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ORGANIC CONTENT, SOCIAL MEDIA, AUTHENTICITY, AND THE CONSUMER LENS

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the cultural background, brand tactics for success, and consumer perspective on effectively using organic and native content to create a business empire through social media. The study opens with a literature review examining the cultural relevance that has lead to today's normative state for digital advertising and branded social media accounts. Delving into a specific example, an extensive case study on the small, fashion company Kiel James Patrick (KJP) is presented. The case study analyzes KJP's substantial success through organic content on social media. In addition, a quantitative study examines how consumers view and react to the various elements identified as the success behind the KJP brand, with a focus on consumers connections to brands and perceived levels of authenticity through social media. The literature review, case study, and primary research add to our knowledge and perspectives on how content and social media can best engage and connect to consumers.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction: The Changing Landscape

The question of advertising's influence on culture and society has long been debated. One stance claims that advertising is merely a reflection of cultural trends, while the other states that advertising plays an active role in creating, influencing, and forming culture. Each opinion is true to varying degrees and has been represented throughout time. However, while culture and advertising are often intricately linked together – both are ever present to the changing trends and influences of society. These factors have changed the face of digital media, and by extension, the face of advertising.

I have compiled a variety of sources that report and examine the declining levels of trust among the American people, why the levels of trust may be falling, and how this connects to the media, businesses, and brands. From here, I examine rising trends in individualism and how this has been represented within advertising. This lends itself into the next section which examines the American people and advertising's linked identity by critically investigating the connection between authenticity, identity, and brands.

An extensive case study on the small, fashion company Kiel James Patrick (KJP) is then presented. The case study analyzes the connection between authenticity, identity, and the KJP brand with a focus on organic content within social media. Additionally, a quantitative examines the consumer perspective on the elements identified as the success behind the KJP brand. There is a focus on how consumers form connections to brands and how consumers perceive levels of authenticity within social media. The literature review, case study, and primary research add to

our knowledge on the most successful ways to engage and relate to consumers through social media.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Confidence in Institutions**

In the United States, there has been a dramatic decline of the general population's confidence in institutions- ranging from the government and big corporations, all the way to the media. In 2017, a mere six percent of Americans were reported to trust large corporations "a great deal" ("Confidence in Institutions", 2017). In contrast, eighty-two percent of Americans reported themselves as dubious about big corporations. Even small or local businesses have reported declining numbers as compared to historical levels of confidence. While significantly higher than the base percentages for large corporations, only sixty-eight percent of Americans reported having "some trust" in these smaller institutions ("Confidence in Institutions", 2017). Overarchingly, falling levels of trust is not a new trend to 2017.

The decline in trust plays a dramatic role in today's methods of communication, particularly when examining levels of trust in the press and television. A forty-year study done by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago funded by the National Science Foundation examined "societal change and the growing complexity of American society" from 1972 to 2014. Through a series of interviews, the study demonstrates that Americans' confidence in television and the press has continuously trended downwards, reaching all time lows in 2014. Here, only seven percent of adults stated that they had confidence in the

press while a staggering forty-four percent stated they had “hardly any.” The percentages for confidence in television are remarkably similar. These record low percentages are the result of years of falling levels. In 1976, confidence in the press was at its peak with a high of twenty-eight percent. This was closely mirrored by confidence in television, which peaked in 1977 with a high of eighteen percent. Confidence levels in major companies follow a similar trend (Smith & Son, 2013).

Statistics demonstrating declining percentages of trust across the American population introduce the question of why. “Declines in Trust in Others and Confidence in Institutions Among American Adults and Late Adolescents, 1972–2012” critically examines the factors likely to have shaped American society’s shift. The study cites sociocultural factors such as, values, trust, and generational differences as responsible for the change. The factor most relevant for the purpose of this study is trust. The study defines trust in institutions (also called confidence in institutions) as a “belief in the reliability, honesty, or ability of institutions” (Twenge, Campbell, & Carter, 2014).

Initially examining generational differences, the study notes that an overall trust in others noticeably dropped among both American adults and twelfth graders between the 1970’s and 2012. More specifically, between 1972 and 1974, forty-six percent of American adults agreed, “most people can be trusted.” In contrast, between 2010 and 2012, the surveys found a twenty-eight percent decrease in this attitude. Matching this trend, between 1972 and 1974, fifty-one percent of American adults agreed, “you can’t be too careful in dealing with people.” By the surveys in 2010 to 2012, there was a twenty-two percent increase in adults who agreed with this statement. The studies among the younger generation, twelfth graders, replicated the declining pattern of trust in others revealed by the adults. However, the younger generations results had

even lower base numbers at the study's inception in 1972 and also lower end results by approximately ten percent. While the base numbers difference is noticeable, no significant effect was found from generational differences. Therefore, the study concludes that all generations of Americans are exhibiting similar trends in declining levels of trust. Consequently, distrust is most likely embedded in the existing time period, rather than a result of generational differences (Twenge, Campbell, & Carter, 2014).

Moreover, social capital levels among millennials reflect this finding. Social capital can be defined as trust in others and confidence in institutions. Recent millennials were much lower in social capital than the Boomers or GenXers were when they were at the same stage (Gupta, 2016). As a result, the landscape and bar for trustworthy advertisements being met by the consumer with a healthy dose of skepticism has never been higher.

### **Rising Individualism**

Coinciding with falling levels of trust, individualism within the American people has been rising. Greenfield (2013) conducted an analysis of over one million books from 1800 to 2000 to examine the changing psychology of culture. The study reveals how American culture has dramatically transformed. The principle of the study is based on the idea of word-use frequencies. Cultural features are indexed by these word-use frequencies, which in turn reveal what is prioritized by a culture or population. The study finds that in present day, there is far more of an emphasis on "choosing" than being "obliged" and "getting" than "giving." Moreover, very recently in the last forty years of the study there began to be a shift from the word "act" to the word "feel" being more prevalent. The study defines these increases in word usage as

representative of three individualist cultural adaptations in the United States (Greenfield, 2013). These cultural adaptations have been reflected in varying degrees within different methods of communication.

### **Embracing Societal Changes**

These cultural factors lead to re-shaping advertising tactics, methodologies, and most importantly, determining what will resonate most with the consumer. Often, advertising transforms new cultural values into “symbols of a new phase of consumerism” (“Understanding Media and Culture,” n.d.). There are countless examples of companies who have attempted to appeal to consumers on new levels that reflect the changing times. One such example falls with Apple, which embraces individuality while smashing through conformity and distrust. More specifically, Apple’s 1984 advertisement redefined advertising in terms of cultural norms. As a spot that was aired only once during the Super Bowl, the advertisement dramatically challenged conformity and positioned Apple’s products as a tool in doing so (Taube, 2014). The tactics used for this campaign message deeply resonated with consumers. More significantly, the spot ushered in a new age of advertising themes and meaning. This began to be observed in methodologies and tactics, not just overt messages. Today, Apple still utilizes the same core themes and messages. Multiple brands have followed suit in presenting their products as representations of cultural values.

## **How Corporate Distrust is Reshaping Advertising**

Today, the face of advertising is vastly different than the scene that met Apple's initial breakthrough. Online, more than fifty-three percent of consumers use some form of ad blocker. Even more staggeringly, only seven percent of consumers view advertisements in a positive light (Morrison, 2017). A lack of trust plays a large role in the increasingly negative filter that advertisements are being viewed through. Consequently, many factors are cited to contribute to the lack of trust of advertisements, specifically. Prevailing thought points to the extreme clutter and excess of advertising, the awareness of corporate greed, and new channels of information being readily available (Alton, 2017).

Consequently, there has been a rise in popularity of online peer reviews, native ads, inbound marketing, branding, and transparency (Alton, 2017). All of these tactics allow the consumer more power in what they are viewing, where they get their information from, and overall, to be more of a skeptic. Perhaps as a result, social media is resonating more and more with consumers as opposed to traditional advertising avenues. In fact, in 2012 the scales shifted and social media was found to have a higher lead-to-close rate than outbound marketing (Volpe & Miller, 2012).

## **The Quest for Authenticity**

One lens to view this change through is the consumer's increasing focus on finding information and sources they can trust, relate to, and believe to be authentic. "The quest for authenticity in consumption: consumers' purposive choice of authentic cues to shape experiences outcomes" examines what leads to successfully portraying these three factors. The study

discovered that consumers focus on cues that convey authenticity (“what is genuine, real, and/or true”). Moreover, the focus is driven by a want to take different identity benefits (“control, connection, virtue”) (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010).

