howard universities (Nealy, 2009).

The University of the Phoenix defends its education with its graduation rate. According to its website, 38-percent of students seeking bachelor’s degrees graduate from the University of the Phoenix; nationally 43-percent of students seeking bachelor’s degrees graduate. However, government reports open the door to questions regarding these statistics. A U.S. government report analyzing students between the years of 2004-2009, found only 15.7-percent of students seeking a degree at a for-profit university graduated with a bachelor’s degree in that six year period. During the same time, 59.5-percent of students at public universities achieved a bachelor’s degree and 64.6-percent of students at private universities achieved a bachelor’s degree (Carey, 2010).

**Media Branding**

So money and education aside, what is it that makes for-profit universities such as the University of the Globe so popular? Critics point to the university's branding. Critics suggest the for-profit university uses aggressive marketing tactics in an effort to lure students away from public and private institutions, so the for-profit university can capitalize on the return
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(Kelderman, 2010). Records show the University of the Globe spends $100-million a year on media advertising which is more than advertising spent on Cheerios or Tide (Miley, 2009). The University of the Globe television campaigns speak to a student's emotions. For example, a commercial produced in 2007 by the University of the Globe reaches out to working parents. The commercial features a baby playing with a ball in the hallway, while the words “University of I don’t want to miss a thing” appear on the screen.

The 2011 University of the Globe media campaign looks to draw on those same emotions through a different avenue. Each commercial, billboard or radio advertisement featured in this campaign portrays one adult achieving success in the business or health industry. These advertisements are appealing and timely, particularly with the high unemployment rate facing American society in 2011. In addition, for-profit universities also rely on other mediums such as print hand-outs and pop-up advertisements on internet website pages. The example below (see Figure 1) shows an advertisement by University of the Globe embedded on the homepage of the career website Monster.

![Figure 1. Monster Homepage. Arrow on the right points to University of the Globe advertisement. (2011, September 23). Retrieved from http://www. monster.com](http://www.monster.com)

These different internet marketing positions used by the University of the Globe establish the organizations branding. Todd Gitlin (2002), author of Media Unlimited, describes branding as “a way of life” (p. 69). Gitlin suggests companies purposely land a symbol in front of a person in hopes of attracting attention and building an image. An example of this type of brand is
the trademark. A study from University of St. Gallen in Germany argued the trademark was nothing more than a symbolic link designed to make money for the company. The researcher classifies brand as the meaning behind the message communicated. The study points to two factors in determining the strength of the brand: social noise and strength of the distinction. The researcher specifically pointed to advertising, stating advertisements provide the brand with meaning and consumers with the emotional tie to it (Ludicke, 2006, p. 123).

The University of Phoenix media campaign offers a great example of this brand. Its website takes the prospective student to a page all about education and its graduation success (see Figure 2). This webpage displays five videos, all of which tell a story of a non-traditional student who found success following an education at the University of the Phoenix. The first video tells a story of a woman who is the first in her family to go to college. Another video touches on the emotion of being a mom, a student and a military spouse. All the videos end with the same brand message known to some as the tagline. One by one, these videos build the University of the Phoenix' brand, as each attempts to pull on a different emotion. In the end, the sixth video on the page directs potential students to a career guidance page. The University of the Globe has a very similar internet brand presence.

Figure 2. I Am a Phoenix Homepage. 2011, September 28. Retrieved http://iamaphoenix.phoenix.edu
Social Cognitive Theory

This concept of branding is best explained through social cognitive theory. In his essay "Theoretical Integration and Research Synthesis," Albert Bandura explores the symbolism present in media and its relation to human thought. According to Bandura (2001) "most external influences affect behavior through cognitive processes rather than directly" (p. 267). Bandura (2001) goes on to state, "it is with symbols that people process and transform transient experiences into cognitive models that serve as guides for judgment and action" (p. 267).

A great example of what Bandura says here is the University of the Globe media campaign. As described earlier, the University of the Globe portrays a call to action in its 2011 media campaign. The branding gives the same symbol in every medium its placed, the symbol of success. The cognitive message is visible in the smiling faces of adults featured on billboards and in the University of the Globe (2010) commercial showing a recruiter talking about how she's changed lives by helping unemployed Americans turn into successful business owners. The university's branding uses symbols from society, whether its visual or verbal. Its marketers understand the role electronic mediums play in society and they appeal their advertisements to the emotions of those people viewing these media.

A key part of the social cognitive theory in understanding the University of the Globe campaign is the concept of retention. The university's advertisements would not work if people did not remember them and the semiotics buried within them (Bandura, 2001, p. 272). Looking at the University of the Globe branding, the media advertisement serves as an independent variable and the social reaction by potential students serves as the dependent variable. Smiling faces on billboards, career success stories in commercials, both of these independent variables serve as model behaviors and create a social reaction in society.
These reactions are propelled by social prompts. The electronic media carry the power to ignite reaction and behavior. Over time, researchers have applied social cognitive theory from focusing solely on how people learn to a more detailed approach which includes thinking, speaking, memory and consequences. Bandura (1986) believes four things must be present to initiate behavior: attention to the model, behavior retention, ability to reproduce the behavior and motivation. The University of the Globe's brand serves as a model behavior through its visual and verbal images. As Bandura (2001) states, "the best social sellers depend on what happens to be popular at the moment" (p. 283). If a person turns to a medium for answers and sees the symbol of success, the person is more likely to use that symbol as a guide.

**Semiotics in Media Branding**

Semiotics helps support this concept. Theorist Jay David Bolter is quoted as arguing,

> Signs are always anchored in a medium. Signs may be more or less dependent upon the characteristics of one medium-- they may transfer more or less well to other media-- but there is no such thing as a sign without a medium. (Chandler, p. 55, 2002)

What Bolter is saying here is that signs are present in everything we hear and see. Some may work better on television, while others thrive in print, but all mediums contain some kind of sign-some kind of message. It's something people think about, something they retain in their memory and in many cases, something that eventually alters their behavior.

