

Communicating with Viewers:  
Examining the Use of Graphics in Cable Television

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## **ABSTRACT**

GILLIAN WHEAT: Communicating with Viewers: Examining the Use of Graphics in  
Cable Television

(Under the direction of Penelope Muse Abernathy)

A comparative content analysis examined the use of graphics as promotional tools by cable networks. The cable networks chosen for analysis were USA, TNT, Nickelodeon, and the Disney Channel. Comparisons of the use of graphics by these cable networks were made based on target audiences and business models. Key findings included the use of graphics to drive viewers to social media by the adult-targeted networks and the exclusive use of graphics to promote programming by the non-ad-supported network. In addition, the study revealed that programming-related graphics were used predominantly to retain viewers on the child-targeted networks and to drive viewers to programming considered to be a priority on the adult-targeted networks.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
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### Chapter

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
II.	LITERATURE REVIEW.....	4
	Competitive Strategy.....	4
	Marketing Communications.....	7
	On-Air Promotion.....	10
	Research Questions.....	16
III.	METHOD.....	18
	Sample.....	19
	Coding Parameters.....	19
	Relevant Measures.....	20
	Reliability.....	23
IV.	RESULTS.....	26

V.	DISCUSSION.....	35
VI.	CONCLUSION.....	41
	Scholarly Implications.....	41
	Practical Implications.....	42
	Future Research.....	42
	Limitations.....	43
	REFERENCES.....	45

## LIST OF TABLES

### Table

1.	Intercoder Reliability by Variable.....	24
2.	Intracoder Reliability by Variable.....	25
3.	Presence of Graphics by Network.....	27
4.	Basic Attributes of Graphics.....	28
5.	Attributes of More Than Text Graphics.....	29
6.	Types of Messages in Graphics.....	32
7.	Types of Programming Messages in Graphics.....	34

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

While the total amount of time Americans spent watching television increased during the past year, online and mobile viewing became more popular (“State of the Media,” 2011). As such, attracting and retaining traditional television viewers is becoming more of a challenge for both broadcast and cable networks. A number of tactics have been used to address this growing issue in the past few years. For instance, Showtime used responses to online ads that were associated with search terms relevant to one of its programs in order to target potential viewers (Whitney, 2007). In addition, social media such as Twitter have been utilized to connect directly with viewers (Malone, 2010; Weprin, 2009). Although television networks are eager to find new ways to reach viewers, they have not abandoned other methods for doing so such as on-air promotion.

While promotional spots, or promos, of varying lengths are the traditional format in which on-air promotion has taken place, graphics can also be used to communicate with viewers (Eastman, Ferguson, & Klein, 2006). Overlay graphics, those that are superimposed over programming, first appeared over primetime programming on the broadcast networks in 2004 (Eastman et al., 2006). These graphics can also be seen over other types of programming like sports and news (Steinberg, 2009). Graphics that “pop up” on the screen have gained popularity as well (Eastman et al., 2006). One type of graphic, a snipe, presents the name of an upcoming program to viewers during the



program they are watching at that moment (Eastman et al., 2006). Being confronted by graphics has become an increasingly common experience for viewers, as broadcast and cable networks continue to explore the promotional value of graphics (Steinberg, 2009). The belief that consumers are getting used to cluttered media screens, be they part of a computer or a television, is thought to have contributed to the willingness of networks to feature graphics (Steinberg, 2009).

The importance of graphics to a television network's overall promotional strategy may grow, as consumers today can easily avoid commercial breaks, and therefore, traditional promotional spots (Steinberg, 2009). The penetration of DVRs has increased ("State of the Media," 2011) and in turn, so has the ability of viewers to fast-forward through content. In addition, viewers may change the channel, or simply leave the room, instead of watching the breaks between programming segments. Scholars have even investigated the degree to which viewers derive satisfaction from changing the channel or using television-related technology to bypass certain types of content (Perse & Ferguson, 1993; Walker & Bellamy, 1991). Regardless of the reasons why consumers may seek to avoid commercial breaks, graphics that appear over programming can be used as a strategic tool to communicate with them (Steinberg, 2009).