## **Native Advertising**

Native advertising is a prime example of endeavoring to be perceived as authentic. One study examines how consumers process native content. In order to do so, the study measures sponsorship transparency and ability of the consumer to recognize native content (Wojdyski, Evans, & Hoy, 2017). Another study by Wojdyski and Evans (2016) extends upon this and studies how native content is recognized by the consumer. More significantly, the study notes that recognition leads to more negative perceptions of the original message by consumers (Wojdyski & Evans, 2016). Finally a study by Wojdyski (2016), delves further into native content and perceived authenticity. The study examines how consumers recognize and perceive native advertising, identifying factors that lead to more negative perceptions. The study posits that identification of an article as advertising leads to decreased opinions of article quality, a more negative attitude toward the sponsor, in addition to a decreased intent to share the article. These negative factors are facilitated by both the levels of persuasion attempted and the perceived levels of deceptiveness of the article (Wojdyski, 2016).

Further exploring how a lack of authenticity leads to negative perceptions, “A tale of two sources in native advertising: Examining the effects of source credibility and priming on content, organizations, and media evaluations” continues to evaluate native content. The study focuses on if native advertising negatively affects perceptions of brands and the media outlets due to the

potential hidden persuasive intent and often unknown content sources (Wu et al., 2016). Most significantly, the study found that priming consumers before introducing native content would increase both recognition and positive perceptions.

## **Organic Content**

What might be the difference between organic content and native advertising, particularly from the consumer lens? “The “convergence of commerce and content,” as the advertising industry calls it, “has meant that the production of content is even more entwined with advertising than ever before” (Taylor, 2009, p.1). An increasing amount of content is produced with attempts at concealing overt branding. Native advertising is successful in melding with or blending into organic content, without the majority of consumers immediately or directly noticing, however, it is paid for (Shewan, 2017). Organic content is not paid for to be distributed, thus finding its way into the consumers feeds or consumption naturally.

Van Reijmersdal et al. (2016) explore how associating sponsored content within organic content effects persuasion. The study, “Effects of disclosing sponsored content in blogs: How the use of resistance strategies mediates effects on persuasion,” evaluates consumer’s purchase intentions and brand attitudes in order to do so. The study discovered that when consumers are aware of the fact that something is attempting to persuade them, the consumer uses both cognitive (counter arguing) and affective (more specifically, negative affect) to reduce the given persuasion. This is highly significant when exploring different effects of overt advertising, covert advertising, blended (native) advertising, or simply organic content.

## **Personal Identity Found within Brands**

Moreover, as brands fight to position themselves as more personable and relevant to consumers, consumers begin to identify more closely with various attributes of brands. Elliott and Wattanasuwan (2015) examine the emotional and personable attachment that can form between a user and a brand, and the possible effects of this connection. The study theorizes that a search for self-identity and meaning often plays a deeper role in consumerism. Therefore, it is essential to understand two factors, the purpose and symbolic meaning of goods and the role that brands play. Brand strategy is discussed to be stronger with an inclusion of trust, more depth, and the rising opportunities for mass-market corporate brands to have a unique, personal meaning for individuals (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 2015). Moreover, it is significant to recognize that brand identity is fluid and dynamic brands are the sum of multifaceted social relations (Michel, 2017).

Chernatony (1999) also examines this idea, exploring the need for congruity between all aspects of a brand, a product, and a company – including employees. The article introduces the term of “staff as brand builders.” Stating that the utmost importance in brand building is culture, Chernatony proposes that a homogenous brand identity, with all other aspects relating to the brand matching these behaviors and values, will create a far more powerful brand (Chernatony, 1999).

Moreover, the study highlights the importance of being authentic across and within mediums. In today’s day and age many consumers deeply value feelings of reciprocity. They want to be included not just talked at. “Using Brands to Communicate Self: How Effective Are We?” defines this need for interaction as the value of reciprocity. However, much of “advertising research continues to focus on the solitary subject at the expense of a more social

orientation,” neglecting the value in reciprocal social interactions (Emile, Craig-Lees, & Hyde, 2009). As a result, there is an opening for brands to be more uniquely engaging.

## **Conclusion**

All of these societal factors and changes in advertising content and tactics have come together to play a groundbreaking role in the backdrop that characterizes the company in the following case study. Kiel James Patrick rose from a distrustful consumer base. One that was eager for authenticity, identity, and reciprocal interactions through mediums that they could control, social media. The following case study addresses how the company Kiel James Patrick executes on these foundational tenets to create a successful and unique brand.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Case Study: Kiel James Patrick**

#### **Introduction**

Scenes of bonfires lighting up the sky, yachts cruising over sparkling blue waters, and fall leaves decorating picturesque cottages fill the background. American flags, vintage accessories, and witty slogans are tucked carefully into the corners. Front and center, a pair of slender brunettes and their merry friends, all impeccably clad in ‘just the right amount of ruffled’ high fashion, stand proudly, living the American Dream. This is Kiel James Patrick’s social media

content. Part fairy-tale, part junior Ralph Lauren, the world created within it is both captivating and absurd.

It is also highly successful. Patrick is an up-and-coming fashion business mogul who drives his sales through social media. He, his wife Sarah Patrick, and his team of interns/employees pose within this carefully constructed world, always wearing at least one item from the brand, aptly named after his initials, KJP – using Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and blog posts to share these photos on a daily basis. People want to be Kiel and Sarah, which is what sells the line. With over 559K followers on its flagship Instagram and collaborations with companies such as Tommy Hilfiger and Brooks Brothers, the brand's popularity is rising.

KJP is a prime example of a company that took the increasing popularity of social media platforms by storm – and with a minimal advertising or marketing budget. The brand built its unprecedented and loyal, domestic and international empire through organic content, social media, and carefully constructed collaborations. While the company has grown overtime and thus shifted tactics and image slightly, these three factors remain constant and are the attribution of their success.

## **Company Background**

Where does Kiel James Patrick come from? Based on Patrick's social media accounts, one might think old money, a classy family, and a hefty trust fund that paid for both his ivy education and the startup of his original bracelet making company. However, Patrick is the son

of a detective from Rhode Island and, despite the Ivy League aura he channels, did not finish college.

The brand “KJP” or “Kiel James Patrick” was originally inspired by Patrick’s rebellion towards wearing a high school uniform. Instead of the traditional tie, shirt, and pants required – Patrick began substituting these plain items for colorful, patterned or pastel versions he discovered in his grandfather’s antiquated wardrobe. He began to make a profit when he sold these items to his fellow classmates. After noting this success, Patrick and his fiancée/business partner started their first company “Wicked Vintage.” Here, they perused attics and thrift shops to find vintage clothing they could remake and sell. The couple noted that when they took pictures of the clothing on themselves, it sold better. This finding would prove to be highly significant and become the core insight to their brand. Moving on from Wicked Vintage, the couple began creating bracelets, eventually expanding to belts, bags, shirts, and necklaces (Kurutz, 2014).

The original manufacturing process for the bracelets took place in Patrick’s parents garage. Patrick taught both himself and Sarah how to use his grandmother’s sewing machine. They then used lobster pots to boil the dye into the bracelets and sundry them. First introducing the product at a local festival in Rhode Island, Gaspee Days, the products sold out in one day. The festival is what Patrick cites as the true beginning of their business (Writer, 2015). After that success, they estimated the cost of enlisting local help in creating the bracelets and determined it was too expensive for this stage of their company. As a result, the first several thousand KJP products were handmade solely by the two of them (Coelho, 2016). Continuing to distribute and sell their products to local vendors, the company officially began in 2008 (“Kiel James Patrick,” 2016).

Eventually outgrowing the garage over Patrick's parents home, in 2012 KJP bought, contracted, and created the Kiel James Patrick Factory for approximately half a million dollars. The interior design is a testament to the themes and foundations KJP was founded upon, displaying the timeless era of the Kennedy's with a classic, outdoorsy vibe. The company intends to stay on the Central Avenue at Pawtucket, expanding their factory as they grow. The location is convenient as around ninety percent of their product materials come from their home state, Rhode Island. Even more significantly, the entirety of their materials is from within the United States, allowing the brand to fully claim "American Made" (Coelho, 2016).

As the company gained in size and popularity, their distribution avenues grew from boutiques to national vendors. The first store to officially carry the KJP line was the Pink Pineapple, a Newport, Rhode Island based clothing boutique. When this partnership turned out to be highly successful, real estate companies began expressing interest to partner with the company for an opportunity for their properties to be featured on KJP's Instagram ("Kiel James Patrick," 2016). By the end of 2016, KJP had added Nordstrom, in addition to over one hundred and sixty boutiques to their portfolio (Writer, 2015). In present day, brands such as Brooks Brothers, Vineyard Vines, L.L. Bean, Pottery Barn and Starbucks all have expressed interest and worked with the company.

