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THE STICKINESS FACTOR: A STUDY OF DISNEY'S MAGNETIC APPEAL

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ABSTRACT

Why are animated Disney films so sticky and how does Disney animation create lifelong value for consumers? To answer this question, the concept of stickiness is deconstructed into the SUCCES model from Dan and Chip Heath. The first section of this paper uses the SUCCES model to conduct critical analyses of the most current Disney animated products, and compares this analysis to consumer perceptions gathered in young adult focus groups. The second section of this paper examines how childhood memories may affect brand perception in later life. A study of the relationship Disney possesses with young adults is investigated through use of projective techniques. Lastly, closing remarks include recommendations for areas of future research into the power of the Disney brand.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction of Disney as a Sticky Brand

The term “stickiness” was first coined by Malcom Gladwell in his bestseller *The Tipping Point*. In his book, Gladwell uses the term to describe messages that are particularly memorable, lasting and impactful (Gladwell, 2000). Certainly, the term can be used to describe one of the most powerful brands in the world: Disney.

Founded in 1923 by Walt Disney and Roy Disney as the Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio, Disney was originally a company that focused on animated films. Today, the company has evolved into a multinational mass media conglomerate. The current Walt Disney Company operates in five main business segments: media networks (which include ownership of The Disney/ABC Family Television Group and ESPN Inc., as well as equity interest in A&E Television Networks, Hulu and Fusion), parks and resorts (five destinations worldwide, the Disney Cruise Line, and Adventures by Disney), consumer products (toys, apparel, books, art, etc.), interactive media (blockbuster mobile and console games), and studio entertainment (Marvel Studios, Pixar Studios, DisneyNature, Touchstone Pictures, The Disney Music Group, and Walt Disney Animation Studios). As of 2014, the company ranked number fourteen on Forbes List of Most Valuable Brands, ahead of Facebook, Wal-Mart and Nike. This impressive lineup of profitable subsidiaries, however, does not capture the entirety of the Disney brand.

For many, the name “Disney” evokes an incredible, emotional pull. This emotional dimension to Disney is one that cannot be totally understood through assessment of the company’s business operations. The Walt Disney Company of today might be a media conglomerate that offers a multitude of products, digital and otherwise, but to understand the brand’s emotional connection with consumers, it is crucial to trace Disney’s long history back to its roots. Decades before Disney purchased subsidiaries like ABC Family and ESPN that radically revolutionized its offerings as an entertainment company, Disney existed

primarily as a cartoon studio providing family-friendly entertainment to its audience. Generation after generation, year after year, Disney animation created household attachment with its consumers through the adventures and values of its animated characters. This is the legacy of the Disney brand. Animated entertainment has been at the heart of Disney's product pipeline since the company's inception and even now, the animated Mickey Mouse – a character now more than eighty years old – is more iconic of Disney than any other image.

This paper seeks to investigate the ability of Disney animation to capture consumers for a lifetime. Not only is Disney animation able to find a home in the hearts of consumers as children, but it is able to maintain incredible momentum throughout the course of a consumer's entire life. While today's young adults consumed Disney films as children, they continue now to consume Disney's more contemporary animated features. The recent hit *Frozen* is a great case; despite the film clearly being catered towards youth, the movie resonated with consumers of all ages. High school male choruses performed *Let it Go*; parents created fan videos that reenacted *Love is an Open Door* (Konnikova, 2014). Why do adult consumers return to the brand of their childhood, even though they are no longer part of the target demographic? What is the appeal behind these children's products? What is so magnetic about Disney animation?

This paper explores the captivating quality of Disney, namely: Why is Disney sticky? This query is examined in the context of how Disney animation is received by one specific consumer group: the young adult generation. Theories of stickiness and consumer memory are applied to Disney's animated product offerings in order to better understand how the company's strategic innovation drives its overall brand stickiness. Primary research is also conducted, through use of focus groups and projective techniques, to discover how the Disney brand is perceived both consciously and subconsciously by young adult consumers.

CHAPTER 2: Examining Disney's Formula for Stickiness

Stickiness is one of those key marketing terms that resonates so well because it embodies its own meaning; the word “sticky” is itself sticky. But what is stickiness? And better yet, what makes a brand or product sticky? This chapter explores the research that has already been conducted on the phenomena of stickiness, and ties these findings back to the Disney brand. The following sections will break down stickiness into a formula called the SUCCES model, examine the formulaic stickiness of Disney products through content analysis, and explore consumer perception of Disney's brand and products.

The SUCCES Model of Stickiness

Stickiness is the ability of a certain message or idea to be naturally infectious. Gladwell writes on the subject: “Is the message – or the food, or the movie, or the product – memorable? Is it so memorable, in fact, that it can create change, that it can spur someone to action?” (Gladwell, 2000). The concept of stickiness can be quite abstract, and whether or not a brand's level of stickiness can be quantified is a subject for debate – nevertheless, marketers could agree that there is value in understanding how to make a brand sticky. In their book *Made to Stick*, brothers Dan and Chip Heath break down the components of stickiness as pertaining to ideas. This paper reapplies the stickiness model offered by the Heath brothers to brands rather than ideas. The formula is as follows:

S – Simple. A brand should be stripped down to its core message.

U – Unexpected. A brand should have an element of unpredictability.

C – Concrete. A brand should be easily accessible and relatable.

C – Credible. A brand should be believable.

E – Emotional. A brand should inspire others.

S – Story. A brand should embrace some type of narrative.

Together, the elements of this formula are known as the SUCCES model (Heath & Heath, 2007).

The first aspect of stickiness is creating **simple (Si)** messaging. A brand can become extremely successful if it can create ownership of a certain word. This type of focused consumer perception also drives exclusivity; customers will always think of that word when they think of the brand. For example, IBM owns “computer” and FedEx owns “overnight” (Reis & Trout, 1993). For a brand to do this, it must be stripped down to its core values. The Heath brothers recommend extracting the most important principle and using that principle to drive all business decisions. For example, Southwest Airlines champions a simple motto (to be *the* low cost airline) and uses this slogan when considering strategic additions to their product line. Southwest once toyed with the possibility of offering dinner to passengers. Though this proposal offered both pros and cons from a business perspective, the stronger of the two options became clear when managers realized that, while providing dinner would upgrade the comfort of passengers, the addition of a meal and the surplus expenses associated with the offering would not align with the airline’s low cost proposition. Thus dinner was abandoned in favor of cutting costs and providing consumers with the affordable prices that are now an integral part of Southwest’s brand identity (Heath & Heath, 2007).

The second element of the model is **unexpectedness (U)**. For a brand to be sticky there should be an element of surprise and unpredictability – in other words, it is important to attract consumers by creating moderate incongruity. The Heath brothers recommend that after identifying the core idea behind the brand (**Si**), a manager should then explore what may be inherently counter-intuitive about that idea – what are the implications of the idea, and is it already available elsewhere? In addition, it can be beneficial to examine how drama can be evoked by a brand/product that is unexpected not only in nature, but also in presentation. When John F. Kennedy proclaimed his dream of a man “walking on the moon,” this was a novel concept in and of itself. But the dichotomy of pairing the ordinary act of walking with the otherworldly surface of the moon further enhanced the idea’s unexpected quality (Heath & Heath, 2007).

The next element of stickiness is the ability to be **concrete (Con)**. According to the Heath brothers, a brand or idea is concrete when it is easily grasped. Often, this calls for a message that is tangible to the human senses in some way. For example, rather announcing that a bag of movie theatre popcorn contains 20 grams of fat, one could much more effectively communicate the same message by sharing that a bag of movie theatre popcorn contains more fat than a bacon-and-egg breakfast, a Big Mac and fries lunch, and a steak dinner – combined (Heath & Heath, 2007). For a brand to be concrete, its messaging and products must be easily accessible to the consumer's imagination.

Credibility (Cr) is another aspect of the SUCCES model. This element is self-explanatory; in order for a brand to be sticky, it must also be trusted and respected. This can be communicated in several ways. In advertising, a brand can provide testable claims: for example, Wendy's "Where's the Beef?" commercials in the 1980s suggested that hamburgers at Wendy's were larger than at other fast food chains, a claim that was readily verifiable by any consumer (Heath & Heath, 2007). A brand's credibility may also be built off of positive, repeat interactions with the consumer.

The next aspect of stickiness is **emotion (E)**. For a brand to be memorable and have a lasting impact on consumers, it must have the ability to inspire. Getting people to care about a product or cause can be one of the most challenging aspects of marketing, and it can be done using the *power of association*, i.e. creating an association between something people care about and something they don't. Another method commonly used by marketers is an *appeal to self-interest*, which involves tying a product or brand up to a higher cause. A company selling grass seeds might advertise their ability to offer consumers "the best lawn" rather than "the best seed." Lastly, a third method that can be used to inspire consumers is an *appeal to identity*. Oftentimes, consumers do not make rational purchasing decisions, but rather choose options based off perceptions of what they believe "people like me" would do in the same situation (Heath & Heath, 2007). Thus it is paramount for a manager to understand how the consumer perceives himself and how a brand might fit into that self-image.

The final aspect of the stickiness model is **story (St)**. The Heath brothers advocate empowering a brand through use of a narrative, due to the theory that narratives engage the consumer and create a mental stimulation that helps to make the brand memorable. Subway is an example of a brand that successfully leveraged a story to generate buzz around their product. Years ago, Subway created a promotional campaign centered on the true story of a man named Jared, who lost 245 pounds by eating at the restaurant every day. Ultimately Jared's story was much stickier than any other contrived or rational messaging Subway could have distributed, including their original communications, which promoted the fact that Subway sandwiches contain less than seven grams of fat. Jared's story, which was really an inspirational journey, was much better received than the dry content around Subway's sandwich fat (Heath & Heath, 2007).

The Heath brothers note that although not all elements of the SUCCES model are required to be present for an idea to be sticky, sticky ideas generally contain all or most of the model's elements (Heath & Heath, 2007).

Content Analysis of Disney Products

In order to evaluate Disney's stickiness as a brand, it is important to understand how Disney incorporates elements of the SUCCES model into each of its individual products. A critical analysis will now be performed on two animated Disney films. The goal of this analysis is to compare how sticky each film is, based on their possession (or lack thereof) of SUCCES model elements. The two films selected for analysis are *Tangled* and *Frozen*. The films were chosen based on their overarching similarities, which include but are not limited to: length, incorporation of humor, use of romantic plotline, notoriety of voice actors, and relative success. These commonalities will first be discussed, followed by critical analyses of the plotline and music from each film.

The films *Tangled* (2010) and *Frozen* (2013) are both products of Disney's contemporary animation studio. At first glance, the films are readily comparable. The films vary in length by only eight minutes. Both showcase comedic relief through the usage of minor characters (Maximus the horse in *Tangled*, Olaf the snowman in *Frozen*). Both employ romantic storylines involving at least one main character (a princess and a commoner). Both films use the voices of actors/actresses already prominent in the entertainment industry (Mandy Moore and Zachary Levi in *Tangled*, Kristen Bell and Idina Menzel in *Frozen*). Lastly, both films achieved what can be dubbed as box office success. After its first two weekends in theatres, *Tangled* had drawn \$96.5 million in sales and ousted highly-anticipated blockbuster *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1* for the number one spot; similarly, *Frozen* amassed \$93.9 million in ticket sales after its first two weekends in theatres and was ranked number two.

However, when long term comparisons are drawn, there can be no doubt that *Frozen* created more disruptive and longer lasting ripples in the entertainment industry than its 2010 predecessor. From a numbers perspective this can be easily quantified. By the end of its run in theaters, *Frozen* had raked in double the box office earnings of *Tangled*, both domestically (\$401 million vs \$201 million) and internationally (\$1.3 billion vs \$592 million). In home DVD sales, too, *Frozen* came out on top with \$350 million in sales as compared to *Tangled*'s \$207 million. *Frozen*'s soundtrack produced more than 3 million copies and was the top-selling album of the year, becoming the first Disney soundtrack to reach the number one spot on Billboard 200 since 1995. It stayed at the number one spot for a non-consecutive thirteen weeks in total – beating out acclaimed artists like Beyoncé, Coldplay and Taylor Swift. In contrast, *Tangled*'s soundtrack did not make it onto the Billboard 200. And from a consumer behavior standpoint, *Frozen* was astoundingly revolutionary. For months after the movie's release, social media exploded with lip-sync videos of parents and their children. Fox News broadcasted a school district's parody-style announcement of snow day, titled *School is Closed* and sung to the tune of *Let it Go*. Filipino singer Charice secured the top trending spot on Twitter after belting out a cover to the same song. At Halloween nearly a year later, little girls could still be seen dressed as Elsa and Anna. With its viral

success, *Frozen* is the best example of the Disney's stickiness to date. But were the unique features of this film that enabled it to create such a memorable, lasting impact?

Critical Plot Analysis

A critical analysis of both films reveals that while the plotlines of both *Tangled* and *Frozen* each contain several elements of the SUCCES model, *Frozen*'s plotline ultimately holds a greater number of elements.

First, the plot of *Tangled* is loosely inspired by the legend of Rapunzel. The storyline revolves around three main characters: Rapunzel, a male thief named Flynn who rescues Rapunzel from the tower, and a malicious old woman named Gothel who strives to lock Rapunzel back inside her tower. The majority of the film's rising actions and climax occurs as a result of the conflict between Rapunzel and Gothel, both of who personify the classic struggle between good and evil. This motif has appeared in a multitude of Disney films – Simba versus Scar in *Lion King*, Cinderella versus her stepmother in *Cinderella*, Aladdin versus Jafar in *Aladdin*, etc. – and though it creates an **simple (Si)** and easily understood message, it does not generate any thematic surprises that satisfy the SUCCES model's criteria for **unexpectedness (U)**. For a brand like Disney, the clash between good and evil is revisited again and again not only because it is a timeless story that has roots in the very fabric of humanity (the notion of good vs evil was portrayed as early as biblical tales), but also because the struggle is one that is basic and easily sharable with younger audiences. In Disney movies, good vs evil is simplified to an abstract and even shallow concept. It has very little in common with the complexities of real life. For example, the subtleties and motivations of a person's character are rarely addressed in *Tangled*. The writers need not shed light on the backstory and psyche of *why* Gothel is evil – it is enough that she is. In this way, although the film's central conflict meets the SUCCES model's requirements for **simplicity (Si)**, it does not communicate a truly **concrete (Con)** message to audience.