In the early years of semiotics the Saussurean model was widely used to classify the relationship between the signifier and the signified as convention. An example of this is product positioning in advertising. The Saussurean model suggests the importance lies in the different ways the signs are viewed and how others relate them. Though it makes no actual correlation to
real-life, Saussure's model did spark many different semiotic theories, particularly because it focused on verbal and writing signs (Chandler, 2002, p. 21).

The University of the Globe television commercials dominate the use of verbal signs in its message to people who want to make a life-change. This is where social semiotics comes into play. Social semiotics refers to the concept of signs constructing reality. More specifically for the purpose of this study, it is the idea that dominant groups limit their signs to meet the groups interest. A sign could take on a different meaning depending on its medium (Chandler, 2002). So why is this important in terms of branding? Social cognitive theory points to television as a potential influence on a person's decisions (Bandura, 2001). This relates back to the idea of modeling behavior. A study titled “The Neural Basis of Following Advice” detailed research that supported this concept. The researchers found people often do not look for personal assurance before making a decision. Instead, they act on the messages and observations displayed in a social environment. The researchers cited MRI results of reward-related brain activity to support their claim of social learning. According to the researchers' findings, the recorded brain activity showed greater reward signals after a person followed advice, as opposed to when the person did not (Biele, G., Heekeren, H., Krugel, L., Rieskamp, J., 2011).

Another example is Professor Dale Schunk's take on self-efficacy. Schunk used Bandura's social cognitive theory as a guide when he explored a student's academic motivation. Schunk's (1991) research found students excelled when they modeled their peers. Schunk also found the students were more motivated when offered rewards. In relation to the University of the Globe branding, the media campaign appeals to both these ideas. The advertisements feature students or members of the university. The words in its tagline are featured in every advertisement model a specific behavior for the prospective student and the look of success and
happiness in the advertisements model the reward.

It is one thing to analyze a student's motivation, but can one relate it back to advertising? No known studies have explored this concept in relation to the University of the Globe, however, a recent study in 2011 examined the effects of virtual advertising in sports broadcasts. The researchers found 77.5-precent of participants recognized the virtual advertising used during a soccer match. Among them, 92.7-precent of the participants recognized the goal-side billboards that went with it. The study did come with some drawbacks. One in particular was the point that only five brands were advertised during the soccer match (Sander & Altobellie, 2011).

The study described above supports the idea of brand recognition as it pertains to social learning. When people see and hear the same message on television, billboards and radio, people begin to learn the message and model the message. Several other factors also influence a person's cognitive thinking. However, as Bandura points out, status incentives are a major motivator in adopting behavior. Social influence comes in all mediums and all sizes and it is implanted both directly and indirectly (Bandura, 2001). The University of the Globe brand hits on this status symbol. The signs of success and confidence in the brand model the behavior of goal achievement. Each commercial and billboard provide an avenue for prospective students who want to live the message.

Media Literacy in Social Learning

When applying this theory to the University of the Globe branding, one question that remains revolves around the word "how." Prospective students looking to the University of the Globe for higher education are knowledgeable. They would not qualify to attend the school if they were not, so how does the university attract so many people? Media literacy plays an important role in the social learning of students considering education at the University of the
Globe. Media literacy is defined as "a perspective from which we expose ourselves to the media and interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter" (Massey, 2002, p. 31). The more one understands the media and its role in society, the more one understands the messages within the media. Media literacy is about taking control of the messages that are real. As one begins to question the signs and goals of a given advertisement, one will be able to navigate to the truth behind it. This will help a person pick out the real-life information pertinent to his/her well-being. Timing is also an important factor in becoming media literate. W. James Potter (2008) believes the media brings messages to us at the media's own pace. Considering the fact that studies show most people spend about thirty-percent of their time awake during a given day using media as a sole activity, it is imperative that people develop media literacy so they do not get caught up in the media-made message (Potter, 2008).

To be media literate means to understand the message through “emotion, aesthetic and moral” dimensions (Potter, 2008, p. 20). This requires people to dig deeper into advertisements by for-profit universities. When viewing the University of the Globe's 30-second commercial produced in 2007, the pictures of children playing combined with the message of “University of I don’t want to miss a thing” is attractive to a prospective student’s emotions. People lacking the knowledge of media literacy fail to pick out the true message behind the media campaigns of this for-profit university. A person lacking media literacy is more likely to “buy” into the advertisement without researching the foundation. Media literacy teaches individuals to use personal skills and knowledge to uncover the source of the message and to better make an educated decision. In the case of University of the Globe, the source lies in a key term never mentioned in its branding, the term “for-profit university.”
RATIONALE

A major voice of media literacy, history Professor and author John Staudenmaier (1989) suggested “technologies shape the essentially human component of society” (p. 2). Staudenmaier believed people in society believe what they see and they believe the technology to be speaking to them.

The University of the Globe is a subsidiary company of a Wall Street powerhouse. Its mission is to educate, but its goal is to make money. Journalist Naomi Klein studied the role of big business as it pertains to media. She focused on the idea of a brand. Klein (2000) believes advertising and branding are two separate things. According to her, advertisements inform a person about a message, while branding builds an image. This relates back to Todd Gitlin's idea of choosing. As stated earlier, Gitlin believes companies purposely put images in the forefront so people will choose the brand.

That brand is a driving force for the University of the Globe. Its tagline builds an image and create a successful brand. As described earlier in this chapter, a study by Dale Schunk found students who modeled their peers excelled in education. This is the image present in each University of the Globe commercial, but does the hard work in the classroom carry over into the boardroom? The University of the Globe builds an image of promise, success and wealth into its brand, creating an atmosphere that prospective students desire to model. These students think about the message, they retain the images, they change their behavior accordingly, but do they really know the facts?

This new research based on the social cognitive theory is important because it explores emotional triggers based solely on images presented in media. Results of this study will help expand research of human reaction as it pertains to behavior. The goal of researching the
University of the Globe is to better understand what it is about its message that attracts students and makes the university the second largest. Research of the semiotics used in the university's branding will explore the reality of the signs in its messaging. That information will help highlight the importance of media literacy and how understanding the use of signs could help deter a person from acting on emotion.