Today, KJP is well known outside of Rhode Island and has a large market that extends internationally, mainly within China, South Korea, and Southeast Asia. This is the modern KJP. Selling bracelets for forty-five to eighty dollars a piece, in addition to belts, shoes, and clothing, the products are fashionable, well made, and classified as nautical preppy; however, they are not particularly unique.

## **Organic Content**

What sells is the creation of the story behind the brand. Utilizing social media such as [Twitter](#), [blogs](#), and [Facebook](#), with a focus on [Instagram](#), the KJP team lavishly presents the wonderful life they lead while constantly featuring their own product. Patrick describes the brand's aesthetic as, "what I want New England to be: it's a New England fantasy...it's classic American elegance" (Kurutz, 2014). Throughout his multiple feeds, almost every image portrayed is carefully curated as timeless, and could be reasonably placed anywhere within the last forty years.

Multiple comparisons about KJP to Ralph Lauren have been made, with both companies selling "lifestyles" more than "fashion" (Lorenze, 2016). However, the main brand difference between iconic preppy fashion advertisements, such as Abercrombie or Ralph Lauren, and KJP's is the authenticity inherent within KJP's shoots. The photos demonstrate KJP, his fiancée, and his team of twenty-something interns/employees to be living a life based on reality, not a photo-shoot. They presumably have a wonderful time making bracelets, selling their product, and essentially leading the life they created. While it is difficult to determine how much is glamorized and how much is true, they drive their sales through social media based on this 'real' illusion.

## **A New England Love Story**

Woven within the many posts, features, and blogs of KJP's content is a classic love story. Every step of the relationship between Sarah and Kiel has been carefully mapped throughout their feed and intricately linked to the brand. From the couple's first trips together, pet adoption,

engagement, wedding, and even their first child- the story is met by followers with a large amount of enthusiasm and growing loyalty. It is a huge factor in the lifestyle appeal of the brand as it offers something both unique and, that is interpreted as, incredibly genuine. Their followers and consumers are invested in both the couple's and the brand's success. Moreover, these intimate details of their life explode when placed on social media. For example, the couple's wedding photos garnered record highs on all of KJP's social media platforms and were picked up by websites such as *Town and Country*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, *the Knot*, *Huffington Post*, and more (Coelho, 2016).

### **The KJP Team**

While the love story creates appeal and enticement, it is significant to note the two founders of KJP are in their mid thirties, an age range several years above their primary target audience. As a result, in addition to the romance between Sarah and Kiel, KJP's multiple platforms also feature the story of their interns and even their brand ambassadors. The highly photogenic team is strategically closer to their target audience's age is a and natural fit for the brand's image. As Patrick stated, "A lot of the kids who work for us are stylish. We don't tell them what to wear. They know what works" (Writer, 2015, p. 1). However, KJP does provide the interns with free clothing and cars that are appropriate for the company's brand. As a result, photo shoots feature multiple photogenic college age kids. The carefully selected cohort participates in much of the content creation as strategists, production assistants, and, most visibly, as models (Coelho, 2016).

One such example is Sean Gale Burke (48.3k followers on Instagram), a freshman in college who participated in the coveted KJP summer internship, referred to as Camp Foxhawk. From a social media promotion perspective, Sean was both featured on the main KJP platforms, including one dedicated to Camp Foxhawk, in addition to curating his own content on his personal Instagram (Coelho, 2016). While Sean's Instagram content does not reach nearly the same number of viewers as the flagship KJP and Sarah KJP accounts, he manages to garner thousands of likes on product promotions. Sean is just one out of the approximately fifteen young adults that KJP has collaborated with and hired to help promote the brand, all the while learning the craft of the trade and increasing frequency/reach of product viewings.

### **Non-Employees**

The brand does not stop at the story of the company's founders or employees. KJP also has expanded their product line to encompass new details of the founders' lives. For example, shortly after the couple adopted two dogs, KJP created two new Instagram accounts. The dogs' feed features their adventures around Rhode Island and, of course, KJP's new line featuring leather dog collars and leashes. The couple also recently celebrated bringing a son into the world. While their son, Harris, does not have his own account – his adorable smile and J. Crew styled outfits are a constant feature gracing the KJP social media feeds. Overall, KJP treats their social media content the same way a circle of close friends and family would share the intimate details of their life, except all are invited to have a front row seat and be a part of it.

## **Aspirational Content**

KJP's content is not only organic, but also aspirational. In this context, aspiration can be defined as goal-oriented striving to achieve or become something of perceived higher status. Aspirational content is anticipatory, captivates its audience, and draws consumers into the brand. All the while, the product exists within anticipatable reach of the consumer. From a pricing standpoint, the KJP product is an affordable luxury, attainable to the average citizen yet still associated with higher end price points. In other terms, purchasing the product is linked with a higher household income and placed in a luxury category.

It is the mood and expectation of content that keeps drawing the audience back in for a non-necessity. "Aspirational content works by igniting the imagination, the way having a really evocative story read to you as a child used to" (Geier, 2015, p.1). The brand's content differentiates itself from the masses with a storytelling focus that is expressed through unique attributes and authenticity. KJP does not simply sell a product; the company sells an idea, an experience, and a mood. Taking a close look at emotions and experiences that make people feel good, KJP finds ways to amplify how its brand can be instrumental in positive feelings.

The brand uses evocative images and language to create an irresistible story. In order to accomplish this, it is integral that the company understands itself, its audience base, and how to bridge the two together. KJP does a phenomenal job of understanding its brand, appealing to a target audience base that matches these values, and publicizing a team that truly embodies the brand's purpose and values. The connection between the brand's core values and its consumers is authentically conveyed through varying digital media mediums, creating an incredibly loyal consumer base and setting the company apart from other brands.

## **Social Media**

A small, Rhode Island based designer reaching global recognition due to a well crafted brand on social media would have been nearly impossible a decade ago. However, today it is possible for a designer to embody his brand and to spread this reflection organically throughout social media, while reaching a relevant target audience. Moreover, the carefree, fashion forward images that create the story are meticulously crafted and placed on a remarkably small budget. The KJP team is able to produce all of their content in-house, place almost all of it organically, and experience a staggering return on investment because people become invested in the brand's story and products (Coelho, 2016).

Daily visuals are posted to Patrick's social media accounts – Facebook was first, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat became active later. Referring to social media, Kiel stated that, “it was a very easy way for me to market. There are no tricks to it because people speak about what they like. I carried them as followers from platform to platform” (Writer, 2015). In fact, much of KJP's goods are found and promoted by the company's social media followers. There is a strong correlation between the rise of the KJP Instagram account and the brand's sales (Lorenze, 2016).

## **Instagram**

KJP's social media content consists of two flagship Instagram accounts, one from Patrick's perspective and one from Sarah's, his wife. Patrick's account (@KJP) has over 559k followers while Sarah's (@SarahKJP) falls a little behind with 495k. Notably, these numbers are double what they were in 2015. From there, the Instagram accounts branch out to their dogs

(136k followers), the summer intern account (17.7k followers), and their multiple employees, interns, and brand ambassadors. The KJP extended team (employees, interns, and brand ambassadors) have a following ranging from a high end of 64k to a lower end of around a thousand, with an average following in the range of 15k-40k.

The multiple accounts are made cohesive through various features, highlights, and tags. For example, KJP's bio reads "The photographic tale of New Englanders Kiel James Patrick, his darling wife @SarahKJP, baby Harris & dog Bennie documenting their American Dream." Each character in the story of the brand becomes more recognizable as they are featured throughout a variety of the KJP accounts. For example, in the dog's account, Patrick, his wife, and the extended KJP team are tagged throughout many of the posts. Moreover, new products and lines are also carefully featured multiple times across accounts. This crossover is a way to repeat similar messages, thus creating frequency organically within one or multiple mediums.

### **Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat**

Messages are also repeated across mediums. KJP's flagship Twitter and Snapchat accounts maintain a similar balance between entertaining content and unveiled product promotion. However, the Twitter (69.3k followers) accentuates the silly tone Patrick permits glimpses of on his Instagram, in addition to allowing his ideologies to filter through with more frequency. The Twitter also features an increased amount of giveaways and product promotions. Sarah's (@SarahKJP) Twitter (46.9k followers) also allows her a little bit more freedom of personality; however, it maintains a similar same tone to her Instagram with a fashion forward focus. Most of the couple's Instagram posts are dually featured, once again increasing message

frequency for viewers. Both accounts are intended for more of a bottom of the barrel, loyal consumer base- however; Sarah's content is more oriented towards a wider audience funnel than Kiel's.