Examining the film's plot from a different angle yields similar results. Aside from the good/evil conflict, finding true love is another recurring theme throughout the film. When she escapes from her tower, Rapunzel becomes dependent on and gradually falls in love with her travel companion, Flynn. However, analysis of this romantic storyline reveals that it also lacks a few of the SUCCES model elements. The concept of falling in love is a classic element portrayed in Disney films, and is easily followed by younger audiences. Between Rapunzel's doe-eyed girlish beauty and Flynn's smooth, self-satisfied smirk, these two main characters are quintessentially attractive – and they are the only ones designed to look this way. The romance is obvious from the onset. Again, this satisfies the element of **simplicity (Si)**. But as with the good/evil conflict, *Tangled* follows the same overarching storyline that has already been embodied by so many other Disney movies: a couple that falls in love, faces conflict, and ultimately achieves a happy ending together. Previous Disney princess movies, and even non-princess movies such as *Tarzan* and *Lion King*, have featured similar plots. As a *USA Today* movie critic writes, “*Tangled* braids strands of traditional storytelling and a contemporary sensibility with stylish if predictable results...It all feels very familiar” (Puig, 2010). A storyline like this one is highly predictable for any repeat consumer of Disney products. This violates the SUCCES model element of **unexpectedness (U)**. In addition, *Tangled*'s romance, while filled with wholesome values such as caring and selflessness, makes no effort to look past the tropes associated with finding “true love.” The film does not examine character foils, likeable or otherwise, that would be insightful of a real-life romance. Consequently, *Tangled* also does not have a firm grounding in authenticity (**Con**).

The movie does, however, play on the SUCCES elements of credibility, emotion and story to bring its characters to life. All Disney films are branded with the Disney name, and thus are **credible (Cr)** sources of great family entertainment, an image that Disney has carefully cultivated through the generations. In addition to bearing Disney's signature, *Tangled* also appeals to audiences by using painting its characters with many **emotions (E)**. Throughout the film, Rapunzel is a vibrant heroine whose transparent longing for many things is central to driving the plotline. For instance, the story is set

in motion by her desire to attend an annual floating lanterns festival, which she has never been able to watch due to being locked in her tower. It is for this reason that she defies the evil Gothel's authority and escapes from imprisonment, thus perpetuating the good vs evil conflict that occurs throughout the rest of the film. In addition, Rapunzel's gradual friendship with and love for her male savior, Flynn, are feelings that drive the romantic storyline. These **emotions (E)** not only enable Rapunzel to be a more interesting main character, but also allow the audience to better connect with her, creating memorability. Lastly, it is important to note that the events put in motion by Rapunzel's choices give way to the rising actions and climax that form a **story (St)**. The full-bodied narrative journey unveiled during this hour-and-a-half cinematic experience is the final element of the SUCCES model that enables *Tangled* to generate stickiness with consumers.

Overall, *Tangled* possesses four of the six elements in the SUCCES model. Below is a chart summarizing this analysis:

Table 1 – *Tangled*, Critical Plot Analysis

	SUCCES Model Elements of Stickiness					
	Simple	Unexpected	Concrete	Credible	Emotional	Story
<i>Tangled</i>	x			x	x	x

In comparison, a critical analysis of *Frozen*'s plot reveals that the winter film, which is loosely inspired by Hans Christian Anderson's fairy tale *The Snow Queen*, makes a stronger showing of stickiness elements.

Frozen's storyline is driven by the adventures of two princess sisters, Elsa and Anna, one of whom (Elsa) has magical powers that enable her to create ice and snow. The story begins when the sisters quarrel, causing Elsa to leave the kingdom. Before leaving, however, Elsa's powers are unleashed out of anger; she casts an eternal winter over the land. Only by putting aside their differences and working together can the sisters lift the eternal winter brought on by Elsa's powers. A fantastical, imaginary conflict lies at the center film's plotline as Elsa learns to control her magic. However, it is important to recognize that much of the film is actually driven by a familial struggle. Elsa and Anna's disagreements

of opinion, and the lengths to which they go to reconcile these disagreements, fuel the plot's momentum. The rising actions and events in this movie occur as the result of obstacles that Anna and Elsa both overcome as they seek to become reunited as sisters. The siblings are the main characters in this film. Each sister advances a separate storyline throughout the movie as they independently take on challenges. The two siblings only reunite at the very end for a climatic showdown against the evil prince antagonist. The alternating points of view create a strong familial theme that shines through in every aspect of the storyline, producing a basic motif that resonates well with audiences **(Si)**.

A sisterly quarrel is not only a simple concept, but it is also one that is very relevant in the lives of children from a young age. Any child who has grown up with siblings has most likely quarreled with those siblings. The disagreement between the sisters in *Frozen*, and the journey that the sisters undertake in order to set aside their differences, are quite genuine experiences that could just as well take place in real life as in the magical kingdom of Arendelle **(Con)**. As movie reviewer Amanda Rodriguez notes, "The two of them love each other very deeply, but they struggle to connect" (Rodriguez, 2013). The concreteness extends past the sisters' relationship and breaches the realm of romance as well. In *Frozen*, Elsa defies the love-at-first-sight stereotype so often associated with other Disney princess movies by forbidding her sister Anna from wedding a prince she has just met. She incredulously demands how the two can claim to be in love, as they have only known each other for a day. Later in the movie, Anna is forced to spend an extended period of time with a different male character. She then falls in love with him instead. As a contributor to *Forbes* writes, "It [*Frozen*] doesn't condemn the notions of love-at-first-sight or happily-ever-after even while it acknowledges that true love comes in many forms aside from the fairy-tale romance variety" (Mendelson, 2013). Thus the film spins a more authentic romance than is typically seen in the classic Disney princess storyline, including that of *Tangled* **(Con)**. Finally, the relevance of the film is also embodied by Elsa's highly dynamic character. Elsa's personal struggle to become comfortable with herself might be magical in nature (she must learn how to accept and control her ice powers), but at the core of this struggle is a very tangible internal conflict about self-acceptance **(Con)**.

Elsa's journey is a melancholy and haunting story of a child grows into a woman while trying to repress certain parts of her personality. Repeatedly throughout the movie, Elsa struggles to present an "acceptable" face to the world. This internal conflict eventually erupts into the iconic power ballad *Let it Go*, which celebrates Elsa's realization that she no longer wants to hide who she is. Elsa's character is not only flawed, but also has a richness and depth that is seldom seen in characters of Disney films. The identity conflict she faces is one that can be applied to many situations. Writers in media have suggested that her story can be viewed as a metaphor for contemporary identity challenges faced by homosexuals, women in the rapidly changing world of feminist deals, those affected by anxiety disorders like PTSD (Mendelson, 2013) (Feder, 2014). Ultimately, Elsa's story is one that highly relevant and more **concrete (Con)** than any story advanced by the characters in *Tangled*.

Frozen is refreshing in more ways than one. The movie also defies a few other customary character roles as well. For one, the antagonist is not immediately obvious from the start. It is only later that the prince (whom Anna was initially enamored with) is revealed to be an evil, power-hungry conspirator – and thus Disney turns around and pokes a bit of fun at the traditional typecasts that it has created (**U**). Another such surprise comes during the highly apocalyptic climax. During the adrenaline-rushing scene (which involves a massive ice storm and a curse coming to fruition), princess Anna turns away from the arms of her true love, and sacrifices herself to save her sister Elsa's life. *Frozen*'s main characters essentially choose their family over any kind of romantic connection. As discussed previously, the sisterly connection between these two characters is the central driving force behind the plot, and the romantic side stories are more of secondary plotlines. Of course, the movie does still conclude with Anna living happily with both her sister and her love interest (would a Disney movie still be a Disney movie without a happy ending?) – but *Frozen* is still the first of any Disney princess movie to **unexpectedly (U)** stray from the traditional strong emphasis on romance.

As with *Tangled*, *Frozen* also incorporates the three remaining SUCCES model elements of credibility, emotion and story. Since this film was released by the same animation studio as *Tangled*, both

movies share similar **credibility (Cr)** from the Disney name. Neither of these films were Pixar collaborations, further purifying Disney's brand image as well as the association both films share with Disney. It is also evident that *Frozen* draws heavily on emotions from its characters and appeals to the audience on an empathetic level. Anna's and Elsa's sisterly love, as well as Elsa's struggle to achieve happiness with herself, are all highly passionate storylines that are tangible to viewers precisely because of their **emotional (E)** nature. And lastly, the use of narrative in *Frozen* is obvious. The 102 minute movie is essentially a narrative that captures the adventures of its lively and lovable characters. Like *Tangled*, this film uses a sequence of rising actions to actively engage and capture the audience's attention. With this final element of **story (St)**, *Frozen* has captured all six elements recommended for stickiness by the SUCCES model.

Below is a chart that compares the SUCCES model elements possessed by both *Frozen* and *Tangled*. It is clear that *Frozen* possesses the greater number of stickiness elements:

Table 2 – *Tangled* vs *Frozen*, Critical Plot Analysis

	SUCCES Model Elements of Stickiness					
	Simple	Unexpected	Concrete	Credible	Emotional	Story
<i>Tangled</i>	x			x	x	x
<i>Frozen</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x

The conclusion of this critical plot analysis finds that much of *Frozen*'s widespread success can be attributed to its masterful, maximum incorporation of the elements of SUCCES. To reinforce these findings, the next section will take a further look at the elements of stickiness, as applied to the musical content of both *Frozen* and its predecessor *Tangled*.

Critical Music Analysis

Much of the recognition that Disney animation garners among both audiences and critics alike is rooted in spectacular musical achievements. For this reason, it is important to examine the musical

offerings of both *Tangled* and *Frozen* when comparing the relative successes of the two movies. In both cases, the soundtracks of these films also play into their stickiness among consumers.

The music in *Tangled* has been quite well-received, and has been described to hold Broadway-style appeal by many, including critics from *The Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* (Morgenstern, 2010) (Puig, 2010). On the whole, it has also been noted that the film's music is largely reminiscent of that seen in the past from previous Disney films. A journalist from the *Chicago Tribune* writes "*Tangled* is a musical, harkening back to the '90s Disney successes" (Phillips, 2010). This is a fitting description, as entire soundtrack is collaboration between lyricist Glen Slater and award-winning composer Alan Menken, who has worked on many other Disney films in the past. Between the years of 1989 and 1995, composer Menken was nominated for a total of twelve Academy Awards. His nominations led to eight victories, all of which were Disney animations including *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin* and *Pocahontas* (Pond, 2011). With this kind of legacy, the soundtrack of *Tangled* can, on the whole, be said to have much **credibility (Cr)**.

The music in *Tangled* features a total of four vocal songs, which is equivalent to 16.44 minutes. These songs include performances by pop singer Mandy Moore, actor Zachary Levi, and Broadway star Donna Murphy. For the sake of brevity, only two of the most popular and well-known songs from the soundtrack will be analyzed in this paper. The first is a solo from Mandy Moore called *When Will My Life Begin*, which is referenced often by movie reviewers in comparison to earlier Disney movies. The second is a lyrical duet between Mandy Moore and Zachary Levi called *I See the Light*, which is film's most iconic song and illustrates the moment when Rapunzel and Flynn fall in love. On YouTube, these two tracks have more views than any other songs from the *Tangled* soundtrack.

The movie opens with an upbeat yet wistful solo from Mandy Moore called *When Will My Life Begin*, in which Rapunzel expresses her longing to experience something other than the day-to-day routines of her tower imprisonment. The song feels sweet and melodious, well-written for Moore's finer and soft voice. It does well in evoking the character's **emotions (E)**, especially through lyrics that actively

showcase Rapunzel's impatience for adventure ("And I'll keep wondering... When will my life begin?"). Questions like these help create the **simple (Si)** messaging necessary to orient the audience to Rapunzel's life, and also capture the longing for excitement that could be relatable for viewers in a very **concrete (Con)** way. However, this song follows a precedent set by other Disney films in which the main character sings about his/her desire to be a part of something else. It largely echoes other compositions that Menken created for Disney in the 90's. A movie critic from the *Oregonian* writes, "As in *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast* (not to mention thousands of Broadway musicals), we have an introductory song in which the heroine details her humdrum life and then expresses her yearning for more" (Levy, 2010). Overall, the song depicts picturesque chores and quaint wishes that are typical of a Disney princess. Lyrical references to sewing, cooking, reading and other inherently girly activities ("Then after lunch it's puzzles and darts and baking / Paper mache, a bit of ballet and chess / Pottery and ventriloquy, candle making/ Then I'll stretch, maybe sketch, take a climb, sew a dress!") give subtle nods to Disney princesses predecessors; Snow White rolling out pie dough, and Belle with her nose in a book. As a result, this song is an example of *Tangled's* predictability and does not satisfy the **unexpected (U)** element of the SUCCES model. The song also captures more of a moment in time rather than a **story (St)**.