**RESEARCH QUESTION**

This study seeks to understand students' desire to model the University of the Globe image. It explores the following questions:

RQ1: How does the branding in the University of the Globe media campaign affect human behavior?

RQ2: If analysis of the sample groups determines that a correlation does exist between behavior and signs present within the media, this research seeks to answer a second question which is does the media portray a perceived reality for non-traditional students?
Chapter 3: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Since the University of the Globe media campaign is a global message on multi-platforms, the scope of this study was selected from three media images. Two images were television commercials present on the internet video-sharing website YouTube and the other media image was internet advertisements posted on search engine websites. This study was limited to these three media for several reasons. First, the two television commercials were the most accessible for use because they were older. The first commercial, titled \textit{Commercial 1} in this study, was produced in 2007 and the second commercial, titled \textit{Commercial 2} in this study was produced in 2010. Current television commercials, while visible to the average viewer, were not accessible to reproduce for the purpose of this study. Therefore, the older television commercials were chosen because they could easily be retrieved and cited in context. YouTube was chosen as the source for these television commercials because the video-sharing website reports three-billion video views per day (Harris, 2011). Of the two commercials picked, \textit{Commercial 2} had 1,098 hits at the time it was selected and \textit{Commercial 1} had 33,350 hits at the time it was selected. In addition to the television commercials, questions referring to internet advertisements on internet search engines were presented in the surveys distributed to the sample populations to analyze awareness of the University of the Globe media campaign. Radio commercials and print media were not chosen for this study due to the fact that television and internet are more visual and more easily reproduced for the purpose of citations.

Within the media focus, the research was narrowed so it only studied the brand, specifically the tagline of the media campaigns. This was done because the study was limited to the behavioral outcome generated by the University of the Globe brand. These taglines were
chosen because they are the symbols repeated in the media and the images used to attract attention (Gitlin, 2002, p. 69).

**METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

This study utilized a quantitative approach. This approach provided a framework for the deductive reasoning which was supported by statistical results collected in two different online surveys (Rubin, Rubin, and Piele, 2005, p. 209). The online surveys consisted of two survey groups: Group 1 (G1) solely consisted of University of the Globe students and Group 2 (G2) consisted of an anonymous online population sample. The sampling techniques were different for each population sample.

Group 1 consisted of a quota sample. It included individuals of a specific demographic with specific traits. Each person who participated in the quota sample was either a University of the Globe student or University of the Globe alumni. All the participants in this sample were over the age of 18. The participants were gathered through word of mouth and random responses to a forum request posted on the University of the Globe Facebook page. Facebook is a social-networking website that brings together people of common interests. It is free and visible for all public posts.

Data from this sample was collected through an online survey questionnaire. The students in Group 1 were asked specific questions related to individual demographics, the University of the Globe, media branding and media literacy. Participants in Group 1 were also shown two University of the Globe television commercials: *Commercial 1* (2007) and *Commercial 2* (2010). The sample was then asked a series of multiple-choice and open-ended questions tied to the emotion of the television commercials. This data was used to answer RQ 1. If the statistical information collected in the survey supported the hypothesis posed in RQ 1, additional
information collected in the survey was then used to see if a correlation existed between RQ 1 and RQ 2 (see Appendix A).

The second part of this analysis consisted of an anonymous online survey distributed to non-students. The survey was distributed as a nonprobability sample because it was sent to a random group of people through email and the social-media website Facebook. All the participants in this sample were between the ages of 18 and 60. The independent variables in this survey included the age and gender of the sample population as well as the content of the survey questions. The dependent variables of this survey included the behavioral responses of the sample population.

The survey distributed to Group 2 was used to provide data relevant to the study, beyond the means of a control demographic. Many of the questions in the random survey were the same questions distributed to the University of the Globe sample used for research of Group 1 (see Appendix B). Both surveys allowed for rich data collection through the use of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. This approach allowed for the comparison between the two samples.

*Internal Validity*

Both surveys used a content validity index to measure results. Several questions in the surveys distributed to Group 1 and Group 2 contained multiple-choice questions as well as open-ended questions. The multiple-choice option was done to ensure the respondent selected all answers that fit the question. The open-ended questions were used to allow the respondents to express their opinion, in their own words. This method helped support the literature in that it provided support to the cognitive social learning theory and the respondents understanding of media literacy.

Both online surveys presented to Group 1 and Group 2 also asked participants to define
media literacy through the use of an open-ended question. This question was posed in both surveys so the researcher could compare the definitions to see if knowledge of media literacy affected the behavioral response to the commercials. For example, if a respondent defined media literacy as "finding the hidden messages within a given medium" this information was then used to see how that same person answered the behavioral questions associated with the television commercials used in the survey. The question of media literacy is an important factor in the analysis because it provides insight as to the respondents understanding of media. For the purpose of this research, media literacy was defined as "a perspective from which we expose ourselves to the media and interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter" (Massey, 2002, p. 31). This question was asked to better define the results of RQ 2.

The measures were reliable because they followed an internal consistency and data was collected through a trusted source. All the results were collected through an online survey, FreeOnlineSurveys.com. Every respondent participated anonymously. Each question in the survey included a requirement to answer and the results of each answer were tracked online. The survey answers were password protected and only the researcher knew the password to the survey website.

External Validity

One limitation from the use of survey collection included the number of survey responses. Since the questions were anonymous, and no reply to the survey invitation was necessary, the researcher could not track who responded to the survey request and who did not. This also limited the ability to follow-up to any answers written as part of the survey results. This left the researcher to interpret the behavioral outcome of the branding based solely on the answers provided in the open-ended question section.
Analysis

Following the collection of the data, an analysis of the results took place to look for common themes among the answers. The data measured internal consistency in that every survey distributed sought to answer the behavioral effect of the University of the Globe branding as asked in RQ 1. This line of questions increased the internal validity of the quantitative research. The questions asked in both Group 1 and Group 2 provided the measurement for the variables. From there, the data was analyzed to test the reliability and internal consistency to determine if any parallels existed between the Group 1 and Group 2 respondents when answering both RQ 1 and RQ 2 (Rubin et al, 2005, p. 211). Once reliability was established the research was then incorporated into tables and grouped by demographics. This was done to narrow the results of RQ 1. The tables displayed the results in a statistical manner to determine if media branding affected one demographic more than another. This was important when combining the results with RQ 2 because it provided deductive and statistical evidence to further examine the hypothesis posed in RQ 2.