Snapchat has a similar tone as the Twitter account, however it provides more of a behind the scenes aspect to viewers. This 'look behind the curtain' is a fine line for KJP to walk; as it is crucial the brand maintains its carefully constructed authenticity. The Instagram often features content that ranges from employees packaging orders to fancy dinner parties (Borza, 2016). The feed also often provides 'sneak peaks' of what's to come, whether that's a new event, a new style, or even a new product. This serves a different facet to a 'behind the scenes look at the brand. Facebook (95k likes) fully differentiates itself from the mold and is almost exclusively product promotion, however, these posts still feature KJP, his wife, and the extended team.

## **Other**

It is significant to note that Sarah's Instagram bio strays away from the KJP norm and instead directs the viewer to her blog. The influential fashion blog, *Classy Girls Wear Pearls*, plays a complementary role and is often referenced on KJP's multiple platforms as a more in depth look at the fashion behind the brand. Moreover, Sarah attracts a slightly different audience than her husband. She often has a greater focus on high fashion than solely portraying the KJP product and lifestyle. She brings a unique credibility to the brand through her fashion knowledge and authority. The blog has gained traction since its inception and was rated within the top twenty most influential personal style blogs, due to its high levels of audience engagement

(Indvik, 2016). Audience engagement is a key factor not just to Sarah's blog, but also as a constant across all of KJP's mediums.

### **Audience Engagement and Brand Loyalty**

Through KJP's daily posts, Patrick and his brand become accessible in a way regular ads simply are not. He makes viewers want to not only be him, but be around him. Viewers experience an almost personal relationship with the team and the brand. His product is not necessarily special by itself, but is made special by the story of him, his crew, and how their content is distributed. The carefully cultivated personal feel to their accounts allows consumers and followers alike to feel and, more importantly, act like they are a part of the story. Posts from the two flagship KJP accounts have responses that range from several hundred to several thousand in volume. Examples of typical responses to their posts include comments relating to the posts style/fashion message, supporting the couple or their family, or demonstrating purchase (or wished purchase) intent. The followers demonstrating a future desire to purchase also demonstrate the focus on aspirational content.

### **Social Scrape**

Several examples of significant quotes by KJP's followers best portray this effect. After a social media scrape of comments on Instagram, the consumer interactions reveal four main themes— admiration for the family, desire for the product, admiration for the Instagram aesthetic, and admiration for the overall brand. For example, a millennial woman fondly stated in relation to KJP's expanding family and son, "He's growin' up! Pretty soon he will be running!" While

another millennial woman tagged a friend in a comment and spoke about her desire to win a product in a promotion, “the pearl necklace in photo 4 is beautiful, happy Valentine’s Day!!” A millennial photographer portrayed an admiration for the overall aesthetic, “this photograph is truly incredible”. While another touched on his overall affinity for the brand and the KJP team, “I think that’s beautiful, Thank you, God Bless you, Family, Friends.” Many particularly passionate costumers also include the KJP brand in their blogs. A representative quote of featuring KJP on this medium stated, “But really: the attention to detail is phenomenal, the craftsmanship is off the charts, and the originality is nothing short of awe-inspiring. Like, how can a single company *get me* so well?!” (Larkin, 2017). All of these quotes share a common theme; the followers interact with and are invested in the company. There is a strong connection and reciprocity between the consumers and KJP.

### **Collaborations and Partnerships**

The combination of organic content on social media with partnerships allowed the KJP brand to take off like wildfire for a relatively inexpensive price. Throughout the posts featuring fun, friends, wealth, hard work, and the U.S., KJP and his crew are impeccably dressed in the latest preppy and highly expensive styles. By pairing the KJP product with other items of high fashion, the product is placed on the same level as these esteemed brands. Consequently, KJP’s credibility is further established and the brand gains more awareness.

In 2014, Esquire had KJP take over its Instagram feed during the Kentucky Derby. KJP also completed shoots that involved Van Cleef and Arpels high-end extremely high end jewelry which was later featured on a *Town and Country* magazine online campaign (Coelho, 2016).

Since then, the KJP team has traveled to participate in branding opportunities with large global conglomerates that don't have the same personal touch as a small, flexible business. For example, KJP traveled to Maine for an L.L. Bean photo shoot (Writer, 2015).

Another high-end successful partnership that assisted in launching the KJP brand has been with Tommy Hilfiger. Hilfiger contacted the brand in order to feature KJP's belts and bracelets in the *Meet the Hilfiger's* Campaign. Hilfiger eventually began selling the belts and bracelets in their boutiques. Brooks Brothers also photographed the KJP crew for their catalog in addition to partnering together for bracelets and braided-rope belts.

A relatively unique addition to clothing and accessories partnerships are real estate partnerships. KJP often rents mansions on the coast, such as Martha's Vineyard, for cheap prices. The founding couple then hosts elaborate photo shoots and ostensibly fun-filled events for their friends and co-workers. Lila Delman, luxury properties, and KJP have worked together so frequently, KJP actually runs the luxury property's' Instagram account. Capitalizing upon the original partnership and expanding, KJP has been successfully linked with expensive hotel chains, such as the Four Seasons, in addition to high-end restaurants on the eastern coast. Patrick stated that hotels have said, "Guys this is really great, you're welcome to stay here anytime you want. Because of you, so many people have been calling up and making reservations at the hotel" (Lorenz, 2016, p.1).

## **International Reach**

Despite being entirely located in New England, KJP's reach has expanded throughout the world. For example, for a brief period KJP went viral in Dubai and, as a result, Middle Eastern

sales spiked for three months. Since then, the KJP team has traveled increasingly internationally to participate in branding opportunities with large global conglomerates that cannot exhibit the same personal touch as the small company.

Their surprising international reach has been almost directly attributed to the brand's social media presence, in addition to their accounts leading to multiple high profile collaborations and partnerships. KJP traveled to Japan at the behest of Brooks Brothers (Writer, 2015). In response to KJP's sponsored visit to Japan, Patrick says, "We went out to Japan with Brooks Brothers and did some events and I couldn't believe how much attention we got. It was a wake-up call for us because we realized, wow, the rest of the world really loves New England" (Lorenz, 2016, p.1). After trending in Japan, Patrick's Instagram account and bracelets have become popular in China, Southeast Asia, and South Korea . Other international visits have included Italy, Canada, and a large amount of tropical locations on behalf of brands and hotels who are enthusiastic about the opportunity to be featured in KJP's photos (Lorenz, 2016). As a result, social media also lent a direct pathway to multiple high-end collaborations and partnerships.

## **Criticism**

Throughout the brand's growth there has been criticism that the company preaches that they portray real life, as a main difference from their competition, but in reality does not authentically execute on this promise. While the company has responded by typically staying on course with their branding objectives, when compared to more corporate competition, Patrick often forgoes justifying the company's social media and advertising content in favor of justifying

the products quality. As previously mentioned, all of KJP's products are manufactured in the United States, with entirely American materials. Moreover, a significant portion of KJP's materials is from Rhode Island. In response to a similar belt design being used by Lands' End Patrick states, "I design for myself and am not hired by corporate companies so that they may ship my ideas off to China carelessly in order to make a quick buck, all the meanwhile destroying the diminishing American spirit of industry, originality and entrepreneurship." While social media and the lifestyle/friendships portrayed are up for debate of authenticity, KJP remains stalwart in its stance that the product itself is unquestionably authentic. (Ivy style, n.d.). All of this leads to the question, how do consumers define and perceive authenticity?

## **Chapter 4**

### **Research Method**

#### **Survey Overview**

A quantitative survey was created based upon the themes brought up from the literature review found in Chapter 2 and the case study found in Chapter 3. The survey was used to gain information on what influences a brand's social media content into being perceived as appealing and authentic. The overarching goal of this survey was to further explore how basic behaviors with social media affected brand perceptions and from there, how consumers perceived authenticity. The survey was created using Penn State's authorized version of Qualtrics survey software. The survey was primarily promoted through social media (Facebook); therefore, a convenience sampling method was used.