The song in *Tangled's* soundtrack that is most well-known is a romantic duet between Mandy Moore and Zachary Levi, called *I See the Light*. This number was nominated for Best Original Song in the 2011 Academy Awards and also featured in a live performance, although it did not win. *I See the Light* is a gentle, melodic, folk-style song set in a major key, using acoustic and string instruments accompany Moore and Levi's voices. As pleasant sounding as it is, this composition is again a foreseeable piece in Menken's style, not so different from *Aladdin's* lyrical duet, *A Whole New World*. *TIME Magazine* calls it "a generically tuneful love ballad" before credibly predicting that it would be nominated for the Oscars (**U**) (Corliss, 2010). The song does, however, convincingly describe the **simple (Si)** and heartwarming moment when Rapunzel falls in love with her companion ("All at once, everything looks different / Now that I see you"). The feelings generated by this song are genuine and sweet,

showcasing the characters (Rapunzel and Flynn) at their most tender, vulnerable moments (**E**). The feelings portrayed are also tangible and easily relatable to real life (**Con**). However, as with the previous song, *I See the Light* does not illustrate a **story (St)** as much as it does a moment in time.

The chart below describes the stickiness model as possessed by *Tangled*'s soundtrack:

Table 3 – *Tangled*, Critical Music Analysis

		SUCCES Model Elements of Stickiness					
		Simple	Unexpected	Concrete	Credible	Emotional	Story
<i>Tangled</i>	<i>When Will My Life Begin?</i>	x		x	x	x	
	<i>I See the Light</i>	x		x	x	x	

Overall, *Tangled*'s soundtrack employs the majority of elements from the SUCCES model. The stickiness of the film's music can help explain the film's success in the box office. But success is only relative – and so it is important to compare *Tangled*'s stickiness in to that of *Frozen*.

Like its predecessor, *Frozen*'s soundtrack received widespread acclaim from both critics and audiences alike. In the case of *Frozen*, the music also went viral on an unprecedented scale. The film's most iconic song and hit power ballad *Let it Go* was nominated for recognition in the Golden Globes in the Best Original Song category, although it did not win. Two months later, however, *Let it Go* did take away the prize for Best Original Song at the 86th Academy Awards after a live performance by Idina Menzel. This win was monumental for composer Robert Lopez, who is only the twelfth person to ever achieve the feat of EGOT – winning an Emmy, Grammy Oscar and Tony (Newman, 2014). Previous wins for Lopez had come from his compositions in musicals *Avenue Q* and the *Book of Mormon*, as well as in the animated series *The Wonder Pets*. These credentials set the expectations high for *Frozen*'s soundtrack (**Cr**). But what are the specific aspects of the soundtrack that make it so sticky?

This soundtrack features the voices of actor Kristen Bell and Broadway star Idina Menzel.

Throughout the movie, there are eight vocal pieces – twice the amount in *Tangled* – amounting to a total of 21.04 minutes. Judging by the magnitude of social media impact (number of YouTube views, live performances, covers and parodies) the most popular songs are *Do You Wanna Build a Snowman* and, of course, *Let it Go*. Both songs will now be examined in a critical analysis.

The first song of the two to appear in this film is *Do You Wanna Build a Snowman*. This number features a duet between Kristen Bell and Idina Menzel, and describes the two princess sisters' gradual estrangement as they grow older. The song is set to the gentle twinkle of piano keys as well as a light, lovely backdrop of stringed instruments. The song's mood varies gradually. Starting out innocent and carefree, the music opens to two sisters who are young and inseparable. By the end the melody has become haunting and solitary, as the sisters' parents have passed away and the sisters themselves have grown apart. The messaging behind the song is **simple (Si)**; the question "Do you wanna build a snowman?" exudes the evocative longing and naivety of Anna as she begs for love from her apparently cool and distant older sibling (**E**). The siblings' estrangement is brought on by Elsa's repression of her magical powers. This of course is an imaginary ability which cannot be translated into real life – however, the distance between these two sisters reflects an accurate portrayal of ups and downs a family can go through (**Con**). Unlike any other song discussed so far, this piece truly encapsulates a narrative (**St**). A series of vignettes that flash before the viewer during this number illustrate the aging of the sisters and their growth over time. The only element of stickiness that this song does not possess is surprise, as it does not defy any of Disney's traditional stereotypes. The song's placement in the movie also comes as a natural evolution in the timeline. Prior to the music's start, Elsa is told that she needs to hide her powers from the rest of the world, including her sister. Thus the distance between the two princesses, while chilling, is not an unforeseen development (**U**).

Inherently, *Let it Go*'s structure sets the stage to be a more thrilling and climatic song than any of the more mellow pieces offered in *Tangled*'s collection. A music blogger at *The Guardian* notes that at

137 beats per minute, it is an unusually swift-paced song, especially for a ballad. The song also features a jump from an edgy, minor key in the first verse (“The snow glows white on the mountain tonight”) to major key chords in the chorus (“Well now they know! / Let it go!”) (Lynskey, 2014). These structural components allow the song to be thrilling and unconventional, possibly generating stickiness with listeners. The song also possesses several components of the SUCCES model. As with all Disney songs, the message is direct (**Si**), easily encapsulated by a repetition of the chorus and also visually supported by Elsa’s physical transformation away from her “old” self (she casts off the gloves she has worn her whole life and transforms her conservative dress into a sparkling gown, signifying her liberation). The music is both powerful and **emotional (E)**, celebrating freedom from rules and repression. As discussed before, this is as very **concrete (Con)** glimpse into a woman’s struggle to grow into her own skin and become comfortable with whom she is. The depth behind the flawed and sometimes dark motivations that give rise to this song also comes as an **unexpected (U)** surprise from the conventionally sunny Disney, with its traditional failure to examine character tropes. Overall, this song is a standout; a refreshing change from Disney’s normally predictable soundtracks. The only element of the SUCCES model that *Let it Go* fails to incorporate is **story (St)**, since this song encapsulates a definitive moment in time.

The chart below compares the soundtracks of *Tangled* and *Frozen* as framed by the SUCCES model elements:

Table 4 – *Tangled* vs *Frozen*, Critical Music Analysis

		SUCCES Model Elements of Stickiness					
		Simple	Unexpected	Concrete	Credible	Emotional	Story
<i>Tangled</i>	<i>When Will my Life Begin?</i>	x		x	x	x	
	<i>I See the Light</i>	x		x	x	x	
<i>Frozen</i>	<i>Do You Wanna Build a Snowman?</i>	x		x	x	x	x
	<i>Let it Go</i>	x	x	x	x	x	

As the chart makes evident, *Frozen*'s soundtrack possesses more elements of the stickiness model than does *Tangled*'s soundtrack. This analysis suggests an explanation for why *Frozen* experienced greater overall success as a movie, and perhaps why its music achieved such virality as well.

Of all these tracks, only one (*Do You Wanna Build a Snowman*) encapsulates the element of **story (St)**. However, all the other songs achieved relative stickiness without this element – including *Let it Go*, which is the most successful track in any Disney movie to date. Although the element of story is important when discussing the appeals of Disney's film products, perhaps this element is not as necessary when drilling down to the level of music. It appears that a song can have powerful memorability with listeners despite the failure to incorporate an overarching narrative. Placed in the context of Disney animation, songs are tools of expression usually used to establish a character's frame of mind at a certain moment in time. It is rare that a number on a Disney soundtrack takes the listener on a full narrative journey, as does *Do You Wanna Build a Snowman*. Thus, not all the elements of the SUCCES model are necessary to explain a song's magnetism for consumers; in this case, the element of **story (St)** is clearly not pivotal.

Thus far, the critical analyses put forth have been based on application of the stickiness theories proposed by the Heath brothers. The brothers created the SUCCES model based off case studies and observations. To ground this theory of stickiness in real examples of consumer behavior, the next sections of this paper will look into Disney's relationship with consumers as expressed through direct interviews.

Testimonies from Disney Consumers

So far this paper has studied stickiness by applying the SUCCES model in a critical analysis of Disney products. But how does a theoretical model of stickiness translate into a real life relationship with consumers? In order to better understand this, interviews were conducted to learn how Disney is viewed by its audience, both on a brand and product specific level. Twenty participants were selected from the

undergraduate body of the Pennsylvania State University to participate in informal focus group sessions.

Participants hailed from a variety of backgrounds, ethnicities, ages and majors. Focus groups took place in pairs of two, a setup designed to prevent stage fright but still promote an exchange of thought.

Although the conversations were initiated based on pre-written questions, ultimately the discussions were encouraged to take on a natural flow of their own. Accordingly, the responses from each focus group were very distinctive. Analysis of the conversations is conducted below.

Disney Brand Perception

Each focus group was kicked off with the following question: “What is Disney’s motto?” This query was designed to allow participants to express their perception of the Disney brand, and to learn whether or not consumers feel that Disney delivers one overarching message (**Si**).

Overall, responses from the participants show that each took away his/her own message from the Disney brand. Although these personal takeaways are unique to the consumer, they all share the characteristic of being straightforward in nature (**Si**). All participants were able to deliver a succinct phrase as to what they felt the motto of Disney was. The conversations that took place will now be analyzed based on the concepts that were mentioned most frequently by all focus groups.

The majority of groups spoke of happiness as being a part of Disney’s motto. For example, participants said that Disney’s motto is “To bring happiness to everyone” or “Happily ever after.” Overall, “happiness” was the most heavily used word over the course of the entire conversation across all focus groups (mentioned by a total of twelve people). Even participants who did not initially volunteer happiness as part of Disney’s slogan eventually arrived at this term after further discussion of the brand’s values/representations. This shows that consumers strongly associate the brand with positive **emotions** (**E**). In two cases, the concept of happiness was also connected to the term innocence. For the two participants who mentioned this term, innocence and childhood are what Disney represented the most.

When asked to explain what innocence is, both participants (in separate focus groups) tied the word back to happiness. “Innocence is going to Disney and that being the best thing ever. When children are happy it’s ‘cause they’re just doing their thing,” said one participant. Again, these responses reinforce the positivity that consumers feel when thinking about the Disney brand (**E**).

The second most popular response to the question “What is Disney’s motto?” was a reference to the participant’s own experience in childhood. Nine of the twenty focus groups mentioned the term “childhood” throughout the course of their discussions. In these cases, the conversation then turned to the memories that were created with Disney when the participants were young. Participants alluded to watching movies and visiting the theme parks. In some cases, these memories were created with the participants’ families. “Family” was the third most frequently mentioned term in response to Disney’s slogan. Five focus groups discussed the idea of family in their conversations. Many participants talked about experiencing Disney with their family members when they were younger, whether by watching the films with younger siblings or taking family vacations to Disneyworld. Both terms “family” and “childhood” reference specific experiences that the participants remember from earlier parts of their lives, indicating that Disney has created a **concrete (Con)** relationship with consumers.

A small number of participants associated Disney with creativity. Two consumers, when asked for Disney’s slogan, replied, “Isn’t it something to do with imagination?” These responses salute Disney’s reputation as a film company and entertainment brand. These participants strongly associate Disney with their imaginary characters and the adventures that come along with them (**St**). Another term that was used by respondents in two different focus groups is the word “dreams.” When asked for Disney’s tagline, one consumer said, “A dream is a wish your heart makes.” Asked to expand on what a dream is, she then responded, “I think it would be aspirations...but also fantasy and imagination.” The other participant spoke similarly, voicing ““Dreams come true”” as her idea of Disney’s motto, and elaborating, “A dream is something you... aspire to. Or hope for. Or work towards.” In both cases, the participants went on to explain that the dreams as portrayed in Disney can be unrealistic – however, Disney has made strides to

root their messages in more realistic and contemporary ways (**Con**). For example, the second participant explained, “I think Disney has shifted with the time. It used to be ‘princesses need to get married’...but *Frozen* just came out, where the princess needs to figure out herself. I feel like the dreams are still true, but they’ve adjusted to society’s standards.” These answers show that Disney is perceived as a brand which, despite being in the business of imagination, still understands the evolving needs of its audience (**Cr**).

The chart below summarizes the findings of the focus groups. According to consumer testimonials, Disney as a brand possesses all qualities of stickiness as described by the SUCCES model, except for one.

Table 5 – Disney’s Stickiness Based on Consumer Testimonials

	SUCCES Model Elements of Stickiness					
	Simple	Unexpected	Concrete	Credible	Emotional	Story
<i>Disney (brand)</i>	x		x	x	x	x

Frozen Film Perception

After discussing the Disney brand as a whole, conversations were gradually steered towards one specific Disney product: *Frozen*. The aim of these conversations was to understand how consumer perceptions of Disney might align with the critical plot analysis shared earlier in this chapter. To help guide the discussions, participants were asked whether they had seen the movie and, if yes, why? All the participants who had seen the film reported seeing it as a result of influence from peers. Many mentioned hearing good things, or simply feeling curious due to the film’s tremendous popularity. Four of the participants even admitted that the hype surrounding the movie was so pervasive as to be off-putting. “Snapchat is hell when it snows out,” said one participant, referring to the tendency of Snap Stories to feature college students belting out the hit song *Let it Go*. Nevertheless, the buzz that the movie generated

was not a letdown, according to these focus groups. The same participant described his viewing experience with the following: “Watching it [*Frozen*] made me frustrated because it was a good movie and I wanted to hate it. It was good though.” Other consumers voiced supporting opinions, acknowledging that they enjoyed the movie despite (or perhaps, because of) its overwhelming popularity **(Cr)**.

An interesting discovery here, which could lead to future research, is the polarizing aspect of Disney’s mass appeal. In general, Disney mass produces, not only entertainment products, but also values and emotions, such as kindness or joy. The fact that this company distributes virtues like these on a global scale is a catalyst for cynicism. While some are easily entranced by the golden qualities of Disney’s wholesome entertainment, others find it difficult to stomach the purposefully inoffensive and mass-marketed messaging. Like the participant who voiced his irritancy with Snapchat, some consumers deliberately shun the items in pop culture that have achieved widespread popularity. Consumers like this possess high culture capital. Their interaction with Disney (which could range from grudging acceptance to outright rejection) is one that might reflect a deeper desire to stand apart from the faceless nature of today’s mass consumption culture. This is an opportunity for further research that will be discussed in the conclusion.