Research Ethics

Several steps were taken to assure the research was conducted in an ethical manner. To begin, the actual name of the university used in this study was changed to the University of the Globe to protect the identity of the actual university studied. Also, all answers to Group 1 and Group 2 questions were collected anonymously. No names were used in this study and each participant was given written confidentiality assurance by the researcher which automatically populated when a survey was submitted (Appendix C). Each person was also provided with information up front about the research topic and the research questions asked in the study. This was done to establish honesty and accuracy of the study.
Participants in both samples were chosen at random by the researcher. In addition, every person who inquired about the study was invited to participate. While some of the research questions were multiple choice, the majority allowed for write-in answers. The use of open-ended questions in this survey resulted in a parallel comparison between Group 1 and Group 2 since the respondents answered using their own words. Their descriptions provided an important aspect in this research as it related to the results of the behavioral effect of media branding. In Chapter 4, the use of open-ended questions combined with multiple choice questions are used to help define and answer both RQ1 and RQ2 a proposed in this study.
RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The study included a total of 71 participants. The participants were split into two groups, Group 1 and Group 2. Fifteen participants accounted for Group 1 which included only current or former University of the Globe students. The other 56 participants were drawn from a random population sample which made up Group 2. Every participant was asked to complete an anonymous online survey which included a series of multiple choice and open-ended questions. Both surveys also included two television advertisements used by the University of the Globe. All the respondents were asked questions related to the semiotics within the messages of those commercials.

Upon completion of the study, results from each survey were collected using the website freeonlinesurveys.com. The surveys were divided into their respective groups and placed into a spreadsheet. Each question was analyzed and the responses were categorized based on the connections to media branding and human behavior.

As analysis of the results from Group 2 began, question #9 in the survey immediately drew the researcher’s attention. One-hundred percent of the respondents answered "yes" to question #9 which asked "have you heard of the University of the Globe." That question set the groundwork for the research and analysis of Group 2.

Group 2 Results

The participants in Group 2 ranged in age from 20 to 59. Seventy-one percent of respondents in this group were female. More than half of the participants in this group listed Bachelor’s degree as their highest level of education and fifty-eight percent stated they were considering the notion of returning to school. This fact was a bit surprising considering seventy-
eight percent of the participants already worked full-time. Only two of the respondents in this group were unemployed and actively seeking work.

The results are consistent with a recent article published in *Education Week*. The article *Changing Face of Higher Education* states thirty-eight percent of students seeking higher education are age 25 or older and twenty-five percent are over the age of 30 (Hess, 2011). The author of the article also predicted that number will nearly double in the next seven years. The author pointed to an increase in demand for degrees and/or certificates as a cause of the education spike for non-traditional students (Hess, 2011). These facts provided support to this study in that it offered an explanation of why fifty-eight percent of respondents in Group 2 might be considering additional education.

As stated previously in this chapter, one-hundred percent of respondents in Group 2 recognized the name University of the Globe prior to this research study. In a follow-up question, the respondents were asked to state all the media in which they have seen a University of the Globe advertisement. The answers are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1:**

Group 2 results of question 10: "state all the media in which you have seen an advertisement for the University of the Globe."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Visibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billboards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsorships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Percentages are taken from the sample population of Group 2 only. Group 2 consisted of 56 respondents.
The University of the Globe media was most recognizable to Group 2 via television. This is in line with the findings of the marketing study by Sander & Altobellie (2011). More than three-fourths of the participants in Sander and Altobellie's (2011) study recognized virtual advertising during a soccer match which is typically 90-minutes long. This falls into the same time frame of the respondents of this study. Seventy-eight percent of respondents in Group 2 reported watching three hours or less of television per day and eighty-four percent of the respondents remembered seeing a University of the Globe advertisement on television.

In an effort to understand the respondents brand awareness of the University of the Globe, each respondent in Group 2 was also asked a question regarding the university's status on popular websites. Instead of showing the respondents an example, each respondent was asked to state all the websites in which he/she remembered seeing a University of the Globe advertisement. Table 2 shows how the results varied among popular search engines.

**Table 2:**

Question #21, "Using your memory alone, which websites do you remember seeing a University of the Globe advertisement at one time or another?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internet Recognition</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Google</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahoo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CareerBuilder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monster</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* These percentages were a result of answers given by respondents of Group 2 only. Group 2 consisted of 56 respondents.
Table 1 and Table 2 established brand awareness in that both represent the various media in which the respondents recognized a University of the Globe advertisement. Respondents to this survey were also asked specific questions related to the behavioral decisions caused by the brand through media. Each respondent in Group 2 was shown two University of the Globe commercials. The first commercial, titled Commercial 1 in this study, was from the university's 2007 media campaign. It featured scenes in an office building, the airport and the home where a baby was playing ball in a room. Throughout each scene, the viewer saw an adult working on schoolwork as the words "no boundaries" and "escape the classroom" scrolled across the screen. Upon viewing Commercial 1, each participant was asked a question related to the emotional reaction to the message. Fifty-point-nine percent of respondents stated this commercial appealed to their emotions.

A second commercial, titled Commercial 2 in this study, was then shown to each respondent. Commercial 2 featured a different tone-of-voice and stemmed from the university's 2010 media campaign. Commercial 2 showcased a University of the Globe advisor enjoying the success of her students. After viewing this commercial each respondent was then asked the same behavioral follow-up question that was asked after Commercial 1, however in this case, only twenty-seven percent of respondents answered "yes." One explanation for this could be the fact that more than three-fourths of the respondents said they would work full-time while attending school. This was an underlying theme of the 2007 media campaign and Commercial 1; therefore it had a behavioral appeal to those respondents.