## **Procedure**

The survey was designed to take approximately 15-20 minutes with approximately 26 questions (see Appendix A) in order to ensure completion. Skip and display logic was used to receive the most accurate results. The survey questions flow from demographics, social media presence/usage, the types of connections made to brands and celebrities/influencers on social media, and, finally, the ways trust and authenticity is perceived on social media. Demographic questions were included to get a better understanding of the sample. The extent and types of social media usage were surveyed to find the most active platforms and analyze if there is a correlation between that and valued types of content. The survey then explored the rationale and motivation for following a brand or a celebrity/influencer on social media. Participants were asked to identify the extent that they personally related to or connected to the brands or celebrities/influencers they follow on social media. The survey also explored the extent to which authenticity plays a role in participant's brand perceptions on social media. Exploring the idea of trust in brands, through social media, is one main facet of this section. The various definitions, applications, and extent of authenticity were then further explored. Finally, content focused questions were used to determine what specifically appealed to participants in terms of a brand's posts on social media.

## **Participants**

There were 125 participants. The survey deliberately focused on millennials, as this is the target audience that composes the majority of the company featured in the case study's social media following (see Chapter 3).

Ages ranged from 15 to 65, while 85.6% were within the range of 19-24 years old. 62% were female and 38% were male. 85% were white, 7% Asian, 4% Hispanic, 2% black, 1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 1% other. 59% were students, 16% were employed fulltime, and 16% were employed part-time.

## **Key Measures**

### **Social Media Usage**

95% of participants reported using social media daily. Of that, 19.09% reported using social media on a daily basis for three hours or less, 31.82% for two hours or less, and 26.36% for one hour or less. The most popular social media platforms to have, in order of highest to lowest, were Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn, and Twitter. The three most frequently used social media platforms, in order of highest to lowest, were Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram. Significantly, 0 participants reported using no forms of social media.

### **Social Media Following**

The majority of participants followed 1-10 brands on social media. More specifically, 23.28% followed 0 brands on social media, 29.31% followed 1-3, 26.72% followed 4-10, 11.21% followed 11-14, and 9.48% followed 15+. Correspondingly, the majority of participants followed 1-10 *celebrities or influencers* on social media. 16.38% followed 0, 30.17% followed 1-3, 25% followed 4-10, 14.66% followed 11-14, and 13.79% followed 15+. Media and

entertainment were the most popular industries to follow, seconded by retail, then travel and hospitality, non-profits, consumer goods, technology, government, education, and healthcare.

### **Motivation to Follow**

In terms of why they followed brands on social media, participants identified receiving entertainment, having an emotional connection to the brand, being interested in the brand's product, service, or industry, and receiving discounts as the strongest factors on a Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. In contrast, 'friends following or liking a brands content' and 'product updates' were the weakest factors in terms of motivation to follow brands on social media. Notably, there was the widest range in responses to "I feel the company represents my identity" with 28.1% expressing some form of disagreement, 21.4% expressing neutrality, and 50.5% expressing some form of agreement (skewing towards "somewhat agree"). Participants also reported a preference for following brands that "tell them specifics about products" over others that "tell them about a lifestyle."

### **Personal Connection to Brands**

On a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7), there was a mean of 4.38 for participants being invested in success of the brands, which they value the most and/or have been following the longest. 55.9% of participants exhibited some form of agreement while 16.7% did not agree or disagree. In contrast, for brands that participants value the most and/or have been following the longest, 57.1% exhibited some form of disagreement with the

idea of feeling connected to other people that comment on or “like” a brand’s posts, while 15.5% did not agree or disagree.

Participants were asked to rate 8 different statements on a scale from 0-100 in terms how the brands they follow represent them on social media.

**Table 1 Consumers Identify how Brands Represent Them on Social Media**

	Mean	S.D.
My personality	54.78	23.8
My interests	74.35	20.25
Causes I care about	61.43	26.75
The way I portray myself to others	50.3	25.83
People I interact with	46.16	24.6
My passions	65.15	26.2
What I deem important in life	57.25	25.07
Things that motivate me	57.26	26.88

Participants also reported the level (strongly disagree to strongly agree) to which they feel that the brands they follow are an accurate representation of their gender, social status, community, culture, and ethnicity. The strongest amount of expressed agreement (44%) to this question was culture. Notably, there was a skew towards agreement to all of these factors with the exception of ethnicity, which had the strongest amount of expressed disagreement (35%).

Participants were then asked to rate the statements, “if a *brand* that I value experiences a positive event, I feel as happy for them as I would a friend” and, “if a *celebrity or influencer* that I value experiences a positive event, I feel as happy for them as I would a friend” on a 5 point scale from “does not describe me” (1) to “describes me extremely well” (5). For both statements, the largest percentages of responses were for “does not describe me” (36.90% for brands, 29.76% for celebrities or influencers). There was an almost even split between “describes me

slightly well” and “describes me moderately well” (50% for brands, 46.43% for celebrities or influencers). While celebrities and influencers (21.43%) had almost double the percentage than brands (11.90%) for “describes me very well.”

### **Trust in Brands**

Participants were asked to rate several statements on a Likert scale of disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Notably, the mean response to “the more open, personal, and important details a brand, celebrity, or influencer shares with me, the more likely I am to trust them” was 5.00, with 74.1% expressing some form of agreement.

The majority of participants (83.1%) stated they were likely (32.1% slightly, 41.0% moderately, and 10.3% extremely) to try something a brand recommends given they trust the brand. In contrast, the majority (65.8%) of participants disagreed (44.7%) or felt neutral (21.1%) with the statement “if I trust a brand to be an expert in a certain industry (for example, a fashion piece), I would also trust their recommendations for things outside of their specialty (for example, a vacation destination).”

Extending upon that, the majority of participants agreed that if a brand breaks their trust in some way they will both stop buying their products (strongly agree 14.1%, agree 35.9%, somewhat agree 29.5%) and stop following them on social media (strongly agree 15.4%, agree 30.8%, somewhat agree 20.5%). Interestingly, participants reported a higher likelihood that they would stop buying a brand’s products than stop following a brand on social media.

## **Perceptions of Authenticity**

Participants were asked to rate several statements on a Likert scale of disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Notably, the mean response to “I prefer to follow brands that seem honest” was 5.59, with 86.6% of participants expressing some form of agreement. Similarly, the mean response to “I am more willing to purchase a brand’s product if its mission aligns with my values” was 5.16, with 74.4% expressing some form of agreement.

Participants were then asked to rate 7 factors, in terms of what makes a brand seem the most genuine to them, in order. “Brand has a cohesive personality” was the least persuasive factor with the largest percentage (50.00%) rating it as seventh. In contrast, “brand values aligns with its product” had the largest percentage (26.92%) for first. “Brand is honest” was second (26.92%). “Brand is trustworthy” was third (17.95%). “Brand is transparent” and “Brand is responsive to consumer feedback” were fourth (15.38%). “Brand is responsive to consumer feedback” was fifth (20.51%) and “Brand doesn’t try to be things it’s not” was sixth (20.51%).

## **Results**

### **Gender Differences**

All calculations were completed through SPSS Statistics. I conducted independent samples t-tests to determine if and where there were significant gender difference in participants’ responses. The first statistically significant gender difference stemmed from how participants identified utilizing social media for finding/buying products. Females self identified as doing more of both. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare if participants found

more products on social media in male and female conditions. There was a significant difference in the scores for male ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ) and female ( $M = 5.06$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ) conditions;  $t(101) = -2.984$ ,  $p = .004$ . Therefore, females agreed more with the statement, “I find new products on social media.” An independent samples t-test was then conducted to compare willingness to buy products on social media in male and female conditions. There was a significant difference in the scores for male ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ) and female ( $M = 4.72$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ) conditions;  $t(101) = -2.202$ ,  $p = .030$ . Therefore, females agreed more with the statement, “I would buy a product I find on social media.”

The next statistically significant gender difference stemmed from how participants identified connecting to brands and celebrities/influencers on social media. (Notably, there was not a statistically significant gender difference in the number of brands or celebrities/influencers that participants followed.) Two independent samples t-tests were conducted to determine if there was a gender difference in participants feeling a part of a shared experience with the *brands* and the *celebrities/influencers* that ‘they value the most and have been following the longest’. There was not a statistically significant gender difference in brands. However, there was a significant celebrity/influencer shared experience difference in scores for male ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ) and female ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = 1.472$ ) conditions;  $t(82) = -3.200$ ,  $p = .002$ . Therefore, females agreed more with the statement, “For the celebrities and/or influencers I have been following the longest on social media – I feel a part of a shared experience” while males disagreed.

An independent samples t-test was then conducted to compare if participants prefer to follow brands that tell them more about a lifestyle in male and female conditions. Interestingly, there was a significant difference in the scores for male ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ) and female ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ) conditions;  $t(87) = -2.551$ ,  $p = .012$ . Therefore, females were more likely to

agree with the statement, “I prefer to follow brands that tell me about a lifestyle.” Females ( $M=4.43$ ) were also more likely to agree with the statement “I enjoy following lifestyles on social media that I could never lead” than males who on average disagreed ( $M = 3.10$ );  $t(80) = -3.508, p = .001$ .