As another part of the conversation around *Frozen*, participants were also asked to explain what the movie was about. The goal behind this question was understand whether consumers were able to take away a succinct message from the movie **(Si)**. Participants generally had two takeaways about the film: 1) family, and 2) personal identity. All the responses from the focus groups fell under one of these two categories, showing that *Frozen* satisfies the **simple (Si)** element of the SUCCES model. Those who felt that *Frozen* communicated a lesson about family spoke not only about the importance of family as a whole, but also about sisterhood, sibling relationships and love. There were ten participants who fell in this category. Several of these consumers mentioned decisions to watch the film with another family member, showing the film’s ability to use imaginary characters to make real familial connections **(Con)**.

Another eight participants felt that the film was primarily one about coming to terms with personal identity. Conversations here ranged from debating how the movie is about accepting differences, to conquering fears, to simply “a princess who has self-identity issues.” Finally, two of the twenty participants had never seen *Frozen*. The fact that all consumers who had seen the film expressed one of two takeaways shows that Disney does a great job of creating a straightforward, distinct messaging for this movie **(Si)**.

When asked how they felt about the movie, participants were quick to respond with various **emotions (E)**. The majority of focus groups recalled being happy while watching the film, with one participant describing the movie as “heartwarming” and another saying, “It [*Frozen*] definitely made me happy.” Many of the girls attempted to pinpoint specific emotions to specific characters; for example, a participant explained how Olaf the snowman made her laugh, and how Hans (the evil prince) made her angry. Another participant also mentioned Elsa’s struggles to come to terms with herself, using the terms “loss and isolation.” Finally, two of the participants also noted that the movie transported them back to their childhoods and made them feel like little kids again **(E)**.

To test *Frozen*’s success in using a narrative to create stickiness with consumers, all focus groups were asked to retell the plot of the movie. Participants performed very well in this challenge, aptly describing major events such as the sisters’ disagreement and Elsa’s self-imposed isolation. This shows that the movie masters the SUCCES model element of **story (St)**.

Throughout their discussions, two of the focus groups also debated the merit of *Frozen*’s distinctive plot as compared to previous Disney films. One group conversed about the values that Disney traditionally communicates, using the word “wholesome” repeatedly to describe the brand. This group noted that *Frozen* is a standout from older films in that it stars a strong-willed princess (Elsa) who, instead of falling in love, spends the course of the movie learning who she is on her own. Another group reached a similar point in their conversation, with one participant saying, “I remember liking how it [*Frozen*] is not that typical Disney movie in the way that she [Elsa] meets the guy. I don’t know...I liked how there

was a different spin on it.” The recognition that *Frozen* achieves from these viewers regarding its more liberal nature is a win for the film’s element of **unexpectedness (U)**. However, it is important to note that participants still have mixed feelings about the strong legacy of Disney’s brand. One participant commented, “It [*Frozen*] was more progressive than Disney movies, but it also wasn’t...because there’s the whole part where she [Elsa] still transformed into a beautiful, done-up creature. All of a sudden, she [Elsa] gets into a skin tight dress and stuff. It is more progressive than in the past movies, but it still has a lot of ideological issues where they [Disney] still place a lot of value in appearances.” *Frozen* may be the first film of many to breach Disney’s usual conventionality when it comes to character roles, but it is clear that the brand as a whole still has a ways to go before it will truly be able to surprise viewers with its modernity.

The following chart compares *Frozen*’s stickiness with that of the Disney brand as a whole.

Table 6 – *Frozen*’s Stickiness Based on Consumer Testimonials

	SUCCES Model Elements of Stickiness					
	Simple	Unexpected	Concrete	Credible	Emotional	Story
<i>Disney (brand)</i>	x		x	x	x	x
<i>Frozen</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x

Based off the testimonials given in focus groups, *Frozen* is an example of how Disney animation uses specific products to increase the brand’s overall stickiness. Consumers in these focus groups do not associate Disney with the element of surprise (**U**). However, discussions on the movie *Frozen* shed light on the fact that consumers do perceive Disney’s latest product as an attempt to push the brand’s traditionally conservative boundaries. The more radical characters and messaging contained in *Frozen* are an example of how Disney may be attempting to evolve the place it has in the minds and hearts of consumers. The growth seen here is the last missing piece of the stickiness model that the brand needs to master.

Frozen Music Perception

In addition to learning about consumer perception of the film as a whole, it was also essential to explore consumer reactions to *Frozen*'s music. Due to both the critical and mass acclaim that the songs achieved, the music in this film adds a significant dimension to the film's overall stickiness. In the focus groups, participants themselves acknowledged this; eight of the ten focus groups mentioned either the words "music" or "songs" throughout the course of discussions. Participants mostly mentioned the music when talking about the film's popularity. Over and over, the music's permeation through social media in the form of YouTube and Snapchat was brought up by participants not only when describing their first interactions with *Frozen*, but subsequent interactions after seeing the film. Two participants also brought up Idina Menzel as a reason for why the song *Let it Go* is so appealing. "The music was so huge. People latched onto that song [*Let it Go*] and the message. I think part of it is that I really like Idina Menzel and she's brilliant," said one. Overall, it is evident from discussions that the song's recognition among the masses helped pique the interest of consumers, generating expectations for the quality of both the film and its soundtrack (Cr).

To test the stickiness of Disney's music as framed by the SUCCES model, five of the ten focus groups were selected to listen to two songs; *I See the Light* from *Tangled*, and *Let it Go* from *Frozen*. Participants were then questioned about their perception of the two tracks. The consumer testimonials gathered in these focus groups will now be analyzed and compared to the critical song analysis conducted earlier. Ultimately, the goal is to better understand successfully (or unsuccessfully) music might have enhanced the stickiness of either film.

The first song that participants listened to was *I See the Light*, which is the Oscar-nominated romantic duet from *Tangled*. Three of the five focus groups had never seen the movie *Tangled*, and were hearing the song for the first time. When asked what the song was about, all participants struggled to remember. One asked, "Something about having your troubles lifted away?" (Wrong; the song is about Rapunzel and her love interest Flynn "seeing the light" and viewing the world differently once they fall in

love.) In another focus group, two participants who had both seen the movie debated about the song's message. Ultimately, they used what they remembered about the plot to guess at the song's lyrics. The conversation that took place is reproduced below:

Participant 1: Ummm I think it's trying to say... I think she [Rapunzel] ... like I... so...

She's got that horrible mother.

Participant 2: Well she [Rapunzel] was stolen right. And the hair glows.

Participant 1: And she sees that guy, Flynn. He's got the crown.

Participant 2: And now he's taking her back to her parents. That's... Was that after she chopped off her hair?

Participant 1: So "seeing the light" is like a....

Participant 2: She's getting to see the world a bit... It's new to her...

Participant 1: I think the song means that she's finally –

Participant 2: Experiencing things. Life.

Participant 1: Falling in love.

The roundabout way in which participants arrived at their conclusion shows that the message is not memorable. Not only were participants unable to verbalize a concise takeaway from the song (**Si**), but they also did not feel the song told a **story (St)**. Nor did any participants make connections between the song and aspects of their own lives (**Con**). This pattern was seen across multiple focus groups, as all participants struggled to recall the song's message.

When asked how they felt while listening to the song, participants noted the song's sweet and gentle nature. One listener said, "The song was pretty subdued, it felt like background music, pretty boring. I guess maybe it was supposed to be calming, but at the same time it kind of put me to sleep." Other participants gave similar reactions, calling the song "calming and soothing." The neutrality of responses here can be attributed to the song's slower pacing and its quieter volume. The almost uninterested responses from consumers, however, shows that while the song did produce **emotions (E)** in

listeners, these feelings were not strong enough for the song to be memorable. A different participant said that the song felt “uplifting and optimistic,” but was still unable to recall any specific lyrics or message from the track. It is clear that while *I See the Light* generates emotions amongst listeners, these **emotions (E)** do not necessarily guarantee stickiness if other elements in the SUCCES model are neglected.

The chart below shows the elements of the SUCCES model that the song possesses. The critical analysis previously conducted is now compared to the consumer perception as seen in focus groups:

Table 7 – Tangled Music Stickiness Based on Consumer Testimonials

		SUCCES Model Elements of Stickiness					
		Simple	Unexpected	Concrete	Credible	Emotional	Story
<i>I See the Light</i>	Critical Analysis	x		x	x	x	
	Consumer Testimonial					x	

It seems that, although the song appears to possess many elements of the SUCCES model on paper, these elements do not translate well to consumers. Of course the focus groups studied in this paper represent only a miniscule fraction of consumers that Disney appeals to. However, the testimonials given in these groups give valuable insights to areas of disconnect. In the future, Disney could use this knowledge to better understand the components of music that can create a particularly sticky song or film.

Although *Tangled*’s music did not achieve SUCCES with consumers, focus groups did respond very positively to the hit song *Let it Go* from *Frozen*. It is important to note that all focus groups asked to listen to this song had already seen the movie, and thus might already possess a stronger connection with the song. One participant, before the song began, said, “This is like the ten thousandth time I’ve heard this.” Several of the participants jokingly sang or hummed along to the song as it was being played, exemplifying the music’s stickiness.

When asked about *Let it Go*’s message, participants were quick to respond. One used words from the song itself to describe the song’s lesson: “Let things go, like don’t worry about things you can’t

control... You are who you are, so you just have to let some things go.” All the participants spoke about this “letting go” as being the central theme to the song. Another consumer used different words to voice the same moral: “Elsa is shedding all her concerns about what people think.” The ability of listeners to verbalize a succinct takeaway from this song shows that *Let it Go* successfully conveys a **simple (Si)** message to the audience. When discussing what the song meant, some participants also compared their own lives to the character Elsa and her ability to let go. The following exchange took place in one of the focus groups:

Participant 1: I love her [Elsa] when she’s up there. Cause she just doesn’t care. We always care about what other people think. I could never do that.

Participant 2: I think that’s what we aspire to. Which is why it [Let it Go] resonates too.

Participant 1: Because that’s what we’re always told: be strong, independent women... But there’s always social expectations.

Usage of the words “we” and “I” above show that the participants related strongly to Elsa and her situation, despite still envying her independence. Clearly, this song depicts very realistic emotions that audiences are able to connect with (**Con**). The emotional aspect of this song is one that is evident from focus group responses as well. Speaking about their feelings when hearing the song, participants touched on happiness and empowerment. One listener called *Let it Go* a “pump up song” and added, laughing, “You could work out to that.” In sharp contrast to the sleepy and somewhat indifferent reactions to *Tangled*’s more placid *I See the Light*, participants expressed feeling strong and energized (**E**). This is due to *Let it Go*’s inherent structure. *Let it Go* is a faster-paced song and uses an interplay of major and minor keys to create drama and anticipation. These compositional qualities evidently enhance the song’s emotional resonance with consumers, which in turn enhance the song’s stickiness.

Asked whether the song told a story, participants stalled and debated before shaking their heads. “I don’t think it really tells a story, I think... I don’t know. I don’t think so. I think it was just more describing a situation. There wasn’t really a plot line so I wouldn’t say it was like a story,” one participant

said. Other focus groups discussed how the nature of song describing a “state of mind” and being “about emotion but not plot.” Thus it appears that *Let it Go* does not capture the final SUCCES element of **story (St)**.

Below is a chart comparing a critical analysis of the song with the consumer testimonials generated by focus groups:

Table 8 – *Frozen*’s Music Stickiness Based on Consumer Testimonials

		SUCCES Model Elements of Stickiness					
		Simple	Unexpected	Concrete	Credible	Emotional	Story
<i>Let it Go</i>	Critical Analysis	x	x	x	x	x	
	Consumer Testimonial	x		x	x	x	

From the above summary, it is evident that *Let it Go* is more successful at conveying each element of the SUCCES model into a relationship with consumers than its predecessor, *I See the Light*. The relative abilities of these two songs to employ the stickiness model may help explain their resulting popularity, and also the popularity of the films as a whole. *Frozen* is Disney’s best-selling and most memorable animated product to date. It is for this reason that studying the elements of this movie that resonated most with consumers – such as the plot and music – can give marketers valuable insight into how to create even stickier products in the future.

Disney’s Formula for Stickiness

What makes Disney sticky? The answer to this question begins with an understanding of stickiness itself. Without the deconstruction of this concept into the essentials of the SUCCES model, there would be no foundation off which to build a formula for Disney’s stickiness.

Disney is sticky because it employs the elements of simplicity, unexpectedness, concreteness, credibility, emotion and story. Not all the elements are incorporated all the time. In fact, both critical analysis and consumer testimonials have revealed that one or two of the elements are often missing. However, it is the presence multiple elements, working together in an animated film, that help create the movie success which ultimately lead to Disney's overall magnetism.

Few companies have a brand equity as powerful as Disney. It has taken many years for Disney to build a legacy of venerated family entertainment with its consumers, and the ability of this ninety-two year old company to stay true to its values while staying afloat of the latest societal trends is magical – to say the least. Thus far in this paper, an analysis of the film *Frozen* has shed light on how consumers recognize Disney's continued attempts to adapt its messaging to the evolving standards of society. But aside from its ability to create relevance with consumers based off each new product, Disney also has another advantage. This company is one that makes an early presence in the lives of consumers. Truly, Disney is a lifelong brand. And this adds a unique dimension to Disney's stickiness that has thus far not been addressed.

As a brand that plays a huge role in the lives children, does part of Disney's appeal come from its history with the consumer? The next chapter of this paper will address the question of whether an early brand presence in the lives of consumers enhances the ability of that brand to stay sticky throughout that consumer's life.