The purpose of this study was to examine the graphics phenomenon, as utilized by cable television networks. Though graphics can be seen over programming on many networks, this study focused on entertainment-based cable networks. These networks vary in a number of ways, from target audiences to business models. The unique characteristics of a cable television network may not only affect the manner in which it utilizes graphics, but also the messages it communicates through those graphics.

Therefore, graphics were compared from both an adult-targeted versus a child-targeted perspective, as well as an ad-supported network versus a non-ad-supported network perspective.

The following chapter identifies relevant conceptual areas and examines literature that corresponds to those areas. The method chosen to conduct this study is discussed and then followed by a report of the results of the study. The next chapter includes a discussion of the results, while the final chapter draws conclusions about the data and provides suggestions for future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

The following literature review focuses on the conceptual areas related to the use of graphics as promotional tools: competitive strategy, marketing communications, and on-air promotion. Relevant literature pertaining to each conceptual area is reviewed. In addition, a method review of studies related to on-air promotion is included. Graphics that appear over programming qualify as a form of on-air promotion and as such, it is worthwhile to note how previous studies regarding on-air promotion have been conducted.

#### **Competitive Strategy**

The competitive nature of the television industry has been recognized by scholars (Chan-Olmsted & Li, 2002; Liu, Putler, & Weinberg, 2004). In fact, Chan-Olmsted and Li (2002) suggested that the environment in which cable networks operate is more competitive than the one in which broadcast networks operate because it is more complex. Chan-Olmsted and Li (2002) sought to identify strategic groups of cable networks within that complex environment. The data revealed that there were seven distinct strategic groups that varied based on variables believed to create competitive advantages, such as size and programming development (Chan-Olmsted & Li, 2002).

As noted by Porter (1980), there are forces that drive competition within any given industry. In order to address those forces and survive in the midst of a competitive industry, it is necessary for companies to practice strategic management. This type of management has been defined as “the analysis, decisions, and actions an organization takes to create and sustain competitive advantages” (Chan-Olmsted, 2005, p. 14). Two of the strategic actions taken by cable networks are audience segmentation and product differentiation (Chan-Olmsted & Li, 2002).

Given the diversity of interests among potential viewers, cable networks must serve a certain segment of the audience instead of trying to reach all viewers. Market segmentation, or in this case audience segmentation, involves separating all potential viewers into different segments based on variables such as their “needs, characteristics, or behaviors” (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010, p. 191). Once the market for potential viewers has been segmented, a viable audience segment can be identified and targeted.

Segmenting the audience allows cable networks to ensure that they can successfully serve their viewers and make a profit while doing so. In order to stand out from their competitors and attract the target audience, the networks actively engage in differentiation. Another reason why networks engage in differentiation is that it can help build loyalty among viewers (Hoskins, McFadyen, & Finn, 2004). Bae (1999) utilized content analysis to determine whether cable news networks competed for viewers by differentiating their programming. Though cable news networks technically compete with all other networks for viewers, Bae (1999) chose to focus on the three cable news networks because they all offered general news programs in a variety of formats twenty-four hours per day. The data revealed that all three networks did in fact offer

programming that was distinct from the programming offered by their competitors (Bae, 1999).

Aside from creating programming that differs from that of their competitors, cable networks engage in branding to set themselves apart from other networks. Successful branding by networks can serve as a barrier to entry (Bellamy & Traudt, 2000), and the brands that are established by doing so can be used by viewers to help make decisions in a cluttered marketplace (Chan-Olmsted, 2001). Cable networks have recognized the value of creating a strong brand and as such, there have been a number of rebranding efforts in the past few years (Grego & Atkinson, 2010).

Branding within the television landscape has been explored by scholars in a number of ways (Chang & Chan-Olmsted, 2010; Chan-Olmsted & Cha, 2007, 2008; Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2002; Ha & Chan-Olmsted, 2001, 2004). In a study meant to examine brand extension, Ha and Chan-Olmsted (2001) found that viewers accepted the extension of a broadcast network's brand through its official website, while Chang and Chan-Olmsted (2010) identified factors that should be considered when extending the brand of a cable network, such as viewer attitudes toward the cable network itself and the number of brand extensions viewers perceive to have already been established. Yet another study explored how the websites of cable networks were used to brand the networks and influence viewers (Ha & Chan-Olmsted, 2004).