The final statistically significant gender difference stems from how participants identified perceiving and reacting to authenticity within brands’ social media accounts. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the degree to which participants preferred to follow brands ‘that seem honest’ in male and female conditions. There was a significant difference in the scores for male ( $M = 5.07, SD = 1.689$ ) and female ( $M = 5.87, SD = .921$ ) conditions;  $t(80) = -2.779, p = .007$ . Therefore, females were more likely to strongly agree with the statement, “I prefer to follow brands that seem honest.” Extending upon the idea of perceiving authenticity, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare reactions to brands breaking trust in male and female conditions. There was a significant difference in the scores for male ( $M = 4.82, SD = 1.611$ ) and female ( $M = 5.56, SD = .993$ ) conditions;  $t(76) = -2.507, p = .014$ . Therefore, females were more likely to agree with the statement, “If a brand breaks my trust in some way, I will not buy their products anymore.” Interestingly, there was not a gender difference in un-following a brand on social media given the brand breaks the participants trust.

## **Correlations and Implications**

Many significant correlations were found from the examination of the survey data. All correlations were significant at the .05 level. Not all significant correlations revealed are being presented.

Table 2 Correlations and Implications

Correlation	Correlation Number in order of mention	Implications
<p><b>The higher the number of brands followed on any form of social media</b>, the higher the number of celebrities/influencers followed, and the higher the likelihood to <i>find information</i> about, to <i>find new</i>, and to <i>buy</i> products on social media.</p>	<p>(.609) (.626) (.552) (.451)</p>	<p>When consumers seek something out (following brands on their own volition) they are more likely to positively react to the produced content and potentially buy the products being promoted. Consequently, it is integral to a brand's success for consumers to <i>want</i> to follow a brand, and not only see their social media content when it is a paid promotion.</p>
<p><b>The higher the number of celebrities/influencers followed on any form of social media</b>, the higher the likelihood to follow a brand if it gives the participant entertainment, the higher the likelihood to <i>find information</i> about and to <i>find new</i> products on social media, and to <i>consider buying</i> a product if promoted on social media.</p>	<p>(.417) (.447) (.468) (.422)</p>	<p>Notably, there is a weaker correlation when examining the number of celebrities/influencers followed on social media and purchasing factors than with brands followed.</p> <p>Moreover, participants who follow more celebrities/influencers on social media are more likely to follow brands for entertainment. While this makes intuitive sense as a main purpose of celebrities/influencers is solely entertainment, this is an important lens to view what the consumer is seeking, and therefore, what types of content a brand should create.</p>
<p><b>The higher the likelihood to follow a brand if it gives entertainment</b>, the higher the likelihood to follow a brand if it shares interesting visuals, the higher the likelihood to have an emotional connection to brands followed, and the higher the likelihood to follow a brand because the individual feels it represents their identity.</p>	<p>(.719) (.619) (.521)  (.625)</p>	<p>Entertainment value and interesting visuals are highly linked, as are interesting visuals and higher emotional connections.</p> <p>Visuals are the best way to engage followers and consumers. Moreover, the company, KJP, from the case study in Chapter 3, frequently utilizes both of these tactics and is cited for having a stronger emotional connection and representation of identity to their consumers.</p>

<p><b>The higher the likelihood to follow a brand if it shares interesting visuals</b>, the higher the likelihood to have an emotional connection to brands followed.</p>		
<p><b>The higher the likelihood to follow a brand if it is responsive to the individual</b>, the higher the likelihood to have an emotional connection to brands followed, to feel brands followed represent the individuals identity, to be invested in brand's followed success, to feel a part of a shared experience with the brands, for the individual to feel his or her input matters to brands followed, and to feel personally connected to the brand.</p>	<p>(.414) (.475) (.436) (.517) (.405) (.414)</p>	<p>A brand responding to consumers through social media is linked to higher levels of personal connection to and investment in the company. KJP is an example of this as the company capitalizes upon responsiveness to consumers and reaps the rewards of loyalty and engagement.</p>
<p><b>The higher the likelihood to follow brands because of an emotional connection</b>, the higher the likelihood the individual feels personally connected to brands followed, feels part of a shared experience with brands followed, feels invested in brands followed success, and probability that the individual would buy something found on social media.</p>	<p>(.460) (.424) (.450) (.470)</p>	<p>Similar to the previous correlation, an emotional connection to brands followed creates a much higher likelihood of several positive factors towards viewing, relating to, and investing in the success of brands. Importantly, there is even a higher probability to purchase items promoted by brands on social media.</p>
<p><b>The higher the likelihood the individual feel the brands they follow represent their identity</b>, the higher the likelihood to follow brands because of an emotional</p>	<p>(.694) (.520) (.465) (.463)</p>	<p>Notably, when individuals feel that brands they follow are a representation of their identity, they are more likely to want to follow brands that portray a lifestyle. They are also more likely to be invested in the success of the brands they follow.</p>

<p>connection, the higher the likelihood to want to follow brands that tell about a lifestyle, the more likely to consider a product if it is promoted to the individual on social media, and the higher the likelihood the individual is invested in the success of brands they follow.</p>		<p>Ultimately, they are also more likely to consider a product promoted to them on social media.</p>
<p><b>The higher the belief that brands the individual follows represents his or her community</b>, the higher belief that brands represent an individual's social status and culture, and the higher the likelihood the individual is to be invested brands followed success.</p>	<p>(.502) (.649) (.463)</p>	<p>The high correlation between individuals feeling a brand represents their community, their social status, and their culture indicates more investment in brands followed.</p> <p>Similar to the last several correlations, when people relate to, connect to, and care about brands more, there is a higher probability they will be invested in the success of brands followed.</p>
<p><b>The higher the likelihood the individual is invested in the success of the brands they follow</b>, the higher the likelihood the individual feels a part of a shared experience with that brand, the individual feels personally connected to brands followed, and the individual feels personally connected to others that comment on or like brands followed posts.</p>	<p>(.625) (.498) (.499)</p>	<p>When individuals have a stronger personal connection to the brands they follow they are more likely to be invested in the brands success. This can manifest itself in different ways, however, it is interesting to note that the more investment in success, the higher the likelihood the individual will feel connected to <i>other people</i> who demonstrate investment in the brand.</p>
<p><b>The higher the likelihood the individual feels personally connected to brands followed</b>, the higher the likelihood the individual feels their input matters to brands followed, that the individual feels the brands they follow represent their identity, and</p>	<p>(.509) (.403) (.411)</p>	<p>Similar to other correlations, the more personally connected to brands followed, the more likely the individuals relationships to brands followed will feel more like an interpersonal relationship than a typical product to consumer model. Consequently, the individual will engage more with brands followed.</p>

<p>the more likely the individual is to appreciate if a brand highlights how it's purpose, audience, company, and employees all have similar values.</p>		
<p><b>The higher the likelihood the individual feels part of a shared experience with brands followed,</b> the higher the likelihood they are more likely to appreciate if a brand highlights how it's purpose, audience, company, and employees have similar values.</p>	<p>(.462)</p>	<p>The correlation between a brand staying consistent across all expressions and mediums to an individual feeling a part of a "shared experience" is highly notable. There are many possible implications here. However, one particularly notable implication is that the more consistent a brand is, the more an individual can relate and feel as if they are a part of it.</p>
<p><b>The higher the likelihood the individual feels as happy for a brand as a friend if a brand he or she values experiences a positive event,</b> the higher the likelihood the individual will consider a product promoted to them on social media, and the higher the likelihood the individual will feel part of a shared experience with brands followed.</p>	<p>(.408) (.420)</p>	<p>When consumers treat connections to brands as more of an interpersonal relationship than the typical product to consumer model there is a stronger probability the individual will be willing to support the brand and purchase products.</p>
<p><b>The higher the likelihood the individual feels as happy for a celebrity/influencer as a friend if a celebrity/influencer they value experiences a positive event,</b> the higher the likelihood the individual feels personally connected to brands followed, and the higher the likelihood the individual will feel part of a shared experience with brands</p>	<p>(.457) (.499)</p>	<p>It is extremely significant to note that there is higher correlation between personal connection/shared experience and feeling as happy for a <i>celebrity/influencer</i> as a friend than there is for <i>brands</i>. The implication here is that it easier for followers and consumers to connect with individuals through social media than brands. This is perhaps where KJP excels as the company blurs the line between being a brand and being the multi-faceted story of several characters.</p>