After viewing both commercials, 18 of the 56 respondents in Group 2 said they would consider contacting the University of the Globe for higher-education. Of those 18 individuals, several cited the message of flexibility as the reason the university seemed appealing. As Table 3
shows, these 18 individuals also had several other factors in common.

Table 3:

Common factors for individuals who were interested in learning more about the University of the Globe after viewing the commercials.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Male (n=5)</th>
<th>Female (n=13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 5: Current Work Status</td>
<td>Full-time (5)</td>
<td>Full-time (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 7: Have you considered returning to school?</td>
<td>Yes (3)</td>
<td>Yes (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 11: How often do you watch television in a 24-hour period?</td>
<td>1-3 hours (4)</td>
<td>Less than 1 hour (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 14: Does the University of the Globe seem appealing after viewing the commercial?</td>
<td>All responded YES</td>
<td>All responded YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 17: Does the University of the Globe seem appealing to you after viewing the commercial?</td>
<td>Yes (4)</td>
<td>Yes (7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. This table summarizes the results of answers given to specific multiple-choice questions listed in the survey for respondent of Group 2. Group 2 consisted of 56 respondents.

As far as Commercial 2 which portrayed the image of successful entrepreneurs, the men who answered the survey appeared more interested in that message, compared to nearly 50-percent split among the women.

These results can be explained through Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory. Bandura (1986) states "people are more likely to exhibit modeled behavior if it results in valued outcomes than if it has unrewarding or punishing effects" (p. 68). When prospective students see images of other people juggling both work and school, the prospective students begin to think they could do it as well. The prospective students viewed these commercials as modeled behavior. When they began to compare that image to their personal goals, it affected their behavioral decisions and provided a new source of motivation, like that in the study by Dale Schunk.

The modeled behavior present in this study lies in the University of the Globe brand. As found in the Ludicke study (2006), the brand behind the University of the Globe media campaign
portrayed success and flexibility. This image created an emotional connection to the viewers. The prospective students of this study wanted a university that they could attend, while working full-time. They saw that happen in Commercial 1, therefore, they saw themselves as prospective candidates for the University of the Globe. As Todd Gitlin (2002) writes, "the consumer has not chosen to choose, exactly, but from among the range of images on offer, has consented to choose" (p. 70).

The analysis of Group 2 supports the hypothesis that branding by the University of the Globe media campaign affects human behavior in that thirty-two percent of respondents admitted to an emotional connection within the message of the advertisements. This finding set the foundation for a second question which explored the University of the Globe brand more intimately to determine if this modeled behavior present in the advertisements portrayed a perceived reality for non-traditional students. This question was best analyzed through the results of Group 1.

**Group 1 Results**

Group 1 consisted of 15 participants. All the participants were either students or graduates of the University of the Globe. They ranged in age from 24-61. Nine of the respondents were female and six were male. Thirty-three percent of the individuals in this sample listed "some college" as their highest level of education.

A key difference between Group 1 and Group 2 lied in their initial awareness to the University of the Globe. Like Group 2, thirty-five percent of respondents in Group 1 reported seeing University of the Globe television commercials. However, for many of them, television was not the medium which introduced them to the university. As Table 4 shows, forty-six percent of respondents in Group 1 stated that they first discovered the university on the internet.
Table 4:

Question 9, "where did you first hear about University of the Globe?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Visibility</th>
<th>Internet</th>
<th>Television</th>
<th>Word of Mouth</th>
<th>Billboards/Print</th>
<th>Radio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Note.* These percentages were a result of responses to question 9 in the survey distributed to Group 1. Fifteen participants made up the sample population of Group 1.

The participants in Group 1 were shown the same two commercials as the participants in Group 2. In this sample, ninety-three percent of the respondents stated both the Commercial 1, the advertisement showcasing flexibility, and Commercial 2, the advertisement featuring career-success, appealed to their emotions. Only one person stated that the commercials did not appeal to his emotions.

While this analysis correlates to similar findings from Group 2, this population sample sought to explore the message within the media further. Participants in Group 1 were also asked a series of questions to examine if the media commercials portrayed a perceived reality for non-traditional students. Thirty-six percent of the respondents felt the commercials did not portray real-life examples of their educational experiences. Of those individuals, all but one, stated that the commercials did not express the true balance between work-life and school-life. The respondents stated that between their careers and their course loads with school, they had little time for anything else. As Table 5 shows, the respondents who did not feel the University of the
Globe media campaign portrayed a perceived reality also had several other characteristics in common.

**Table 5:**

Common themes among students who did not feel the University of the Globe media campaign portrayed a perceived reality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Male (n=2)</th>
<th>Female (n=7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 5: Do you plan to work while attend school?</td>
<td>All planned to work full-time</td>
<td>Planned to work full-time (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planned to work part-time (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planned to focus solely on school (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 7: How often do you watch television in a 24-hour period?</td>
<td>1-3 hours (1)</td>
<td>1-3 hours (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-5 hours (1)</td>
<td>3-5 hours (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 8: What do you hope to achieve from your college education?</td>
<td>&quot;Higher paying job&quot; was the only</td>
<td>All but one respondent listed &quot;better job&quot; as the answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>answer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 10: What lead you to consider this university for your degree?</td>
<td>&quot;Ease of online classes&quot; was the only answer</td>
<td>Flexibility of attending courses online was the common answer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* This table groups the results of several multiple-choice questions asked in the survey distributed to Group 1. Group 1 consisted of 15 respondents.