Just as the use of branding in television has been studied, so have the perceptions consumers develop as a result of that branding. Chan-Olmsted and Kim (2002) sought to determine how viewers felt about PBS as compared to the growing number of cable

networks considered to be competitors of PBS. The study revealed that PBS was viewed as more intelligent and enlightening than other cable networks, but not necessarily as exciting (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2002). Brand personality is “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347), and the brand personality construct has been applied to television news, both broadcast and cable (Chan-Olmsted & Cha, 2007). In addition to applying the construct to television news, the antecedents and effects of brand personality were investigated in the multichannel news environment by Chan-Olmsted and Cha (2008). Factors ranging from the age of the viewer to the perceived importance of news anchors were found to contribute to the brand personalities developed by viewers of television news (Chan-Olmsted & Cha, 2008). The data also suggested that certain brand personality dimensions, such as competence, significantly contributed to the attitudes and loyalty of viewers (Chan-Olmsted & Cha, 2008).

### **Marketing Communications**

Regardless of the strategic choices made by a network, it is imperative to communicate successfully with both existing and potential viewers. Marketing communications have been defined as “the means by which firms attempt to inform, persuade, incite, and remind consumers – directly or indirectly – about the brands they sell” (Keller, 2001, p. 819). Cable networks may use marketing communications not only to reach out to viewers, but also to reach out to cable or satellite companies (Fletcher, 2002). Fletcher (2002) wrote a case study about the introduction and promotion of Cartoon Network, a cable network featuring animated programming for children, to cable operators. The successful promotional campaign included, but was not

limited to, sending objects that were associated with cartoons to potential carriers to create buzz about what was then a new network (Fletcher, 2002).

As the number of platforms available to reach viewers increases, so does the importance of using those platforms for marketing communications. According to Keller (2001), a marketing program that is fully integrated uses multiple communication options and those options refer to the other options also being used by a firm. For instance, a cable network may use on-air promotion to drive viewers to its website, which in turn, drives viewers to the network's Twitter feed. That Twitter feed may then drive viewers back to the website or the actual network. Integrated marketing programs may be evaluated based on a number of characteristics, including coverage, robustness, and cost (Keller, 2001).

Scholars have investigated the media's use of multiple platforms for marketing purposes (Dailey, Demo, & Spillman, 2005; Edwards & La Ferle, 2000; Greer & Ferguson, 2011; Gregson, 2008). Edwards and La Ferle (2000) conducted a content analysis to examine the inclusion of website addresses in television advertisements. Approximately one-fifth of the commercials analyzed contained URLs, and those URLs usually appeared at the end of the commercials (Edwards & La Ferle, 2000). Dailey, Demo, and Spillman (2005) examined the partnerships between television stations and newspapers. Of the newspapers that had an established relationship with a television station, few actually utilized that partnership to promote their stories (Dailey et al., 2005). In addition, the most popular method used by newspapers to promote their broadcast partners was including a station logo in the paper (Dailey et al., 2005).

Gregson (2008) analyzed the websites of affiliates of ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox to determine the extent to which those websites were used to promote newscasts. Among other things, Gregson (2008) predicted that the stations would use their websites to indicate when newscasts would air. The data revealed that 42% of the websites included at least one “static display” indicating the time a newscast would air, and that 11% of the websites had a call to action that prompted viewers to watch a newscast (Gregson, 2008). More recently, the use of Twitter for promotional purposes by television broadcast stations was investigated by Greer and Ferguson (2011). A content analysis of Twitter feeds revealed that stations were using Twitter more to distribute news stories than to drive followers to their newscasts (Greer & Ferguson, 2011).

Though the studies mentioned above explored the use of cross-promotion within, and between, the media, the extent to which cross-promotion is effective has also been explored (Tang, Newton, & Wang, 2007). An experiment was conducted to compare the impact of a cross-media promotion involving television and print with the impact of a repetitive promotion that only utilized one type of media (Tang et al., 2007). The data revealed that the cross-media promotion gained more attention and was perceived to be more credible (Tang et al., 2007). In addition, the use of cross-media promotion resulted in better recall of the message being communicated and a more positive reaction to the promotion in general (Tang et al., 2007).