<p>followed.</p> <p><b>There is also a high correlation between if an individual feels as happy for a <i>celebrity or influencer</i> as a friend if a brand he or she values experiences a positive event, and the higher the likelihood the individual feels as happy for a brand as a friend, if a <i>brand</i> he or she values experiences a positive event</b></p>	<p>(.787)</p>	
<p><b>The more the individual enjoys following lifestyles on social media that he or she personally could never lead,</b> the higher the likelihood that the more open, personal, and important details a brand, celebrity, or influencer shares, the more likely the individual is to trust them.</p>	<p>(.475)</p>	<p>Brands that portray lifestyles through social media have an opportunity to increase trust by sharing more open details through their content.</p>
<p><b>The higher the likelihood to prefer to follow brands that seem honest,</b> the more willing the individual is to purchase a brand's product if its mission statement aligns with my values, the more likely to try something a brand recommends if they trust the brand, the higher the likelihood if a brand breaks the individuals trust in some way, the individual will not follow them on social media buy their products anymore.</p>	<p>(.742) (.526) (.551) (.585)</p>	<p>Many factors about honesty, authenticity, and trust are strongly positively correlated. Furthermore, individuals that trust brands for these factors are more willing to extend this trust to recommendations for the brand. This allows a brand more flexibility in the way they can influence consumers or encourage trial of new lines/products.</p>

<p><b>The higher likelihood an individual is to trust a brand, celebrity, or influencer if they share more open, personal, and important details</b>, the more likely the individual is to be invested in brands followed success, and the more likely the individual is to be invested in celebrities success.</p>	<p>(.541) (.688)</p>	<p>It is interesting to note that there is a stronger correlation between trusting more because of open, personal and important details with being invested in <i>celebrities/influencers</i> success than <i>brands</i>. If a brand can create the personalization on social media that a celebrity creates, they can facilitate more investment in their success.</p>
<p><b>The higher the likelihood an individual is to appreciate if a brand highlights how it's purpose, audience, company and employees all have similar values</b>, the higher the likelihood to prefer to follow brands that seem honest and, the higher the likelihood to try something the brand recommends.</p>	<p>(.549) (.408)</p>	<p>Perceptions of honesty are linked to a brand having consistent values within their purpose, company, audience, and employees. Moreover, consistent values have the potential to allow a brand to have more influence over their followers.</p>

## Chapter 5

### General Discussion and Conclusions

The current thesis was concerned with investigating the cultural relevance behind organic content, how one company has successfully utilized organic content through social media, and finally, the consumer perspective on many of the factors concerning organic content through social media, uncovered in both the literature review and the case study. The literature review, case study, and primary research add to our knowledge and evaluations on how content through social media can most successfully engage consumers.

The literature review revealed increasing levels of distrust and skepticism from the American people, in tangent with rising levels of individualism and personal expression (“Confidence in Institutions”, 2017). These trends and influences have changed the face of digital media, and by extension, the face of advertising. Advertising has capitalized upon these trends and began to embrace the idea of representing identity and uniqueness within brands’ strategies. Many studies reveal this to be successful, however, not much research has been done on how this works within organic content through social media. There was an interesting finding in the apparent link between identity, authenticity, and brands (Michel, 2017). The link between these factors is further explored within the case study on Kiel James Patrick (KJP).

The case study analyzes KJP’s success through organic content on social media. The success rose from a consumer base that was searching for authenticity, identity, and reciprocal interactions through developing mediums that they were more of a part of – social media. The case study addresses how the company Kiel James Patrick executes on these factors to create a highly successful and unique brand with an extremely loyal consumer base. Overarchingly, KJP weaves a sense of authenticity and reciprocity throughout all of it’s content. While a multitude of factors were identified as the success behind the brand, several were particularly notable.

The brand does not simply inform about a product, it tells a multifaceted story that spans across almost a decade. Between the founding couple and their child, the employees, and the interns- a narrative about an almost fairytale New England lifestyle, which revolves around KJP’s products, is created. Despite being seemingly unrealistic, picture perfect content – KJP’s story is viewed as far more authentic than large brand’s, like Ralph Lauren’s, similar portrayals of being more of a lifestyle than a product. Pieces of the KJP story are carefully shared through beautiful imagery, strategic captions, and numerous interactions with the consumer through

social media. In fact, social media is the stage for the majority of KJP's content. Social media allows for their content to be shared free of placement cost and distributed in a far more genuine manner than paid promotions. If a consumer is seeing the brand's content, there is a high likelihood that the consumer was the one who requested and initiated seeing it. This creates an incredibly engaged and loyal consumer base. Consequently, many of the brand's followers interact with the company on almost personal level, despite never having met any of the characters involved in the brand's story.

A quantitative study was then conducted to examine how consumers perceive and react to the factors identified as the success behind the Kiel James Patrick brand. There was a focus on the consumer's connection to brands and viewed levels of authenticity on social media. The survey was used to advance information and insights into what influences a brand's social media content into being perceived as authentic and highly engaging. Many significant results were uncovered that matched integral elements of KJP's social media content.

Motivation to follow brands was highest with entertainment levels, emotional connection, interest in the brand or product, and discounts. Moreover, participants felt brands most represented themselves in terms of their interests, the causes they care about, their passions, and their personality. Significantly, participants demonstrated agreement with both of these statements, "if a *brand* that I value experiences a positive event, I feel as happy for them as I would a friend" and "if a *celebrity or influencer* that I value experiences a positive event, I feel as happy for them as I would a friend." However, participants more likely to strongly agree with the statement when it concerned a celebrity or influencer. The difference in agreement is most likely because it is easier to relate and connect to a celebrity or influencer than a brand. It is particularly significant to note because KJP blends the line between being a brand and being the

story of multiple people. It is possible that this plays a significant factor in why the brand's audience engagement and perceived authenticity is so high.

Multiple gender differences were significant, as well. Females felt more of a shared experience with celebrities/influencers they followed on social media than males. Females also preferred to follow brands that portrayed a lifestyle, in addition to enjoying following lifestyles on social media that they could never lead. This is highly significant to the case study because KJP represents a lifestyle, and moreover, a lifestyle that the majority of Americans are not financially able to duplicate. In terms of authenticity on social media, there were several gender differences, as well. Females exhibited a higher preference for preferring to follow brands that seem honest. Extending upon this idea, reactions to brands breaking trust in male and female conditions were compared. Notably, there was not a gender difference in un-following a brand on social media given the brand breaks the participants trust. However, females were far more likely to agree that they would not *buy* a brand's products if the brand were to break their trust. Notably, all participants perceived brands as the most genuine when the brand values align with the product, the brand is honest, trustworthy, transparent and responsive to consumer feedback.

Many significant correlations were also presented in the results section that demonstrate an engagement difference within organic content and paid promotion. Notably, the higher the number of brands followed on any form of social media, the higher the probability of *finding information* about products, *finding new* products, and *buying* new products on social media. This supports the idea that when consumers actively follow brands by choice, they are far more likely to positively react to the brand's content. Therefore, it is vital that consumers *want* to follow a brand or see its content. This supports the positive effects of organic content over paid promotion.

Many correlations were discovered that provide insights into how to facilitate a loyal and engaged consumer following. When consumers view their connection to brands as more of a reciprocal, interpersonal interaction – they are far more likely to support brands that they follow and purchase products through social media. Moreover, perceptions of a brand’s authenticity are linked to a brand having consistent values within their purpose, company, audience, and employees. Factors such as a personal and emotional connections to brands, feeling a part of a shared experience, and feeling that brands represent different aspects of their identity all lead to positive effects for brands concerning loyalty and purchasing habits through social media. Extending on that, consistent values have the potential to allow a brand to have more influence in recommendations and trust with their followers.

Perhaps most significantly, there was a higher correlation between personal connection/ shared experience and feeling as happy for a celebrity/influencer as a friend than there is for brands. The implication being that it far easier for followers and consumers to connect with people through social media than it is for them to connect to brands. This is where KJP excels, as the company skillfully blurs the line between being a brand and being the multi-faceted story of several characters. If a brand can create the personalization on social media that a celebrity or influencer creates, they can facilitate more investment in their brand and their success. By extension of that, the brand can create a more engaged, loyal audience base.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

The study’s research included limitations within the case study methodology. While the case study on Kiel James Patrick provides insights, particularly into the KJP brand, it is difficult

to generalize these findings. The study's research also included limitations within the survey.