CHAPTER 3: Examining Disney's Early Presence in Consumer Lives

Aside from the many elements in the SUCCES model, Disney also has another secret behind its sticky success. Much of Disney's appeal can be attributed to its early presence in the lives of consumers. This chapter endeavors to shed light on Disney's involvement throughout various stages of a consumer's lifetime. Firstly, an overview is provided of the current research regarding the effect of childhood memories on brand cognition. Next, an examination is performed of Disney's touch points with consumers during early childhood. Lastly, this chapter will reveal the consequences of Disney's early presence, by conducting a study to investigate the connections that young adults possess with the brand today.

The Relationship between Brands and Childhood Memories

The challenge of a marketing manager is to align the brand's values with the needs and wants of the consumer. To this end, marketers are constantly checking the pulse of their target consumer groups to stay in tune with the most current marketplace desires. However, marketers often overlook the notion that brand perceptions can be far more deeply rooted than the latest print ad or TV commercial. Much of the research in the last decade indicates that a consumer's perception of a brand is actually established during early childhood, if the brand makes a significant presence during the consumer's life at that point in time. Remarkably, these early brand impressions can still resonate astonishingly well with the consumer as he/she ages. The next few paragraphs examine several studies which look into the effect of a strong brand impression during childhood.

Firstly, according to a 2004 research study by Kathryn Braun-LaTour and Michael LaTour, the impacts of long-term advertising have been an under-explored area in the past. Most companies, despite having long-term strategies in place, prefer to focus on shorter term campaigns to generate continual interest with consumers. This practice has stemmed from the belief among advertisers that each ad is stored independently in the consumer's memory. According to this belief, any failure to recall that particular advertising message is due to an inability to recall the cue leading to that particular memory. In recent years, this conservative view has been overturned by some in favor of a new view. In the new view, a consumer's experience with a particular ad is not independently stored in the memory. Instead, each new experience interacts with other information already present in the consumer's memory – for example: other ads, previous experiences with the brand, or even word of mouth information about the product/brand. This theory is known as the spreading activation model. This model proposes that all concepts and ideas in a consumer's mind are linked via a memory network. Whenever a consumer recalls one particular memory, all the concepts linked to that memory become active. Under this theory, all the “active” ideas linked with a particular brand are known as the *brand schema*. A brand schema is very dynamic, and it constantly affects how consumers process incoming information about the brand, both consciously and subconsciously. Thus the entirety of a consumer's portfolio of experiences with a particular brand, even experiences dating back to childhood, help to frame the way the consumer interacts with the brand today (LaTour & Braun-LaTour, 2004).

In their 2004 study, Braun-LaTour and LaTour found evidence to support the spreading activation model. When the subjects in their study were exposed to new messaging from an unfamiliar source, networks with similar memories were activated, and the subjects attributed the source of the messaging to a brand they were already familiar with. For example, consumers who had grown up with Metlife commercials using Charlie Brown characters mistakenly identified Metlife as the source of a separate commercial with the same animated characters, when source was actually Hallmark (LaTour & Braun-

LaTour, 2004). These results give valuable insight into the idea that early childhood exposure can be the key to creating a powerful brand schema.

Another study was performed in 2007 by Braun-LaTour, LaTour and Zinkhan to learn more about the impact that childhood memories had on brand meaning. In this study, childhood memories were broken down into two main types: earliest memories (EMs) and defining memories (DMs). EMs are memories from early childhood that usually predate the age of ten. In many cases, subjects may be unable to perfectly recall these memories, and they inevitably fill in gaps with a projection of their current personality or lifestyle. The importance of EMs was first verbalized by G. Clotaire Rapaille, a French anthropologist who studied childhood memories extensively through use of projective techniques. Rapaille explained that the first time a person learns the meaning of a word, he/she “imprints” on the word and creates a mental connection with it that is used every other time the word is accessed. Thus, some of our interactions with products today are rooted in memories and definitions that we created as children. Stories from our childhood become a frame of reference which we use to decide what products/brands to consume (LaTour, Braun-LaTour, & Zinkhan, 2007). In some ways, EMs embody the elements of the SUCCES model previously shared in Chapter 2. Since EMs are the first imprinting tools used by children when learning, these memories must exemplify messages that are both **simple (Si)** and **concrete (Con)** in nature. As childhood memories, EMs can also contain **emotional (E)** and **story (St)** elements. Thus EMs are inherently sticky in nature.

On the other hand, DMs, or defining memories, are memories created during adolescence. During this period of life, the consumer begins to develop a sense of self, and makes consumption decisions that consciously reflect their identity. DMs tend to reflect the sense of purpose and identity felt by a consumer (LaTour, Braun-LaTour, & Zinkhan, 2007). Research from Huang and Yu in 1999 also backed up this theory. Huang and Yu found that during young/middle childhood (ages zero-twelve), children made more concrete brand associations, i.e. were able to recall which products and brands they owned. Children in adolescence, however, connected the brands in their life more to the idea of “self-concept”; they evoked

the idea of a brand personality, or reference group affiliation, when describing the brands present in their lives (Huang & Yu, 1999). Like EMs, DMs also exemplify several elements of stickiness as dictated by the SUCCES model. Since DMs are more complex in nature, the formation of these memories potentially involves the elements of **unexpectedness (U)** and **credibility (Cr)**. These elements require the more engaging thought process that is associated with DMs. For example, in order for an event to be unexpected, one must already possess a conscious sense of anticipation. The liveliness of mind needed to question an idea's credibility is another example of the mental maturity aligned with DMs. In both cases, unexpectedness and credibility are rooted in an awareness of one's needs and wants, which involve the sense of self-concept. Since almost all memories involve some aspect of **emotion (E)** or **story (St)**, DMs also represent these SUCCES components as well.

How can marketers use the study of childhood memories like EMs and DMs to drive their brands to success? Research shows that studying childhood memories can provide valuable insight into consumer desires that can be incorporated into both product strategy and advertising. In their 2007 study, the LaTours and their researchers listened to subjects tell stories and recount memories from their childhoods. During analysis, researchers noted that it was of utmost importance to observe the language, emotion and tone used by each subject. By paying attention to these cues, it was concluded that positive EMs towards a particular product reflected the emotions that people returned to repeatedly, or "core emotions," dating back from childhood, that underlay a product. This information tells a marketer how the consumer currently perceives their brand. On the other hand, it was discovered that DMs reflected the goals and aspirations of the subjects (LaTour, Braun-LaTour, & Zinkhan, 2007). Thus, DMs provide key insights into where marketers can align their brand with consumers in the future. Using both EMs and DMs, marketers can incorporate the relevant images and life themes from their consumers' childhood memories into future products that will heighten the chance of these products to become sticky to consumers.

Disney's Presence in Early Childhood

Perhaps more than any other brand, Disney animation has made a name for itself by targeting consumers in the childhood demographic. Even without considering the destination-based offerings that Disney provides for families and their kids (i.e. Disneyland and other theme parks), the brand has a multitude of touch points that it uses to establish a connection with consumers in the early years of their lives. For the purpose of marketing its animated films, Disney uses a three-pronged strategy that consists of entertainment, toys, and self-identity. These three angles will now be explored through a critical analysis of Disney's product offerings.

Since its inception, Disney has been known as an entertainment brand. Entertainment is at the core of Disney's most iconic business: studio animation. Entertainment is also the most prominent method through which the brand has been able to appeal to children. Walt Disney Animation Studio was founded in 1923, and released its first film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, in 1937. Since then, the studio has released films with gradually increasing velocity. Between the years 1992-1994, the years in which all focus groups participants were born, Disney released three films. By the time all participants were graduating from elementary school ten years later in 2004, the studio had released forty-five more animated features – more than quadrupling the rate at which films were being released. In addition, seven of the forty-five films over this ten year period were sequels, meaning that the brand endeavored to continually capture a repeat audience. Thus, back when today's young adult generation was still in elementary school, they were likely exposed to an animated Disney product multiple times a year, throughout the course of several years. Not only did Disney have the chance to incorporate elements of the SUCCES model with each new film, but the frequency of film releases no doubt means that the brand permeated the lives of consumers as children. Disney had many opportunities to become part of consumers' lives through EMs throughout these years. The success of the brand in generating tremendous

emotional equity can be seen in the breakthrough ticket sales from features such as *Lion King* in 1994 (which became the highest grossing animated film of its time), *Toy Story 3* in 2010 (a Disney-Pixar collaboration which broke *Lion King*'s records), and *Frozen* in 2013 (which, at \$1.3 billion, broke records set by both *Toy Story 3* and *Lion King*). The successive record-breaking ticket sales of all three animated films have given Disney the opportunity to reinforce again and again the strength of its brand. This repeated exposure most likely creates an extensive network of positive memories (the spreading activation model) that is accessed by the consumer each time he/she perceives a new Disney animation – strengthening the stickiness of Disney's brand as the consumer grows older.

But to children, what really makes Disney films so magical is not just the film itself; it is the many opportunities children still have to interact with their favorite characters after the movie is over. Disney Consumer Products is a substantial part of the company when it comes to playing a role in the lives of consumers as children. Not only does Disney sell licensing rights to toy manufacturers such as Mattel, Jakks Pacific, and Hasbro, but the Disney Store is a fairy tale wonderland for young children looking to keep their fantasies of animated characters alive. These toys account for innumerable touch points with child consumers – in 2013, Disney brands generated a record \$40.9 billion from licensed merchandise (Graser, 2013). That year, in just one season of sales after the movie *Frozen* was released, toy maker Mattel raked in \$500 million in revenue from the sale of toys featuring the film's characters alone. In fact, Disney influences much of the growth in the toy industry with its perfected formula of releasing princess films before those same princesses are brought to life on shelf in dozens of toy stores across the country (Townsend & Palmeri, 2014). The wide array of playthings available to a child Disney consumer are mostly gendered, including dolls and plush toys of princesses for girls, and video games featuring various beloved animated characters for boys. Everyday accessories such as bags, totes, lunch boxes and backpacks featuring the most popular Disney characters are also available, showcasing the accessibility of Disney's animation long after the movie has been seen in theaters. Each of these belongings prolongs the lifetime of a film, enabling it to survive for months and even years beyond its

practical two-hour duration. In this way, Disney is able to interact with children as they are creating some of their earliest memories, setting the tone for positive brand interaction not only in childhood but hopefully into adulthood as well.

The last, and most powerful, way Disney interacts with its consumers is through self-identity. Every Halloween, hundreds of thousands of little girls flock down driveways in Disney princess costumes. Even on non-holiday occasions, Disney films have inspired young girls across the country to dress up as Disney royalty (Townsend & Palmeri, 2014). This long-lasting and deeply-rooted emotional connection comes from the ability children have to identify with animated characters. The princess franchise is one that has truly escalated in the last fifteen years. In 2000, Andy Mooney, a former Nike executive, arrived at Disney and noticed that there was a substantial gap between what Disney was making available to consumers and what these consumers – hundreds of little girls – wanted. After watching a Disney on Ice show and seeing girls dressed as princesses everywhere, Mooney realized that Disney's target audience was already projecting character identities onto themselves, yet Disney offered no licensed, franchised way to help children achieve their desired princess identities. "All we did was envision a little girl's room and think about how she could live out the princess fantasy," said Mooney of his initial idea. "What type of bedding would a princess want to sleep in? What kind of alarm clock would a princess want to wake up to? What type of television would a princess like to see?" In this way, the first princess identity accessories were brought to life. It is remarkable to note that this first line of items was released without a marketing plan, focus group research, or even advertising – and still, it achieved immediate success (Orenstein, 2006). Through its films, Disney had unknowing generated demand for this franchise, and now the brand was finally satisfying the hunger it had created. The **credibility (Cr)** of Disney characters alone was enough to launch these products into success. The Disney princess trend, which was just surfacing in the early 2000s, caught the tail end of childhood for the young adult generation of today. More than one focus group participant mentioned dressing up as Disney characters, or owning Disney princess accessories such as bedding, a mirror, and a music box. The ability of these

memories to resonate with consumers now, over a decade later, is evidence of the stickiness of DMs. The home décor and costume products Disney offer are truly the core of the brand's power to interact with their consumers through self-identity. Owning costumes and home goods is different even from owning toys; dolls and plushies may be well-loved forms of fun and games, but they still represent distant, third-party characters. On the other hand, princess accessories like *Frozen* themed bedding or Elsa pajamas truly enable the consumer to embrace the identity of their favorite character – to *become* that character, in a way.

The self-identity phenomenon can certainly be relevant to boys as well as girls. However, the Disney branded franchises that have interacted most with the today's young adult generation are primarily princess products. The reason for this can be easily discovered through a brief examination of historical context. At the time when the young adult generation of today was growing up in the 1990s and early 2000s, female princess characters had already existed for decades and generated enormous traction with young girls. *Snow White* was released in 1937, *Cinderella* in 1950, and *Sleeping Beauty* in 1959, just to name a few. Meanwhile, masculine Disney characters were largely absent from both the Disney film and animated film scene. Perhaps the closest comparison that can be made between the Disney princess phenomena and similar male character hype would be Disney's entrance into the superhero world, which was marked by the release of *X-Men* in 2000 and the *Spider-Man* in 2002. These films were also supported in stores by costumes and home décor products that would have enabled boys to identify with characters the way that girls identified with the princess franchise; however, it is important to distinguish these gendered products as two separate offerings. *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* are both action films released by Marvel Studios, which would have likely increased awareness of the Marvel brand rather than the Disney brand. Thus, from a self-identity perspective, Disney can be observed to have made a stronger brand presence during childhood for the young women (rather than men) of today.

The phenomenon of self-identity is one that exemplifies the defining memory (DM) theories put forth by French anthropologist G. Clotaire Rapaille. By dressing up as and embracing the Disney

franchise, children are projecting traits that they admire in Disney characters onto themselves. As children mature and begin to more consciously develop a more concrete self-concept, they may gradually grow out of the Disney obsession in favor of other brands. However, Disney will always be associated with the defining moments of a consumer's life. Over time, this can create either a disconnected and dated perception of the brand, or lead to positive feelings of nostalgia. Both possibilities are investigated in the study performed below.