The importance of reaching viewers on multiple platforms has been recognized as more than just a marketing tactic in recent years. The creative forces behind television programs are actively brainstorming ways in which the content, including program characters, can exist on multiple platforms (Morabito, 2011b). The transition from using



more traditional media like television for the distribution of content to using a variety of media has been examined (Doyle, 2010). In addition, Vishwanath (2008) investigated the impact of the increased access to content that consumers now enjoy. Vishwanath (2008) chose to focus on CNN, because the network offers news content on a variety of platforms from television to satellite radio. Among other things, the findings of the study suggested that consumers perceive each different point at which they can access content as an extension of the network (Vishwanath, 2008).

### **On-Air Promotion**

Given the amount of competition faced by television networks, promotion remains an integral part of their marketing strategies. There are two main kinds of promotion: image and program (Eastman, 2000). Image promotion is meant “to enhance the brand name of the parent service and create a positive attitude among viewers, advertisers, and other groups” (Eastman, 2000, p. 8). On the other hand, program promotion is meant to encourage viewing, among other things (Eastman, 2000). Most often, program promotion is carried out on-air in the form of promotional spots (Eastman, 2000). Eastman, Newton, and Bolls (2003) noted the importance of on-air promotion in the increasingly competitive media landscape. In addition, they claimed that promos should not only be acknowledged as a type of advertising, but also should be recognized for their ability to impact the decisions a viewer makes (Eastman et al., 2003).

Much of the research regarding on-air promotion has focused on the use of promos (Alessandri, 2009), and whether they are effective (Eastman & Newton, 1996, 1999; Eastman et al., 2003; Eastman & Otteson, 1994; Eastman, Schwartz, & Cai, 2005;

Newton, Williams, Eastman, & Billings, 2009; Walker, 1993). The lack of literature examining graphics as promotional tools likely results from the fact that on-air promotion has traditionally been implemented through the use of promos (Eastman et al., 2006). In addition, the scholarly research regarding on-air promotion has largely pertained to its use on broadcast television networks rather than cable television networks (Alessandri, 2009; Eastman & Newton, 1996, 1999; Eastman et al., 2003; Eastman & Otteson, 1994; Eastman et al., 2005; Newton et al., 2009; Walker, 1993).

The general use of on-air promotion by both broadcast and cable networks has been examined by a number of scholars (Alessandri, 2009; McAllister & Giglio, 2005). Alessandri (2009) conducted a content analysis to explore the different manner in which television networks and their affiliates utilized on-air promotion during the Super Bowl between 2001 and 2006. The data revealed that CBS and its affiliates ran more on-air promos during the Super Bowl in the years that the game aired on that network than did ABC and Fox in the years that the game aired on those networks (Alessandri, 2009). Furthermore, the data revealed that the promos that CBS and its affiliates aired featured a wider range of content than did the promos on the other networks (Alessandri, 2009). Among other things, sporting events that were set to air at a later date were promoted by CBS (Alessandri, 2009). On-air promotion within children's television was investigated by McAllister and Giglio (2005). A content analysis of programming blocks from five different networks, both broadcast and cable, indicated that the vast majority of programs aired or promoted on the WB and Fox featured characters that appeared in other media or consumer products (McAllister & Giglio, 2005). The data also revealed that on-air promotion was used to maximize the benefits of synergy (McAllister & Giglio, 2005).

For instance, a promo that aired on ABC, which is owned by Disney, reminded viewers that a certain program could also be seen on the Disney Channel (McAllister & Giglio, 2005).

Scholars have assessed the degree to which promos are effective based on a variety of factors (Eastman & Newton, 1996, 1999; Eastman et al., 2003; Eastman & Otteson, 1994; Eastman et al., 2005; Newton et al., 2009; Walker, 1993). Walker (1993) examined how the frequency of promos airing on the major broadcast networks impacted the ratings of new and returning primetime programs on those networks. Among other things, the results of the study indicated that the relationship between the frequency of promotion and ratings was negative and weak (Walker, 1993). Eastman and Newton (1999) investigated how the salience of promos, based on their location within commercial breaks and select other variables, might affect ratings. Though Eastman and Newton (1999) determined that the salience of promos did affect the ratings of the promoted programs, it should be noted that it was necessary to control for the ratings of the programs that aired immediately before those programs.

