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Maximizing Sharability and Persuasiveness on Web 2.0

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### Introduction

Online marketing efforts usually focus on the persuasiveness of a message (Cheung, 2013) or the shareability of a message (Berger, 2014). Today, over 500 million people interact on Facebook on a regular basis (Khosravi et al., 2013), however, research has not established if and when these two concepts align, such that a message is maximally persuasive and highly shareable. According to Berger (2014), individuals are likely to share content based on one primary factor: when the message allows one to present oneself favorably online. If an individual believes that a website’s content is likely to cause other readers to view him or her as more favorable, then this individual will be more likely to share the website’s content. Adopting a Web 2.0 framework (Walther & Jang, 2012) enables aggregated online cues to be conceptualized in such a way as to suggest that the content is likely or unlikely to be received favorably by readers. In terms of alignment, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppi, 1986) can be employed to examine whether or not individuals will be persuaded in terms of the message content and their personal involvement. Specifically, messages differ in argument quality (high/low) and the inclusion of emotional appeals. The current research proposal outlines a test of shareability and persuasion aligns by examining online cues and types of message content.

### Proposed Hypothesis

Shareability and persuasion will be examined in terms of their effects on receiver attitudes and shareability. The study utilizes an original experiment that varies message quality (3: high argument strength, direct or low argument strength, and emotional messages) x Web 2.0 cues (i.e., ratio of views, likes, and shares) to signal self-presentation (2: favorable or unfavorable) design. The table below denotes our predictions.

### Table 1. Hypothesized Contrast Weights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicted Contrast Coefficients</th>
<th>Attitude Change</th>
<th>Likelihood of Sharing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional High Argument Quality</td>
<td>+1, -1</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Argument Quality</td>
<td>-1, +1</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Low Argument Quality</td>
<td>-1, +1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional High Argument Quality</td>
<td>+1, -1</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Argument Quality</td>
<td>-1, +1</td>
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<td>Low Argument Quality</td>
<td>-1, +1</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Proposed Method (IRB APPROVED)

**Participants**

Participants include Chapman University students who sign up using the Communication Department’s subject pool. Of students will participate from other courses where instructors offered extra credit for their participation in completing the study. Assuming a moderate effect and following a statistical power analysis, we propose to include 30 participants per condition, resulting in a total of 180 participants. For the dependent ratios we will be using 216 shares to 762 for the three websites with a high number of shares. For the dependent ratios on the websites with a low number of shares we will use 2 shares to 762 views.

**Figure 1. High Quality Argument Website**

We have created two main web pages. Each page contains the three variations of our message. Participants are randomly assigned to the message condition. We will utilize High Quality arguments, Low Quality arguments and Emotional Appeals. We produced High Quality arguments in our messages by including numerical data as well as names, which are more concrete.

**Figure 2. Low Quality Argument Website**

In our Low-Quality arguments we used generic descriptions in the content as well as direct messaging with vague information. For the Emotional Appeal messages we used a narrative based message with testimonials such as Lee’s statement in the Disney Corporation message. We produced each of these messages by creating webpages. One set of webpages contains three types of content relating to a recent scandal at Disney Corporation. The first website is full of factual information, the second has a very emotional narrative and the third has low arguments for why the scandal occurred. We produced another set of webpages relating to the Ebola crisis. The first set of webpages also contains three different styles of content. The first website includes facts about Ebola and what it has done to a country, the second is very emotional and deals with an individual’s story in the fight against Ebola and the third includes very irrelevant facts that do not pertain to the reader’s interest or involvement. To examine which of these impacts a person’s likelihood to share the article based on whether or not this content will result in High-Self Presentation or Low Self-Presentation: it will be represented in a 3 X 2 design, with message content as the repeated factor. High self-presentation is represented in the following ratio: 762 views, 216 shares and 672 likes. The higher number of likes and shares seen by the reader will create high self-presentation if they choose to share the content. Low self-presentation is represented in the following ratio: 762 views, 2 shares, and 16 likes. To measure persuasion, we will assess participants’ attitude toward the target corporation (Disney) using a 4-item 7-point semantic differential measure including items such as good/bad, credit/not credit. Next we will ask whether or not the participants shared the content. By juxtaposing these two items, we can examine how shareability is related to persuasion.

**Figure 3. Low Quality Argument Website**

The rationale for this hypothesis is that if individuals believe an argument does not have factual evidence and has little emotional component to it, they will feel less connection. If the reader does not connect, the reader is likely to believe those they are sharing it with will also feel a lack of reliability and be uninterested in the content. Our final prediction is that Low Argument Quality and low self-presentation result in very few if any shares and/or likes. In the table below we express these concepts explored above using contrast weights so that everything in a row adds up to zero. These numbers have been included previously in parenthesis to allow for a better understanding of the weight each number measurement. The more shares and/or likes we expect a concept to have, the larger the number. The fewer shares and/or likes we expect a concept to have, the lower the number.

**Figure 4. Low Quality Argument Website**

In our Low-Quality arguments we used generic descriptions in the content as well as direct messaging with vague information. For the Emotional Appeal messages we used a narrative based message with testimonials such as Lee’s statement in the Disney Corporation message. We produced each of these messages by creating webpages. One set of webpages contains three types of content relating to a recent scandal at Disney Corporation. The first website is full of factual information, the second has a very emotional narrative and the third has low arguments for why the scandal occurred. We produced another set of webpages relating to the Ebola crisis. The first set of webpages also contains three different styles of content. The first website includes facts about Ebola and what it has done to a country, the second is very emotional and deals with an individual’s story in the fight against Ebola and the third includes very irrelevant facts that do not pertain to the reader’s interest or involvement. To examine which of these impacts a person’s likelihood to share the article based on whether or not this content will result in High-Self Presentation or Low Self-Presentation: it will be represented in a 3 X 2 design, with message content as the repeated factor. High self-presentation is represented in the following ratio: 762 views, 216 shares and 672 likes. The higher number of likes and shares seen by the reader will create high self-presentation if they choose to share the content. Low self-presentation is represented in the following ratio: 762 views, 2 shares, and 16 likes. To measure persuasion, we will assess participants’ attitude toward the target corporation (Disney) using a 4-item 7-point semantic differential measure including items such as good/bad, credit/not credit. Next we will ask whether or not the participants shared the content. By juxtaposing these two items, we can examine how shareability is related to persuasion.

### Theoretical and Practical Contributions

We expect our research findings to show that content expressing high self-presentation and a strong emotional persuasive appeal is most likely to be shared by the content consumer. The results can be used to inform future studies relating to the fields of communication and technology. More importantly, it would stimulate theoretical work that addresses the motivations behind sharing and attitude change resulting from persuasion.

### References


### Procedures

In an anonymous online experiment, participants will first read and sign the consent form to formally participate online. Participants will be provided a link via email to a survey that will also provide a link to one of our various message conditions. The experiment will be done via laptop at the leisure of each individual throughout the duration of a specific time period during which the experiment is designated to be completed. The participant will view the stimuli, and they have the freedom to share the content directly from the page. After viewing the message the participant will fill out a follow-up survey after completing their responses. Our dependent variables are the attitudes measured against Shareability. When users visit a website their likelihood of sharing the page can be predicted by their attitude toward the subject and the content quality of the message on the page.