Study of Subconscious Relationship with Disney

It is apparent that Disney maintains a significant presence in the lives of consumers as children. But how does this early presence build the foundation for a mature connection with the brand as the consumer grows out of the target audience? The purpose of this study is to answer this question by exploring the tensions present in the relationship that young adult consumers possess with the Disney brand today.

To complete this study, a sample of twenty students (ten males and ten females) was taken from the undergraduate student body at The Pennsylvania State University. This sample is identical to that used previously in the SUCCES model study, and the participants were recruited in the same manner. In this investigation, projective techniques were employed once again to uncover subconscious perceptions. Participants were asked to complete a series of three activities: 1) a word association test, and 2) a sentence completion survey. The activities were completed individually and consecutively by each participant.

Word Association Test

The aim of the word association test is to determine whether the participants' subconscious relationship with the brand is aligned with the conscious relationship that was previously verbalized during direct interviews. For this exercise, consumers were given a list of thirty-three words, each printed on individual flash cards. Participants were instructed to organize the cards however they felt appropriate. The words provided were a combination of adjectives, nouns, and companies, selected to ensure a wide range of possible emotional and practical associations. To test the strength of subconscious brand perceptions against the conscious perceptions previously discussed during focus groups, several of the words in this exercise were taken verbatim from the conversations that took place during the SUCCES model study. Such words are highlighted in the full list below:

Adaptable, agenda, business, childhood, Coca Cola, colorful, corporate, creative, Disney, dreams, family, fresh, Google, greed, happiness, imagination, innocence, inspire, job, love, Microsoft, modern, money, normal, power, pretty, respect, simple, stale, success, timeless, tradition, ugly.

Ultimately, the word association test provided supporting evidence to the positive and nostalgic perception of Disney previously uncovered during SUCCES model interviews. Most of the participants (seventeen out of twenty) made connections between Disney and the highlighted terms taken directly from the previous interview, showing that their subconscious connection with the brand is very similar to their conscious vocalization of the relationship. A small minority (three out of twenty) of the participants did not relate Disney with the highlighted terms at all, but rather connected Disney with words describing corporations such as “agenda,” “money,” or “greed.” These responses will be examined in the paragraphs below. All participants were found to organize flashcards in one of two ways: 1) connecting all words to one another and ultimately creating some type of a web or flow, 2) sorting words into various separate groups. The frequency of words linked or grouped with Disney is shown in the following table:

Table 9 – Word Association Test

Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
Timeless	12	Pretty	5	Business	2
Childhood	11	Inspire	5	Tradition	1
Innocence	11	Microsoft	5	Job	1
Dreams	10	Google	5	Stale	1
Family	9	Fresh	3	Greed	1
Imagination	9	Power	2	Normal	0
Coca Cola	8	Success	2	Modern	0
Happiness	7	Simple	2	Ugly	0
Love	6	Adaptable	2		
Colorful	6	Corporate	2		
Creative	6	Agenda	2		
Respect	6	Money	2		

All of the top words used (except for “Coca-Cola”) were words taken from direct interviews with the participants, showing that participants generally possess the same subconscious relationships with the Disney brand as they consciously realize. The word “timeless” shows that the brand is sticky, and indicates the accessibility that consumers still feel towards the brand (**Con**); “childhood” also signifies that the brand played a tangible role in the participants’ early lives (**Con**). These two terms reinforce the hypothesis that part of Disney’s stickiness with young adults is rooted in the brand’s strong presence during the early stages of life. Without the brand’s ability to take part in the EMs and DMs of participants, it is unlikely that either of these flashcards would be linked with the brand. The term “innocence” is a connecting descriptor which reinforces the association that participants feel between Disney and their childhoods, as innocence is often associated with naivety and youth. Moving further down the list, “family” is a sign that consumers feel a relationship between Disney and their own life

experiences (**Con**). All of these words show that Disney harnesses the element of **concreteness (Con)** to create a sticky, lifelong relationship with consumers.

Flashcards bearing the words “dreams” and “imagination” were also frequently linked with Disney. “Dreams” and “imagination” are both references to the lessons disseminated by Disney movies (**St**). These terms are evidence of Disney’s legacy in children’s entertainment, as the brand has created a name for itself in the business of inspiring its audience. Participants who connected these two cards to Disney feel that the brand can be trusted to provide motivational values through creative and enjoyable entertainment (**Cr**). To this end, both of these words exemplify the company’s success in using **story** and **credibility** to create stickiness. Finally, the “happiness” flashcard was also amongst the most frequently used words. Clearly, participants associate the brand with positive **emotions**, another element of the SUCCES model that works in Disney’s favor.

An interesting trend to note is the frequency of associations made with the Coca Cola flashcard. Words that were often used in tandem with these two companies included “happiness” and “childhood,” showing that both brands have a history of positive memory networks with participants starting from an early age. Further investigation into the connection between these two brands could be an interesting exploration that will be addressed in the conclusions section. Disney was also occasionally connected to Microsoft and Google, although at a lower frequency. In these cases, participants usually organized their flash cards by isolating all four companies (Disney, Coca Cola, Microsoft and Google) from the set before placing other flashcards in groups under one of these four headings. Thus Disney shares an exclusively emotional connection with Coca Cola, but shares a deductive connection with all four companies.

As mentioned before, three of the twenty participants did not connect Disney to any of the highlighted words taken from SUCCES model interviews. These participants were discovered to have less personal and more objective perceptions of the Disney brand; all three connected Disney with the other companies (Coca Cola, Google and Microsoft) or business-related words such as “corporate,” “money,” and “power” (Appendix A-C). Here, practical word associations were made based off concrete

qualities of Disney as a company, displaying a more mature understanding of the business world. These associations show that these participants may not have interacted with Disney as frequently during childhood, and may have a less developed network of early childhood memories associated with the brand. This undermines the ability of Disney to be a memorable brand to the participants as young adults. The lack of SUCCES elements felt by participants in this case is another barrier to Disney's memorability. Together, these two weaknesses result in a lack of stickiness for this type of consumers.

Overall, the word association test demonstrates that Disney had a strong early presence in the lives of most participants. For the consumers that experienced Disney in their childhoods, the brand successfully uses **concreteness (Con)**, **credibility (Cr)**, **emotions (E)** and **story (St)** to maintain stickiness even today. On the other hand, a small minority of participants did not feel strong connections with the brand. This is a result of a lack of interaction with the brand from a young age. For these participants, Disney is not perceived to possess any elements from the SUCCES model, and thus is not a particularly sticky brand.

Sentence Completion Exercise

After completing the word association test, all participants were also asked to fill out a sentence completion exercise. The aim of this study is to uncover subconscious perceptions of Disney through visualization and projection techniques. Each sentence in this exercise is designed to gain insight into the participant's perception of Disney's target audience, Disney's values, and the participant's own relationship with the Disney brand. The sentences provided were left intentionally vague, giving participants the freedom to interpret and imagine meanings as they wished. Pictures were also encouraged, although none were received as responses. A copy of the complete exercise is provided below:

1. *Disney is...*

2. *Disney could never be...*
3. *If Disney was a person...*
 - a. *(Would Disney be a boy or girl? Young or old? What kind of music would he/she listen to? How would he/she dress? Etc.)*
4. *When I watch a Disney movie...*
5. *When other people watch a Disney movie...*
6. *The typical Disney consumer is...*

This study was extremely useful in uncovering varying subtleties in the brand perception that participants were not able to vocalize during direct interviews. The most insightful part of this exercise was sentence number three – *If Disney was a person...* To analyze the results of this study, it was necessary to group the participants according to their responses for question number three. This classification was highly conducive to analysis, as participants provided the most distinctive, yet categorizable responses to this question. After grouping the human projections of Disney, responses from other parts of the exercise were compared to gain further insight into relationships with the brand. In this way, commonalities were discovered between participants who had provided similar human projections, and generalizations were drawn on their perception of the Disney brand as a whole.

Participants are grouped according to those who imagined Disney's persona as 1) a young boy, 2) an older man, 3) an older woman, 4) a young girl. These categories have been ranked in order of Disney's brand stickiness (participants in Group 1 feel Disney is the stickiest; participants in Group 4 feel Disney is the least sticky). Tensions were uncovered throughout the classification process, and two participants were not able to be placed in any of the above groups. These two participants will be addressed last.

In general, the greater majority of participants were able to give a coherent visual of Disney's personality. Although these visuals are varied (hence the need for four separate categorizations), they show that overall, Disney disseminates **simple (S)** and consist messaging. However, none of the

participants reflected any elements of **unexpectedness (U)** in their perceptions of the brand. Thus these focus groups find that in general, Disney does well in incorporating **simplicity** but not **unexpectedness**.

Those consumers for which Disney has the most stickiness (Group 1) expressed their perception of the Disney persona as a young boy. The boy is characterized as having a very positive demeanor; he “brightens every room,” is “always willing to help a friend,” and is “super friendly and awesome.” The boy’s dress is a bit ambivalent. One participant wrote that he would be “fashionable, but not flamboyant” while another participant characterized the boy as preppy. However, overall, boy Disney appears to be clean-cut and well liked. These are largely positive traits which show that Group 1 identifies Disney as a brand with confident and vibrant energy. When asked to imagine what Disney could never be, respondents wrote “insulting,” “controversial,” “evil, corrupted or deceiving,” and “unethical.” Descriptions of this nature illustrate the perception of Disney as a brand that is pure, untarnished, and even inspirational (**E**). For this group, the youth of Disney’s persona is a positive trait, and reflects the energy of the brand. Participants in Group 1 do not discriminate against the brand for its artificial myth-making. For instance, when asked to complete the sentence *Disney is...* responses reflected an acceptance of Disney as an entertainment brand, but also portrayed the company as a talented and creative one. One participant wrote, “Disney is a company with the faces of many characters” (**Cr, St**). Another wrote, “Disney is happiness” (**E**), and a third responded, “Disney is childhood memories, universally loved, timeless, classic, but has evolved over time” (**E, Con**). Overall, the SUCCES elements present in these responses (**credibility, concreteness, emotion and story**) indicate that Group 1 probably experiences Disney as a sticky brand. Each of these participants has seen *Frozen*, meaning that Disney animation still has a sway over their entertainment choices. And although these consumers did not find the storyline or values to be greatly applicable to their lives (one participant used the term “not life-changing,”) they spoke highly of the film’s entertainment merit during their interviews for the SUCCES model. Thus, for Group 1, Disney still maintains a current and fulfilling relationship.

The second way that Disney was personified was as an older man (Group 2). This image is likely inspired by Walt Disney, the founder of the company. All participants in Group 2 mentioned that the man would be dressed formally, in one case “like a wealthy man from the 1950s (suspenders, trousers, bowtie? Occasional cane).” This persona, though feeling dated and perhaps conservative, still exudes an image of tradition. An older man or grandfather figure is likely associated with **emotions (E)** of respect and esteem. Added to this initial image is the perception that those who grew up with Disney are lifelong consumers, a perception that all the participants in this category alluded to. Therefore, although Disney is a brand that caters towards childhood, its appeal is in some ways classic. One person wrote that the Disney consumer is “someone who has probably been watching Disney movies since childhood,” showing that the brand is perceived as having legacy and history (**Cr**). Another participant simply wrote the Disney consumer is “Everyone! Usually moms, dads, older relatives and younger children. Also teens who visit the parks” and a third wrote that it is “the parent of a child.” Again, these responses suggest the perception that Disney can be present through multiple stages of a person’s life (**Con**); Disney products are not necessarily dated, but rather have a somewhat classic and iconic appeal. Disney’s connection with Group 2 can be described by its image as an old, yet timeless, brand that is likely built a long relationship with the consumer. As with the previous group, Disney does not have a particularly significant presence in the lives of Group 2 participants. When watching a Disney movie, participants wrote that they felt nostalgia and that “it’s sort of a trip down memory lane.” These feelings show that consumers view the brand as a reminder of past times – nevertheless, the reflective nature of these emotions do reveal underlying affection for Disney (**E**). The brand is sticky for these consumers because of its everlasting, iconic quality. Like Group 1, this group perceives mixed elements of the SUCCES model. Participants provided responses which displayed strong underlying **emotions** and **credibility**, but lacked **story**. The level of **concreteness** felt by these participants is mixed; this group does not feel that Disney is pertinent in life now, but believes that the brand will become relevant again later in life. Thus Group 2 feels that Disney is, in general, a sticky brand. All the consumers in this group had seen *Frozen*. Although not all

participants watched the movie by choice (one saw the movie while working at a daycare center), all spoke positively about the movie and described enjoying the experience.

Group 3 participants envisioned Disney as an older woman. The details on the older woman are somewhat conflicting between participants. In regards to the woman's dress; one participant said that the woman's style would be "old, classical hippie chic," while another participant wrote "Disney is an older female – slightly disillusioned... She would dress like a classically attractive, sharply dressed but inherently feminine middle aged lady – think a combination of conflicting fashion advice from Hilary Clinton and Michelle Obama." Still a third person characterized the older woman as an aunt, "dressed formally most of the time." These descriptions, though radically different, all attribute Disney as being a brand that is somewhat out of touch. This is possibly due to a perception that Disney is a childhood brand which no longer has much relevance to the everyday lives of the participants (**Con**). Nevertheless, the aged and feminine quality of the Disney persona also adds a nurturing, generous dimension to the brand. Multiple participants in Group 3 wrote that when watching Disney movies, they felt happy or calm. The same emotions of happiness were reflected onto other consumers as well; when asked to fill in the sentence *When other people watch a Disney movie...* participants wrote "They enjoy the experience," and "They generally feel happy and satisfied" (**E**). This shows that although these consumers may perceive a certain disconnect with Disney's products today, the brand is still associated with overall warm feelings. It is also interesting to note that participants in this group have a practical perception of the Disney Company and its operations. Responses to the sentence *Disney is...* all included the Disney being portrayed as an entertainment company that is successful and well-known (**Cr**). This shows that participants here do feel a level of disconnect with the brand – perhaps they have grown out of Disney's offerings. However, participants also reflect on the brand with warmth and perhaps enjoy Disney products as a nostalgic reminder of childhood. All of these participants had seen *Frozen* and enjoyed the experience, although one mentioned that "I would probably only watch it with other people, and I wouldn't suggest it." For Group 3, Disney possesses a few stickiness elements (**credibility, emotion**) and

lacks others (**story, concreteness**). As a result, Disney is not likely to be a particularly sticky brand, except as an artifact of the past.