Not included in the results from Table 5 are the students who felt the University of the Globe media campaign did portray reality (Table 6). These six students expressed the same concern about balancing career and school, however they all believed the balance between career and school served as a challenge and a way to improve their personal organization skills. This finding is similar to that from the University of Utah (2005) which looked at the behavioral change among honeymooners after they realized their dream honeymoon did not live up to their "fantasy." Instead of classifying the honeymoon as a disappointment, the newlyweds found new fantasies in their honeymoon. The same idea carries over into this study. Respondents who said the commercials did not portray an active work-life balance found a new "fantasy" in that they believed a in a new reality, beyond the pictures and words of the advertisements.
Table 6:

Common themes among students who did feel the University of the Globe media campaign portrayed a perceived reality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Male (n=4)</th>
<th>Female (n=3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 5: Do you plan to work while attend school?</td>
<td>Planned to work full-time (3)</td>
<td>Planned to work full-time (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planned to focus solely on school (1)</td>
<td>Planned to work part-time (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 7: How often do you watch television in a 24-hour period?</td>
<td>Less than 1 hour (1)</td>
<td>Less than 1 hour (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-3 hours (3)</td>
<td>1-3 hours (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 8: What do you hope to achieve from your college education?</td>
<td>Professional Development (2)</td>
<td>Professional Development (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Achievement (1)</td>
<td>Personal Achievement (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More money (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 10: What lead you to consider this university for your degree?</td>
<td>Online flexibility (3)</td>
<td>Online flexibility (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Degree Specifics (1)</td>
<td>Acceptance offer (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. This table summarizes the results of several multiple-choice questions distributed in the survey for Group 1. Fifteen respondents made up the sample population of Group 1.

These results are also consistent with that of The Neural Basis of Following Advice (2011) study which found people showed greater reward signals after following advice. The answers from Table 5 and Table 6 are similar, however, the difference lies in the reward. The respondents from Table 6 all believed the "flexibility" in their education helped them gain character and organizational skills. They found reward in the message.

Group 1 vs. Group 2

In an effort to better understand these results, a comparative analysis took place between Group 1 and Group 2. The first part of the analysis studied the message the respondents felt after they viewed commercial 1. All of the respondents from both groups portrayed the university as a non-traditional university which allowed for a flexible education in an effort to cater to the busy life of adults. This finding set the foundation of the message, however further study of the respondents found a correlation between Commercial 1 and social behavior. Seventy-five percent of respondents from Group 2 who admitted to having an emotional reaction to Commercial 1 were female. In the same manner, all the females surveyed in Group 1 also admitted to an
emotional reaction after they viewed Commercial 1.

The research also studied the family dynamics of the respondents. A major theme of Commercial 1 was family and the idea of "never missing a thing." Of the respondents in Group 2 who felt an emotional tie to the university after viewing the commercial, sixty-eight percent of them had children. An analysis of Group 1 found similar findings, as sixty-five percent of respondents with an emotional tie to the university were parents. These findings support the theory of social behavior in that the message within Commercial 1 showcased a modeled behavior candescent to the lifestyles of the respondents. The respondents saw other parents working and achieving their education goals in the 30-second commercial and it gave a cognitive impression to the respondents that they too could model the behavior to be successful. This supports Jay David Bolter's theory that signs are present in the message (Chandler, p. 55, 2002).

The findings were similar in a comparison analysis of Commercial 2. The majority of respondents from both Group 1 and Group 2 described Commercial 2 as a woman showcasing how much she enjoyed her job. They viewed the message of the commercial as a message of career success. The major difference between this commercial and Commercial 1 was the amount of respondents who believed in the message. Only twenty-seven percent of respondents from Group 2 felt an emotional tie to this commercial compared to ninety-three percent of respondents from Group 1. Like that of Commercial 1, the reaction again came mostly from the females surveyed.

**Media Literacy**

In an effort to further understand the social cognitive behavior of the respondents in relation to media, this study also sought information to gain an accurate gauge of the respondents’ knowledge of media literacy. While media literacy is not a major focus of this
research, the findings could set the foundation for future study of media as it relates to social learning.

Every respondent surveyed as part of this study was asked to define the term media literacy. The answers varied among the respondent. Some did make reference to understanding knowledge of media in their definitions, however, none of the respondents related the question back to their explanations of the message portrayed in Commercials 1 and 2. Despite that, one answer to the media literacy question did stand out among the rest. When asked "how do you define media literacy," one of the respondents answered "I am not really sure, and I work in the media. We don't use that term." That same person also said the University of the Globe seemed appealing after viewing Commercial 1.

This finding displays a need for more media literacy education. If a person who works in the media is not familiar the term media literacy, why should the public be expected to understand it? Media is about language, filled with messages and signs. For the purpose of this study, media literacy of social information could have helped respondents determine factual information in the message of Commercials 1 and 2 (Potter, 2008, p. 14).

W. James Potter believes people need to understand five key areas to be media literate: "media effects, media content, media industries, the real world and the self," (p. 14). Potter states people who understand the keys of these areas are more likely to seek more information about the messages showcased in the media before making an emotional reaction to them. For example, a working female with two children at home, might not be as likely to appeal to a commercial featuring a baby playing with a ball, if that female had the knowledge structure of media literacy to process the information using the facts, not the semiotics. Future study of this hypothesis is needed.
DISCUSSION

The method of research used in this study followed the socio-psychological tradition. This study sought to explain the hypothesis of RQ1 and RQ2 through a cause-and-effect relationship. The results of this study found the people most affected emotionally by the University of the Globe television advertisements were women who worked full-time. In exploring the cause of this relationship, the research found a correlation between these women and their families in that sixty-five percent of respondents in Group 1 who reported an emotional tie to the university were parents. This statistic provided an example of the influence which results within the mind of an adult after viewing media presented by the University of the Globe.

The results of this study also support the philosophy of Jean Baudrillard. Jean Baudrillard believed television does nothing more than provide an avenue for sending and receiving a message. A commercial works in a similar manner in that many who view it on television or on the internet believe it provides a message, when in actuality it is nothing more than an advertisement. Its main purpose is to get the viewer to "buy" into a message, however, within this commercial are words spoken about a particular message. This study found respondents treated those words as signifiers which this study classifies as semiotics defined using the Saussurean model.