The effectiveness of promos also has been evaluated based on placement within major sporting events (Eastman & Newton, 1996; Eastman & Otteson, 1994; Newton et al., 2009). Eastman and Otteson (1994) determined that promos that aired during the 1992 Summer Olympics on NBC and the 1992 Winter Olympics on CBS were not beneficial to either network in terms of subsequent program ratings, regardless of whether a program was new. In addition, no relationship was found to exist between the frequency of the on-air promotion and ratings (Eastman & Otteson, 1994). Olympics-related on-air promotion was later revisited when Newton, Williams, Eastman, and

Billings (2009) studied the impact of promotion during the 2004 Olympics, which were broadcast on NBC and its cable networks. Newton et al. (2009) noted that NBC not only utilized its cable networks to cross-promote its broadcast lineup, but also moved up the premiere dates of numerous broadcast programs to take advantage of the Olympic audience. Compared to the ratings for the same time slot a year prior, 40% of the primetime programs promoted saw an increase in ratings in their first episode and approximately half of the programs' ratings remained flat (Newton et al., 2009). The effectiveness of promos for broadcast series that aired during various sporting events broadcast by ABC, CBS, and NBC during 1993 and 1994 was also examined (Eastman & Newton, 1996). These sporting events included professional baseball games, college bowl games, a World Cup soccer game, and golf matches, among others (Eastman & Newton, 1996). While ratings for most of the programs promoted remained flat, a quarter of program ratings did increase the week after the on-air promotion took place within a sporting event (Eastman & Newton, 1996).

In addition to frequency, salience, and placement, content has been acknowledged as potentially having the ability to influence the effectiveness of on-air promotion (Eastman et al., 2003; Eastman et al., 2005). Eastman, Newton, and Bolls (2003) investigated how the content of promos for sitcoms airing in primetime on broadcast networks might impact ratings. The data revealed that the content of the promos, based on the inclusion of variables such as surprise humor, did contribute to program ratings (Eastman et al., 2003). The impact of the content of the programs being promoted also has been explored by scholars (Eastman et al., 2005). Among other things, Eastman,

Schwartz, and Cai (2005) determined that on-air promotion influenced audiences for televised movies differently than it influenced audiences for television series.

A review of scholarly literature revealed few studies related to graphics that appear over content. A content analysis conducted by Foote and Saunders (1990) examined the graphics utilized in network news broadcasts. The data revealed differences in the speed at which graphics moved on the screen on each network, among other things (Foote & Saunders, 1990). Scholars also have undertaken effects research in an attempt to determine how graphics impact the way viewers process news stories after watching them on television (Bergen, Grimes, & Potter, 2005; Fox, Lang, Chung, Lee, Schwartz, & Potter, 2004). The data collected in one experiment indicated that graphics can improve the degree to which certain viewers retain information included in news stories (Fox et al., 2005). Bergen, Grimes, and Potter (2005) found that when subjects viewed news content without graphics, they relied on both their visual and auditory senses to process that content. However, when subjects viewed news content with graphics, their reliance on their auditory senses increased (Bergen et al., 2005).

Though research has been conducted to determine whether banners that appear during commercial breaks can help prevent viewers from changing the channel (Dix, Bellman, Haddad, & Varan, 2010), just two key studies have examined the use of graphics over programming for promotional purposes. Coffey and Cleary (2008) utilized content analysis to explore the use of “news crawls” for promotion by three major cable news networks: CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News. News crawls, or tickers, are often seen at the bottom of the television screen during news broadcasts and communicate a variety of information through moving text (Coffey & Cleary, 2008). The data revealed that two

of the three networks did use their crawls for overt promotion, but that crawls were rarely used to present stories about products offered by the parent companies of the networks (Coffey & Cleary, 2008). Coffey and Cleary (2011) later compared how the same cable news networks use news crawls and traditional video space for promotional purposes. The findings of the content analysis indicated that all three networks featured more overt promotion in their video content than in their news crawl content (Coffey & Cleary, 2011). Furthermore, two of the three networks promoted their programming at a higher rate within their video content than within their news crawl content (Coffey & Cleary, 2011).