The last, and most popular, visualization of Disney was that of a young girl. This group experiences the least amount of stickiness with Disney. This group is labeled Group 4, and consists of six out of twenty participants. Group 4 members noted that the little girl would wear a dress, look like a princess, and listen to happy music. The characteristics embodied by this character attribute a certain naivety to Disney's brand personality. In other parts of the sentence completion exercise, the participants described Disney as "a company that focuses on entertainment" and "a large company that produces movies and has theme parks" (**Cr**). These responses indicate that while the participants in this group respect the scale and success of Disney's operations, they feel a certain disconnect from the brand. They recognize that Disney creates staged attempts to evoke nostalgia or happiness in others. For the sentence beginning *Disney could never be...* participants wrote that Disney could never be "dark," "sad," "rated R," or – most tellingly – "real, no matter how much it [Disney] tries to bring itself to life." Group 4 understands the myth-making, story-telling legacy of the company while not quite buying into the brand themselves (**E**). These participants currently do not possess a strong relationship with Disney, and not necessarily feel that Disney is relevant in their current stage of life (**Con**). The lack of SUCCES elements present in the perceptions that this group of participants has towards the brand shows a lack of stickiness. Group 4 participants are not often consumers of Disney products; in fact, two of them had never seen *Frozen*. The little girl persona that participants visualized when thinking of Disney reveals that for them, the brand is a thing of the past. This consumer group represents one way that young adults today may view the Disney brand.

Below is a chart that ranks each group in level of stickiness, as depicted by the SUCCES model:

Table 10 – Disney’s Stickiness Based on Subconscious Relationship

	SUCCES Model Elements of Stickiness					
	Simple	Unexpected	Concrete	Credible	Emotional	Story
Group 1	x		x	x	x	x
Group 2	x		x	x	x	
Group 3	x			x	x	
Group 4	x					

From this summary, it can be seen that Disney’s stickiness as a brands ranges broadly depending on the consumer’s subconscious relationship with the brand. The relationships that consumers possess subconsciously vary more than the conscious relationships that consumer spoke about when discussing the brand in earlier focus groups. This shows that much of Disney’s brand perception cannot simply be rationalized or explained away, but rather is rooted in the spreading activation model that dates back to the early stages of participants’ lives. The key to Disney maintaining relevance with consumers now lies in the brand’s strong presence early in life. For a marketer to fully understand the scope Disney’s stickiness as a brand, it is necessary to look past the most current Disney products, and delve into the complexities of Disney’s historical relationship with consumers.

Thus far, participants have been grouped in order to broadly examine different types of relationships that Disney holds with young adult consumers. These relationships have been analyzed using the SUCCES model of stickiness. However, there are two participants in this study who were not placed in any of the four categories. These two participants displayed conflicting perceptions of the brand. The conflicting perceptions not only involved contradictions of the SUCCES model elements, but also prevented the participants from belonging completely to one group or another. Both consumers gave responses which showcase underlying tensions with the Disney that is a result of a mature relationship with a childhood brand.

The first participant visualized Disney as either a young girl or boy, and reasoned that the brand radiates a feeling of youth because many of the messages in Disney movies “are a bit unrealistic.” The participant went on to explain, “They remind me of a young person who maybe hasn’t experienced as much in life.” This response displays a pragmatist view that the values often touted by Disney are somewhat unrealistic. It appears that this participant’s views clearly align with Group 4, which classified Disney as a little girl. Like this participant, Group 4 experienced a strong disconnect with Disney, and did not quite buy into the idea of the magic behind the brand. However, closer examination of other parts of the participant’s exercise reveals a few ideas that conflict with the Group 4 perception. Most notably, the participant wrote, “Disney could never be just a company. In my mind, Disney is much more. It helps bring families together.” This thinking suggests a desire to be inspired by the brand, an **emotional (E)** response that conflicts with the previously disengaged answer. But attempts to classify the participant in other categories did not seem quite right either. Group 1, the group that characterized Disney as a young boy, seems to be the next best fit: Group 1 imagined Disney’s persona as being a male role model, an opinion that reflects the brand’s positive energy and inspirational values. This seems to resonate with the participant’s view of Disney being more than just a company. But on the other hand, this view contrasts with the level of detachment that the participant reflected in her projection of Disney as a young person who is naïve about the realities of life. The inconsistent perceptions of Disney provided by this participant mean that she does not fall directly under any one group of consumers investigated by the study thus far.

A second participant also displayed somewhat conflicting responses to Disney throughout the course of the study. When asked what Disney would be as a person, this participant was not able to settle on one image; writing instead “This varies for me. Sometimes Disney is a whimsical old man, sometimes she’s Julie Andrews ish, sometimes he’s a young tech geek, sometimes a little girl!” These various personas reflect different dimensions of the participant’s relationship with the brand, many of which may be a combination of mature retrospection and childhood memories. Other parts of the exercise echoed ambiguity as well; when completing the sentence *Disney is...* the participant wrote both “nostalgia” and

“access to times,” terms which seem to be polar in concept. Nostalgia implies a brand that exists primarily in the past, while access to times seems to refer to a brand that is well-connected with present culture. This response shows a conflicting perception of Disney’s **concreteness (Con)** as a brand. In addition, the participant showed a practical disconnect with the brand’s magic when writing that, while watching a Disney movie, she felt “gripped by the characters and their involvement in the plot,” a response which reveals a mature understanding of the orchestrated elements to Disney’s entertainment process. This is further reinforced by the participant’s response to the sentence *When other people watch a Disney movie...* which reads: “I think they are also sold, either subconsciously or consciously.” This reflects the idea of an audience “buying into” Disney, again alluding to the fact that Disney is very much a strategic company. This perception is one that potentially aligns well with that of Group 4, the consumers who visualized Disney as a little girl and were able to see through the brand’s illusion. Nevertheless, a different viewpoint is reflected in the participant’s response to the sentence *Disney could never be...* Here, the response reads: “wrong (controversial, corporate, impersonal).” These descriptors seem to divulge a desire to believe in a brand that stands for something more than just a film company.” This response fits more with the viewpoints of Group 1, the consumers that saw Disney as a youthful boy, untarnished and very much inspirational. Again, here is a conflict with the **emotional (E)** element of the SUCCES model.

Both of the participants mentioned above showed varying degrees of conflict in their perception of the Disney brand. What is the significance of this? The underlying tension present throughout the responses of these two participants is indicative of a struggle to evolve the relationship with a childhood into an adult one. These two participants provide insight into the difficulties a brand may face when attempting to maintain a lifelong presence. Disney is strongly rooted in the early stages of life. For consumers like the two participants above, the brand likely plays a huge role in the EMs (early memories) that are some of a one’s earliest passive recollections, and the DMs (defining moments) which are the conscious beginnings one’s of self-identity. The significant presence of Disney early in life makes the

brand sticky to consumers as they age, but may pose some difficulties when the brand attempts to transition in a relevant way from childhood to adulthood. The two participants mentioned above both grew up with Disney, but now face some subconscious confusion in redefining a brand that they have likely outgrown, but that once was crucial part of their self-concept.

Disney's Early Presence in Consumer Lives

Stickiness is a simple concept. However, understanding what makes a brand sticky is far from simple. Not only can stickiness be broken down into formulaic elements of the SUCCES model, but a brand's early presence in consumer lives can also drastically increase the chances of a brand to stay memorable for years to come. It is difficult to evaluate exactly how much childhood memories impact on a product/brand's stickiness in later life. But it is clear that the effect is a positive one. The projective techniques used in the study above have uncovered that for young adults, much of Disney's present-day perception is actually rooted in the past. More than anything, Disney is a brand of nostalgia. The company leverages this wistful, sentimental brand image to attract repeat consumers of new products. With each animation that is produced, Disney seeks to remind young adult consumers of the beloved movies and characters they grew up with. The challenge for Disney lays in the necessity of masterfully evolving a childhood relationship to one that is still relevant to an adult. In some cases, this may be difficult.

And yet, for a brand like Disney, a little subconscious tension in the consumer relationship can be a good thing. Certainly, it means that consumers still feel a strong association with the brand in one way or another. Despite their struggle to express a coherent perception of the SUCCES model elements, these conflicts show that consumers are actively attempting to integrate the brand into their young adult lives. And this means that from a stickiness perspective, Disney still comes out a winner.

CHAPTER 4: Conclusions and Future Research

The question asked at the beginning of this paper is: What makes Disney sticky? To provide an answer, this paper has undertaken a journey to define the concept of stickiness. Stickiness was deconstructed into the elements of the SUCCES model. The first half of this paper was devoted to using this model to evaluate the stickiness of the latest Disney products, *Tangled* and *Frozen*. The analyses were then compared to consumer testimonials of the brand, gathered through use of focus groups. Both critical analyses and consumer testimonies revealed that a greater mastery of SUCCES model elements is indicative of greater product and brand stickiness.

The second half of this paper shed light on the influence of an early brand presence in consumer lives. After examining the research that already exists in this area, an overlook of Disney's presence in the young lives of children was provided. In addition, a study of the subconscious relationships that consumers share with the brand was conducted. The responses showed that Disney has varying levels of stickiness with different types of consumers. The brand's greatest struggle to stay sticky lies in the challenge of gracefully evolving from childhood brand of the past to a current and relevant adult brand.

As a whole, the findings of this paper indicate the reasons for Disney's stickiness are twofold: 1) Disney incorporates many elements of **simplicity, unexpectedness, concreteness, credibility, emotion** and **story** into its products; and 2) Disney animation lays the foundation for lifelong stickiness by being a strong brand presence early in consumers' lives. Both of these dimensions are needed to fill in the gaps behind why adult consumers are inspired to revisit the brand of their childhood again and again, flocking to theatres to see films like *Frozen*, even as they grow out of the target audience. Together, these two dimensions of stickiness contribute to the Disney animation's widespread recognition and financial success.

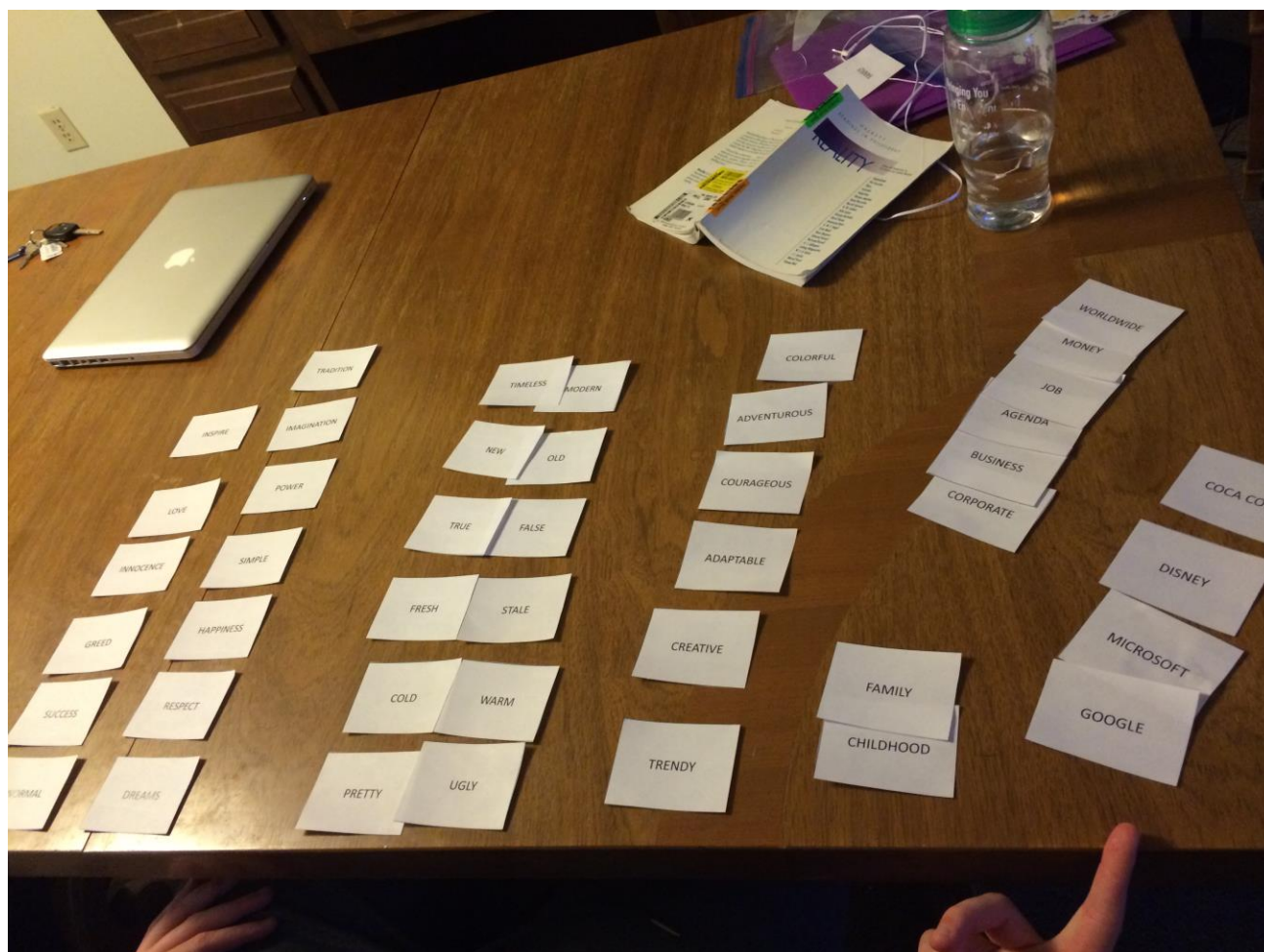
An important finding in regards to the elements of stickiness is Disney's apparent lackluster showing of **unexpectedness**. Except for critical analysis and consumer perception of the film *Frozen*, Disney was seldom viewed in connection with the element of surprise. *Frozen* is an exception. This latest film showcases an unforeseen emphasis on character development that seems somewhat a departure from Disney's traditional recipe, despite the fact that the film still has a certain sparkle and polish that allows it to sit with the rest of Disney's enchanting animations. As such, *Frozen* is a revolutionary offering from a company attempting to become more dynamic. Historically, however, Disney has focused on highly predictable storylines that offer wholesome, family-friendly entertainment. The fact that the company has been highly successful – and sticky – in years past is a testament to the possibility that unexpectedness may not be a crucial element of stickiness. Perhaps a brand like Disney can leverage familiarity to create a habitual appeal to consumers. The concept of what exactly habit is, and how it could influence consumer behavior, is an area for further research.