As stated in Chapter 2, the Saussurean model explores the different ways signs are viewed (Chandler, 2002, p. 21). Using the Saussurean model as a guide, this study focused on the language as the most-important sign within Commercials 1 and 2. Saussure believed "that there is no inherent, essential, transparent, self-evident or natural connection between the signifier and the signified," (Chandler, 2002, p. 22).
Most respondents from Group 1 and Group 2 believed in the commercials because they believed in the messages of the spoken language. Sassurean theorists believed language used as signs do not portray reality, rather they construct reality (Chandler, 2002, p. 25). This study supported that notion with the findings from Group 1 which found thirty-six percent of the respondents felt the commercials did not portray real-life examples of their educational experiences.

These findings were supported using the critical communication tradition. By using an open-ended question to ask participants to define media literacy, this study found every person from Group 2 defined the term differently. This was of great importance when looking at the answers from Group 2 regarding the University of the Globe media and the number of respondents from Group 1 who admitted that the media did not portray the lifestyle they expected.

The use of these two traditions as defined in this study also supported the theoretical basis of the research under Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory. According to Bandura (1986), "social cognitive theory embraces an interactional model of causation in which environmental events, personal factors, and behavior all operate as interacting determinants of each other," (p. xi). The University of the Globe showcases the busy lives of working adults as part of its brand. It uses the work and home environments as backdrops to feature the behavior of happiness and success. The research findings of this study support this concept of social cognitive theory in that fifty-nine percent of the participants from Group 2 admitted that they would consider contacting the University of the Globe prior to viewing its commercial. Follow up questions to these respondents singled out flexibility in education as the reason for the emotional attraction to the University of the Globe.
The research of Group 1 and Group 2 supported the philosophical assumption of this study as guided through the work of Baudrillard and the theoretical basis as outlined in Bandura's social cognitive theory. While the results did not answer both RQ1 and RQ2, it also came with limitations as explained in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5: SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As outlined in the results in Chapter 4, this study answered the two research questions developed by the researcher; however the study did include some limitations. To begin, the sample was small, only consisting of 71 respondents, 15 of whom were University of the Globe students. Initially it was the goal of the researcher to collect at least 20 surveys from University of the Globe students, however many students were reluctant to participate. Most students approached about the study did not respond to the requests by the researcher. In addition, this study included one response from a University of the Globe instructor; however when the researcher asked the instructor to put the survey online for his students to see, the instructor declined out of fear the university would punish him for participating. The only reason the instructor participated in the initial survey was in part to the anonymity promise by the researcher.

While the anonymity assurance helped in that instance, it did also cause another limitation. The anonymity of the respondents prevented any follow-up questions by the researcher. In one example, a University of the Globe student described herself as a senior executive. Without the anonymity assurance, the researcher could have asked that senior executive additional questions related to her career experiences in relation to her education. This method of anonymity also forced the researcher to eliminate any survey results deemed incomplete.

Another limitation was the decision to study only one university. The university chosen for this study is an online university. This prevented the researcher from interviewing people on campus or holding focus groups. Instead, the researcher relied on social media to attract
participants; however by using this method, there was no way to determine if the respondents already had a formed opinion of the University of the Globe. With these limitations in mind, the study, though small, still provided useful results.

**FURTHER STUDY OR RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study also opens the door to further research in a few different areas. One recommendation of further study would be to expand this research to other for-profit institutions to determine if the media branding of those institutions resulted in a similar outcome. Many for-profit institutions do not carry the same name recognition as University of the Globe. A study of their commercials using the theoretical basis outlined in Bandura's social cognitive theory could offer more insight as to the emotional triggers depicted within the semiotics of the advertisements. This additional study could help both private and public universities adjust their media branding of their online education programs to better compete with for-profit universities.

The information from this research could also be expanded to include the financial aspects of for-profit education. The cost of attending a for-profit university rivals the cost of attending a private university. According to devry.edu, tuition for a semester of a degree based program at DeVry University in 2010 was $8100. Based off tuition rates listed on the University of Phoenix website, www.phoenix.edu, a student in Chicago, IL can expect to pay $4110 a semester for six credit hours toward a Master’s degree. At Gonzaga University, a private-Jesuit university, the cost of six credit hours in an online degree program toward a Master’s degree is $4650.

The big difference between the numbers is the overall outcome. Government grant records show students of for-profit universities leave school with the highest debt of any college students. The main source of income among for-profit universities comes from taxpayer money.
About 97-percent of students at for-profit universities pay their tuition with federally funded student loans, compared to only 14-percent of students at community colleges. In addition, for-profit students account for 1 in 2 federal loan defaults ("Grants," 2011). Additional research focused on student borrowing in relation to for-profit university students could prove beneficial to better understand the economic output of the education received.

Aside from the additional quantitative research, further study of media literacy would also prove beneficial in understanding media branding. An expansion of this study would be a more in-depth analysis of why females were likely to have a social cognitive reaction to the for-profit university commercials shown in surveys distributed in this study. Analysis of the semiotics combined with knowledge of media literacy could advance understanding of the behavioral triggers among males and females.

This study showcases how the use of semiotics in media combined with environmental factors can spark a behavioral reaction in a person. The images of flexibility, family and success depicted in the University of the Globe advertisements attracted individuals living through an era of economic uncertainty. With job security slim for many people working in 2011, the vision of improving education at one's own pace appealed to participants in this study. More insight as to media literacy knowledge of the participants could help determine if knowledge in this area could leave consumers to view the commercials without emotional attachments.

Media literacy is a term thrown around in different contexts, however the surveys of this study found not many people are clear on the actual meaning. Programs such as the media literacy partnership between Chicago Public Schools and Cinema/Chicago could help break down some of these barriers. The media literacy training offered to teachers is designed to heighten media literacy awareness through theory, with the idea that teachers will then pass on
the information about the messages and images present in media to their students. This is just one example of programs offered to the public, however specific research would be needed to determine if this program made an impact on the emotional reaction generated from a given media.