**Method Review.** Regardless of the form of on-air promotion explored, content analysis appears to be the popular method for doing so. Content analysis has been used to determine how effective broadcast promos are based on frequency (Walker, 1993), salience (Eastman and Newton, 1999), placement within sporting events (Eastman & Newton, 1996; Eastman & Otteson, 1994; Newton et al., 2009), and content (Eastman et al., 2003; Eastman et al., 2005). In addition, content analysis has been used to investigate the use of news crawls for promotion by cable news networks (Coffey & Cleary, 2008, 2011). Because the majority of the literature regarding on-air promotion that was reviewed focused on the use of promos, the unit of analysis used most often was the promo itself. The two key studies found pertaining to the use of graphics utilized the ticker element as the unit of analysis (Coffey & Cleary, 2008, 2011). It is also important to note that while the studies focusing on promos were sampled from, and drew conclusions about, broadcast television networks (Alessandri, 2009; Eastman & Newton, 1996, 1999; Eastman et al., 2003; Eastman & Otteson, 1994; Eastman et al., 2005;

Newton et al., 2009; Walker, 1993), the studies focusing on the use of graphics for promotional purposes sampled from, and drew conclusions about, cable news networks (Coffey & Cleary, 2008, 2011).

This study sought to build upon previous research regarding on-air promotion by focusing on graphics rather than promos. While graphics can serve as promotional tools for television networks (Eastman et al., 2006), the use of graphics is not a topic covered in most scholarly literature. The study also sought to explore how the diversity of the cable television landscape may impact the use of graphics for promotion and the messages communicated through those graphics. It has been acknowledged that the differences among the cable news networks might impact the use of news crawls (Coffey & Cleary, 2008; 2011). Similarly, this study recognized potential differences between cable television networks. Because of the limited amount of existing literature pertaining to the use of graphics for promotion, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the relationship between the target audience of a cable television network and the content of messages communicated through the graphics on the network?

RQ2: What is the relationship between the business model of a cable television network and the content of messages communicated through the graphics on the network?

RQ3: What is the relationship between the target audience of a cable television network and the proportion of programming-related graphics devoted to retaining viewers on that network?

RQ4: What is the relationship between the business model of a cable television network and the proportion of programming-related graphics devoted to retaining viewers on that network?

The implicit independent variable in RQ1 and RQ3, which was measured nominally, is the orientation or target audience of a particular cable television network. Cable networks can target more than one audience segment. Audience segments may be defined by characteristics such as age, gender or shared area of interest. The independent variable in RQ2 and RQ4, which also was measured nominally, is the business model of a cable television network. While the majority of cable networks are commercial in nature, there are networks that do not air advertisements from third parties. The dependent variable in RQ1 and RQ2 is the content of the messages communicated through the graphics on a cable television network. A variety of messages can be communicated through graphics including those pertaining to programming or the network itself. This variable was measured at the nominal level, but also the ratio level to determine which messages were communicated more than others. The dependent variable in RQ3 and RQ4 is the proportion of programming-related graphics devoted to retaining viewers. Programming-related graphics are graphics that are somehow related to the programming offered by a network. Programming-related graphics meant to retain viewers are those that inform the viewer what program is airing next in hopes that he or she will not change the channel. This variable was measured at the nominal level, but also at the ratio level to determine the proportion of programming-related graphics devoted to retaining viewers.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Method**

Because the purpose of this study was to explore how the differences between cable television networks affected their use of graphics for promotion, and the messages communicated through those graphics, a comparative content analysis was conducted. The population of content for this study consisted of all the graphics displayed on USA, TNT, the Disney Channel, and Nickelodeon. These cable networks were selected for analysis based on a number of factors. USA, TNT, and the Disney Channel were the top three entertainment-based cable networks based on the total number of viewers in primetime in 2011 (Andreeva, 2011). These successful cable networks draw a significant number of viewers and as such, it was deemed worthwhile to investigate how they use graphics to communicate with these viewers. While USA and TNT target adults, the Disney Channel targets children. In order to obtain a robust assessment of the different ways networks utilize graphics based on their target audiences, it was necessary to incorporate another network that targets children in the design. As such, Nickelodeon was chosen as the fourth network. Aside from their target audiences, these four cable networks differ in another way. USA, TNT, and Nickelodeon are commercial in nature, meaning that they rely on advertising to generate revenue. The Disney Channel, on the other hand, is not an ad-supported network.