The findings of this paper open other doors future research as well. The unexpected connection between Disney and Coca Cola is an area that begs further exploration; perhaps similarities that the two brands share can be jointly leveraged to generate greater relevance with more consumers. Another area that could be expanded is consumer research. It could be extremely valuable to study not only young adults, but those of all ages – parents, grandparents, adults without children, etc. The focus groups and projective exercises could be recreated on a grander scale to gain insight into how perceptions of the Disney brand might create value in different ways throughout the consumer's entire life. Lastly, a deeper look into Disney's polarizing effect on consumers of high and low culture capital could be a valuable research project. The brand has built an empire of entertainment on universally positive values that no one can object to, like happiness and nostalgia. And yet people do object to it. Disney entertainment is shunned by consumers who feel that Disney has nothing to offer but artificially pre-packaged, manufactured happiness. Further research into the backgrounds of consumers with high and low culture tastes could offer insight into the alienating effect of Disney's attempt to create mass appeal.

Few brands can conjure up the kind of loyalty and magic that Disney inspires. Over the years – indeed, over the generations – this brand has remained buoyant and tireless. Disney has grown from its humble beginnings as a modest animation studio to become a sensational trendsetter at the forefront of entertainment for all ages. The evolution of Disney’s palace logo (from a simple striped castle on a blue background, to a beautifully terraced palace silhouetted against a violet-periwinkle sky) is fitting to represent the brand’s journey. Yet throughout all of this, Disney’s has stayed true to its original vision. The purity of spirit championed by this brand is still the same today as it was in the 1930s. After all, at the end of the day, Disney understands the deepest desires of its consumers. As kids and as adults, we all want something to believe in. Disney is that something. Founder Walt Disney understood this. He said: “You can design and create, and build the most wonderful place in the world. But it takes people to make the dream a reality.”

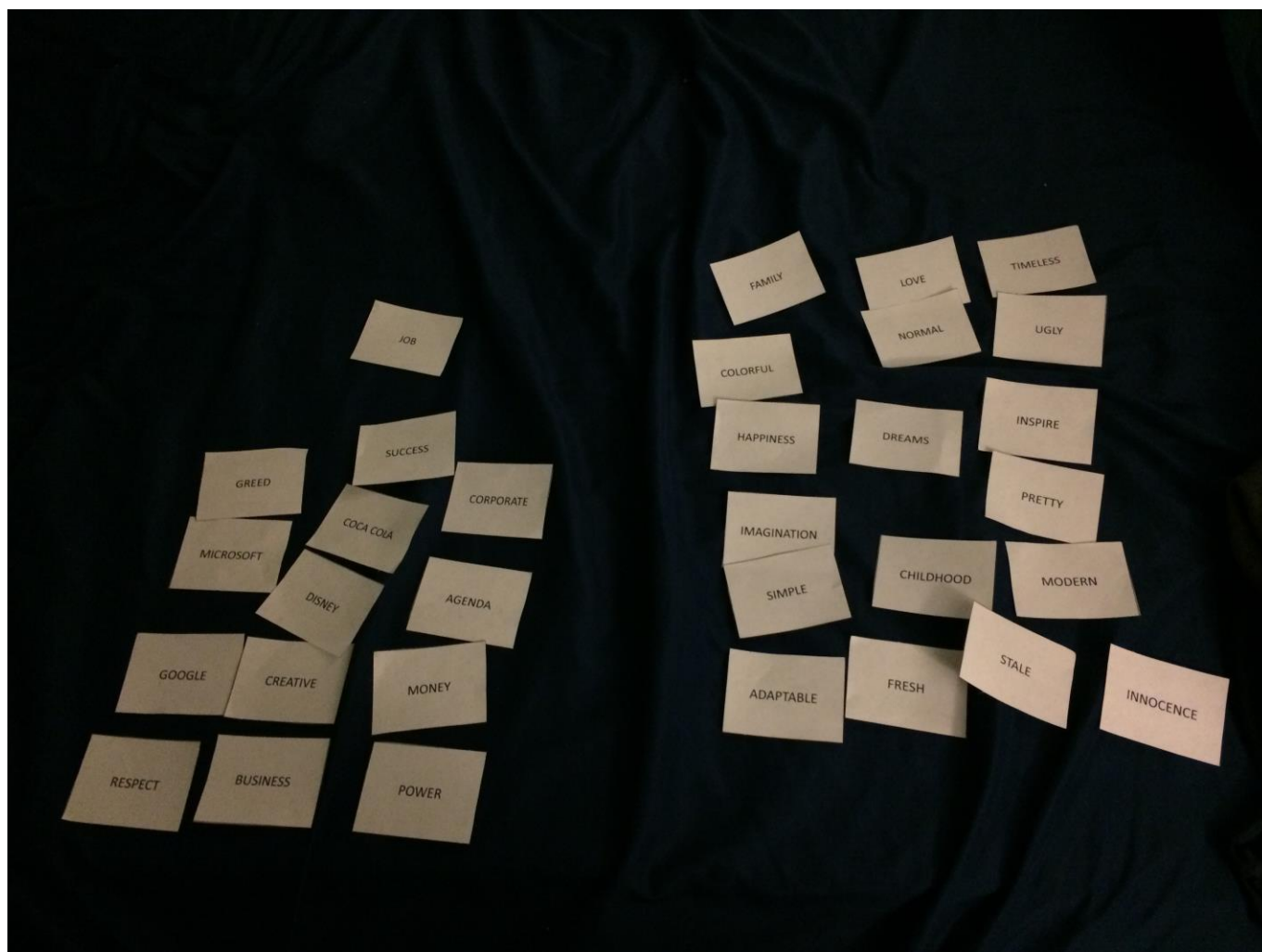
Appendix A

Word Association Test – Participant 1



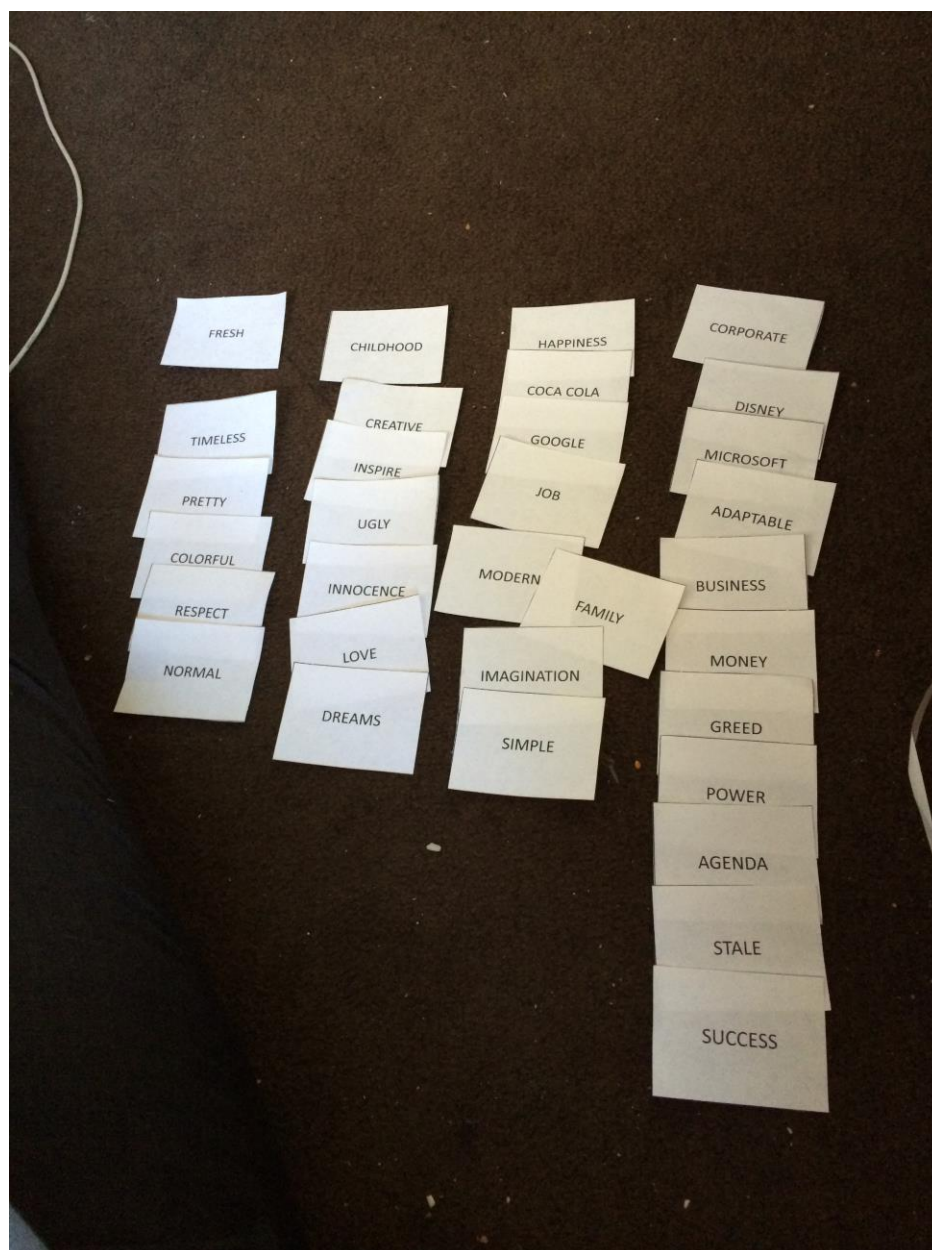
Appendix B

Word Association Test – Participant 2



Appendix C

Word Association Test – Participant 3



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EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University

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Smeal College of Business, Schreyer Honors College

Expected Graduation Date: May 2015

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- National Merit Corporate Scholarship (\$2000/year), Academic Excellence Scholarship (\$3500/year)
- 2nd Place Deloitte 2014 Penn State Case Competition

WORK EXPERIENCES

Unilever

Charlotte, NC

Sales Analyst Intern

June 2014 – August 2014

- Analyzed product data to make a shelving recommendation to increase deodorant sales by \$100,000+
- Identified a \$600,000+ future business opportunity resulting from increased product availability
- Presented findings to business partners at a third party retail managing company
- Developed \$866 million recommendation to introduce a new men's product shelf into the retailer Bi Lo Holdings, working closely with the category and Southeast region retail managers
- Extrapolated insights on men's business by using internal/external databases (Nielsen, Merlin)
- Shadowed sales reps in-store to learn the obstacles that prevent products from reaching the shelf

Neutrogena Corporation, a Johnson & Johnson Company

Los Angeles, CA

Brand Management Co-op

June 2013 – Dec 2013

- Managed creative communication with ad agency J3 to create free-standing coupon insert
- Collaborated with the team to create 7 concepts on Blue Line Cleansing Wipes to be tested in consumer focus groups for future promotions
- Led the PR portion of the United Way charity campaign across the Neutrogena campus, ultimately raising \$75,000+ with 95% employee participation
- Conducted research into the US/Asia men's skincare markets using Euromonitor
- Analyzed syndicated data (Symphony IRI, Euromonitor) using Excel to provide competitive analyses
- Responsible for operating internal systems to push 8 new products through the new product development cycle

The Daily Collegian

University Park, PA

Sales Account Executive

August 2012 – May 2013

- Managed client relationships with 10 local State College business owners
- Met daily quotas, generated monthly plans, and directed the creation of newspaper ads
- Signed \$6100 in annual contracts with clients at the start of the '12-'13 school year

Penn State Learning Center

University Park, PA

Writing Tutor

August 2012 – May 2014

- Worked one-on-one with students to improve writing techniques in many subject areas
- Mentored tutors-in-training

LEADERSHIP

Global Business Brigades

Ekumfi Ebakwa, Ghana

Consultant

May 2014

- Volunteered on an economic development service trip to offer financial advice to native families
- Collaborated with translators to present sustainable business loans to the village elders

Delta Sigma Pi Professional Business Fraternity

University Park, PA

Rose Dance Chair

September 2013 – May 2014

- Coordinated annual spring formal by negotiating \$1000 payment plan with the venue
- Responsible for collecting money from and ordering party favors for 100+ attendees