CONCLUSIONS

This study sought to answer two research questions. RQ1 asked how does the branding in the University of the Globe media campaign affect human behavior? Using the socio-psychological tradition to focus on interpersonal communication, this study found messages and images of flexibility resonated with the lives of busy, working parents desiring a return to higher-education. Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory expanded this research through his belief that people model what they see. Bandura (2001) believed that external influences affect behavior mentally. This is the case of the respondents in this study. After viewing the commercials of the University of the Globe, participants were asked a follow-up question in the survey which required each participant to think about what they saw. The participants were not asked to apply to the school, rather they were asked if the message presented in the media branding would lead them to consider the university as an option. This question was asked to determine the participants cognitive reaction immediately after viewing the commercial. Philosopher Jean Baudrillard's 1986 essay, “Ecstasy of Communication,” was used as a framework during the analysis in that it supported the idea that objects represent a sign, at a given place in time, in a given culture. This philosophy, combined with Bandura's social cognitive theory, answered RQ 1 by determining people who felt an emotional connection to the media branding by the University of the Globe were more inclined to contact the university about future enrollment information.
The philosophical and theoretical basis outlined above also helped answer RQ 2 which asked does the media portray a perceived reality for non-traditional students? Using social cognitive theory as a starting point, this study also used research found in a similar study to answer this question. That study focusing on the fantasy of honeymoons was done as a dissertation presented by Hillary Leonard to the University of Utah in 2005. It found that when the honeymoon fantasy did not live up to expectations, the participants changed their expectations so they would achieve a desirable emotional outcome. A similar situation took place in this study. The respondents from the University of the Globe who felt the images and messages of the media branding did not meet their expectations offered new ideas as to how the branding helped them achieve success. For example, many people said that the images of flexibility were true, however they also said the message did not portray the commitment and the time that it took students to achieve success in a flexible education environment. The participants stated that in that regard the commercials did not represent reality, however they also added to the answer saying that the experience offered them more, specifically new skills regarding organization and time management.

In conclusion, this study found the semiotics represented in the media branding by the University of the Globe caused a social behavioral reaction among consumers. However, the research also concluded that the semiotics depicted in the brand did not accurately portray reality. This study recommends more education of media literacy so consumers can begin to learn how to determine if a message is real or constructed.
References


Behavioral Effect of Media Branding in Online Education


University of Phoenix. (2007). Escape the classroom. Available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTrAZSg6hA0


Appendix A: University of the Globe Survey questions:

1. Please state your age.
2. Please state your gender.
3. Please state your marital status.
4. Do you have children? If yes, please state their ages.
5. Do you plan to work while attending school?
   Full-time/Part-time/I plan to be a full-time student
6. What is your highest level of education?
   GED or H.S. Diploma/Some College/Bachelor's degree/some graduate school/Master's degree/Higher
7. How often do you watch television in a 24-hour period?
   Less than 1 hour/1-3 hours/3-5 hours/more than 5 hours
8. What do you hope to achieve from your college education?
9. Where did you hear about the University of the Globe for the first time?
   Television/Radio/Billboard-Print/Internet/Word of Mouth
10. What led you to consider the University of the Globe for your degree?
11. What media have you seen University of the Globe advertisements?
   Television/Radio/Billboards/Internet Advertisements/Sponsorships/Other
12. Please watch the attached 30-second commercial before answering the next question.
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTrAZSg6hAo
13. What is the message this commercial is telling you?
14. Does the University of the Globe seem appealing to you after watching this commercial? Yes/No
15. Now please watch this 30-second commercial before answering the next question.
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9u0eJRDYa&feature=related
16. What is the message this commercial is telling you?
17. Does the University of the Globe seem appealing to you after viewing this commercial? Yes/No
18. Are these two commercials a good example of your University of the Globe experience? Please explain.
19. In your experience searching internet websites, do you pay attention to the internet advertising listed on each page? Yes/No

20. In your own words, please define the term "media literacy."

21. Do you feel your education at the University of the Globe helped you achieve your career goals? Please explain.

22. Would you say the media campaign by the University of the Globe lead you to the school for higher-education?

23. If you answered YES to the last question, what was the one media message that attracted you the most?

24. Using your memory alone, which websites do you remember seeing a University of the Globe advertisement at one time or another? Please choose all that apply.
   - Google/Yahoo/Monster/CareerBuilder/Other

**Appendix B: Online Survey questions:**

1. Please state your age.

2. Please state your gender.

3. Please state your marital status.

4. Do you have children? If yes, please state their ages.

5. Do you plan to work while attending school?
   - Full-time/Part-time/I plan to be a full-time student

6. What is your highest level of education?
   - GED or H.S. Diploma/Some College/Bachelor's degree/some graduate school/Master's degree/Higher

7. Have you considered returning to school? Yes/No

8. What schools are you currently considering attending?

9. Have you heard of the University of the Globe? Yes/No

10. If you answered yes to the last question, please state all the media in which you have seen an advertisement for the University of the Globe.
Television/Radio/Internet/Billboards/Sponsorships/Other

11. How often do you watch television in a 24-hour period?
   - Less than 1 hour/1-3 hours/3-5 hours/More than 5 hours

12. Please watch the attached 30-second commercial before answering the next question.
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTrAZSg6hAo

13. What is the message this commercial is telling you?

14. Does the University of the Globe seem appealing to you after watching this commercial? Yes/No

15. Now please watch this 30-second commercial before answering the next question.
    http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9u0eJFrDA&feature=related

16. What is the message this commercial is telling you?

17. Does the University of the Globe seem appealing to you after viewing this commercial? Yes/No

18. In your own words, please define “media literacy.”

19. Are you more inclined to contact the University of the Globe for higher education after viewing its branding in the media? Please explain.

20. If you answered yes to the last question, what is the one media message that attracted you the most?

21. Using your memory alone, which websites do you remember seeing a University of the Globe advertisement at one time or another? Please choose all that apply.
   - Google/Yahoo/Monster/CareerBuilder/Other

Appendix C: Confidentiality Statement

Thank you for taking the time to answer this survey!
All the answers from this survey will be stored confidentially.