Although the survey was open and publicized for a two-week period, the majority of responses were submitted within one week. The activity dramatically decreased after the first week of the survey being live. The study's research also included limitations within the survey sampling methodology and size of the sample. A convenience sample was used, and while this provided many insights, the data cannot be generalized as the sample is highly unlikely to be representative of the population being studied. Furthermore, there were 125 participants. Out of these people, the survey lacked diversity as 85% of respondents were white and 62% were female. It would be interesting and impactful to analyze more companies who have utilized similar tactics as Kiel James Patrick and conduct the quantitative research on a wider and more diverse sample. The research would be useful in promoting more impactful and strategic content among brands on social media.

## **Appendix A**

### **Survey Questionnaire**

#### **Survey Flow**

Demographic Questions (5 Questions)

Baseline for Social Media Presence (9 Questions)

Storytelling (6 Questions)

Authenticity (6 Questions)

## Survey Questions

1 Please state your age. (For example "21")

2 To which gender do you most identify?

Male (1) Female (2) Other (3)

3 How would you describe yourself?

White (1) Black or African American (2)

American Indian or Alaska Native (3) Asian (4) Native Hawaiian or Pacific

Islander (5) Hispanic (6) Other (7)

4 What is your education level?

Less than high school (1) High school graduate (2) Some college (3) 2 year

degree (4) 4 year degree (5) Professional degree (6) Postgraduate degree (7)

5 What is your employment status?

Employed full time (1) Employed part time (2) Unemployed looking for work

(3) Unemployed not looking for work (4) Retired (5) Student (6) Disabled (7)

6 Select each form of social media that you use:

Facebook (1) Instagram (2) Snapchat (3) Twitter (4) LinkedIn (5) YouTube

(6) Google+ (7) Pinterest (8) Reddit (9) Yelp (10) Tumblr (11) None (12)

7 Choose three and rank the top social media platforms that you use (#1 is the most):

\_\_\_\_\_ Facebook (1)

\_\_\_\_\_ Instagram (2)

\_\_\_\_\_ Snapchat (3)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Twitter (4)
- \_\_\_\_\_ LinkedIn (5)
- \_\_\_\_\_ YouTube (6)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Google+ (7)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pinterest (8)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Reddit (9)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Yelp (10)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tumblr (11)
- \_\_\_\_\_ None (12)

8 On average, how often do you use social media?

- Daily (1) 2-3 times a week (2) Once a week (3) Less often (4)

9 On average, how much time do you spend daily on social media?

- 30 min or less (1) 1 hour or less (2) 2 hours or less (3) 3 hours or less (4)

- 4 hours or less (5) 5 hours or less (6) 6 hours or less (7) 7 hours or more (8)

10 How many brands do you follow on any form of social media? (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.)

- 0 (1) 1-3 (2) 4-10 (3) 10-15 (4) 15+ (5)

11 How many celebrities or influencers do you follow on any form of social media?

(Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.)

- 0 (1) 1-3 (2) 4-10 (3) 10-15 (4) 15+ (5)

12 Which types of industries do you most frequently follow?

Retail (1) Media/Entertainment (2) Consumer Goods (3) Technology (4)  
 Travel/Hospitality (5) Non-Profits (6) Healthcare (7) Education (8)  
 Banking/Finance (9) Government (10) Automotive (11)

13 Rate each of the following on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. I would follow a brand on social media if:

Strongly disagree (1) Disagree (2) Somewhat disagree (3) Neither agree nor disagree (4) Somewhat agree (5) Agree (6) Strongly agree (7)

It gives me promotions (1)

It gives me information (2)

It gives me entertainment (3)

It shares interesting visuals (4)

If it is responsive to me (5)

It gives me discounts (6)

I have an emotional connection to it (7)

I am interested in its product, service, or industry (8)

My friends follow or like its content (9)

It gives me product updates (10)

I feel the company represents my identity (11)

14 Rate each of the following on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Strongly disagree (1) Disagree (2) Somewhat disagree (3) Neither agree nor disagree (4) Somewhat agree (5) Agree (6) Strongly agree (7)

I find information about products on social media (1)

I find new products on social media (2)

I would buy a product I find on social media (3)

I am more likely to consider a product if it is promoted to me on social media (4)

15 Rate each of the following on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. I prefer to follow brands that:

Strongly disagree (1) Disagree (2) Somewhat disagree (3) Neither agree nor disagree (4) Somewhat agree (5) Agree (6) Strongly agree (7)

Tell me about a lifestyle (1)

Tell me specifics about their products (2)

16 Rate the following in terms of how brands that you follow on social media represent you:

My personality (1)

My interests (2)

Causes I care about (3)

The way I portray myself to others (4)

People I interact with (5)

My passions (6)

What I deem important in life (7)

Things that motivate me (8)

17 Rate each of the following on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The brands I follow are an accurate representation of:

Strongly disagree (1) Disagree (2) Somewhat disagree (3) Neither agree nor disagree (4) Somewhat agree (5) Agree (6) Strongly agree (7)

My gender (1)

My social status (2)

My community (3)

My culture (4)

My ethnicity (5)

18 Rate each of the following on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. For the brands that I value the most and/or have been following the longest on social media:

I am invested in their success (1)

My input matters to them (2)

I feel personally connected to them (3)

I feel a part of a shared experience (4)

I feel connected to other people that comment on or 'like' on their posts (5)

19 Rate each of the following on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. For the celebrities and/or influencers that I value the most and have been following the longest on social media:

I am invested in their success (1)

My input matters to them (2)

I feel personally connected to them (3)

I feel a part of a shared experience (4)

I feel connected to other people that comment on or 'like' on their posts (5)

20 Rate each of the following on a scale from does not describe me to describes me extremely well.

If a brand that I value experiences a positive event, I feel as happy for them as I would for a friend. (1)

If a celebrity or influencer that I value experiences a positive event, I feel as happy for them as I would for a friend. (2)

21 Rate each of the following on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

I enjoy following lifestyles on social media that I personally could never lead. (1)

If a brand becomes too pushy in product promotions, I will lose interest and trust in the brand. (2)

I am more willing to purchase a brand's product if its mission statement aligns with my values. (3)

I prefer to follow brands that seem honest. (4)

The more open, personal, and important details a brand, celebrity, or influencer shares with me, the more likely I am to trust them (5)

22 Rank the following factors in terms of what makes a brand seem genuine to you (#1 is the most genuine):

\_\_\_\_\_ Brand is transparent (1)

\_\_\_\_\_ Brand values align with its product (2)

\_\_\_\_\_ Brand doesn't try to be things it's not (3)

\_\_\_\_\_ Brand is responsive to consumer feedback (4)

\_\_\_\_\_ Brand has a cohesive personality (5)

\_\_\_\_\_ Brand is trustworthy (6)

\_\_\_\_\_ Brand is honest (7)

23 If I trust a brand, I would be likely to try something it recommends.

Extremely unlikely (1) Moderately unlikely (2) Slightly unlikely (3)

Neither likely nor unlikely (4) Slightly likely (5) Moderately likely (6)

Extremely likely (7)

24 Rate the following from strongly disagree to strongly agree. If a brand breaks my trust in some way:

I will stop following them on social media (1)

I will not buy their products anymore (2)

25 If I trust a brand to be an expert in a certain industry (for example, a fashion piece), I would also trust their recommendations for things outside of their specialty (for example, a vacation destination).

26 Rate the following from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Strongly disagree (1) Disagree (2) Somewhat disagree (3) Neither agree nor disagree (4) Somewhat agree (5) Agree (6) Strongly agree (7)

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## ACADEMIC VITA

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### **Education**

Major(s) and Minor(s): B.A., Advertising/Public Relations, B.A., Psychology,  
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### **Work Experience:**

Consultant

Wolf Media Group, State College, PA

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Created content, including multiple published articles, conducted research on target audience, demographics, key influencers, and competitors, enhanced SEO  
Greg Wolf

Broadcast Media Intern

GroupM, New York, New York

Summer, 2017

Designed \$40MM media plan, including digital, social, TV, print, and creative for Intern competition, tracked buys and campaign data, analyzed post-ops and Nielson's data, followed up with station representatives, assisted Media Buyers and Client Service Directors on accounts such as TJ Maxx, Volvo, and General Mills

Danielle Medina

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One of thirty-three aspiring media professionals chosen nationwide from 1,300 applicants, immersive experience about the media industry including seminars about advertising, digital media, marketing, sales, creative, and broadcasting, attended numerous career-planning seminars, informational interviews with media professionals, and a full-time internship

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Redesigned cover photos and descriptions for Sonatype's Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube, Facebook, Crunchbase, and Google+, Launched blogs and conducted interviews to promote company products, created brand promotion presentation and garnered 22,000 views, directed Twitter during "DevopsdaysDC" conference  
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Analyzed data with SPSS, lead participant experiment sessions, presented research at the Psi Chi Research Conference

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