## **Sample**

Sampling was conducted during a consecutive two-week period that began on February 2, 2012, and ended February 15, 2012. In order to accurately compare the use of graphics across the four networks, it was imperative that they all be recorded at the same time, which was randomly selected, each day. While USA, TNT, and the Disney Channel air twenty-four hours per day, Nickelodeon does not. Instead, Nickelodeon becomes Nick-at-Nite overnight. Nick-at-Nite is considered to be a different network than Nickelodeon and it has a different target audience as well. Therefore, all sampling of programming blocks was done within the hours that all four networks are on the air. Nickelodeon is on air from thirteen to sixteen hours per day depending on the day of the week. It should also be noted that USA airs paid programming on Saturday and Sunday from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. Therefore, there were no programming blocks sampled from the hours in which Nickelodeon is not on the air or the hours in which USA airs paid programming. Two DVRs were used to record the programming blocks. Fourteen hours of each cable television network were recorded for a total of fifty-six hours recorded for analysis.

## **Coding Parameters**

Though programming blocks, which include commercial breaks, were sampled, the unit of analysis was the graphic that appears during programming segments. The actual number of graphics that would be featured during the sampling period was unknown when sampling began. All graphics that appeared during programming segments were coded except for network bugs. Bugs typically consist of a network's

logo, although they may also contain a network's name or other text (Eastman et al., 2006).

### **Relevant Measures**

The length of time in which the graphics were visible on the television screen was measured and then the graphics were categorized based on a number of characteristics. Programming segments on each network were recorded and reviewed prior to the sampling period in order to develop the appropriate coding categories. However, it was necessary to increase the number of categories pertaining to the types of messages communicated through the graphics after coding began.

Graphics were categorized as dynamic or static. "Dynamic" graphics include some type of movement other than the actual graphic appearing and disappearing, while "static" graphics do not. Graphics were also categorized by their content: text only or more than text. "Text only" graphics consist solely of text, while "more than text" graphics do not. Graphics identified as "more than text" were further categorized based on a number of factors. First, they were categorized based on whether they included images or footage of characters. Second, they were categorized based on whether they included a logo. Graphics that did include a logo were categorized based on the type of logo featured. Third, "more than text" graphics were categorized based on whether they included a holding shape. A holding shape is a shape, rectangular or otherwise, that encapsulates the message being communicated through a graphic. Those graphics that did include a holding shape were then categorized once again based on whether that holding shape was connected in some way to the network's bug.

Graphics also were categorized based on the type of message communicated: programming, programming/network website, programming/mobile, programming/mobile/network website, programming/social media, programming/pro-social/website, programming/sponsored, programming/sponsored/sister network programming, sister network programming, sponsored, network website, network, pro-social, pro-social/website or other.

“Programming” messages simply promote the network’s programming, whereas “programming/network website” messages promote the programming and drive to the network’s official website. “Programming/mobile” messages promote programming and involve a mobile component, while “programming/mobile/network website” messages promote programming and drive to the network’s official website, but also involve a mobile component. “Programming/social media” messages promote programming and drive viewers to some form of social media. If a graphic qualified as “programming/social media,” it was further categorized based on which form of social media the graphic encouraged viewers to access: Facebook, Twitter or other. If the graphic drove viewers to Twitter, it was categorized once again based on the presence of a specific question meant to engage viewers or the presence of a hashtag.

“Programming/pro-social/website” messages promote programming, promote a pro-social initiative and drive to a website. “Programming/sponsored” messages promote programming and include a sponsor, while “programming/sponsored/sister network programming” messages promote programming, include a sponsor and promote programming that will air on a sister network. “Sister network programming” messages promote programming that will air on a sister network. “Sponsored” messages promote a

third party product such as a sneak peek of an upcoming theatrical release, “network website” messages drive viewers to the network’s website only, and “network” messages promote the network. “Pro-social” messages promote a pro-social initiative, “pro-social/website” messages promote a pro-social initiative and drive to a website, while “other” messages do not fit into the specified categories.

Messages identified as promoting the network’s programming in some way (programming, programming/network website, programming/mobile, programming/mobile/network website, programming/social media, programming/pro-social/website, programming/sponsored, programming/sponsored/sister network programming or sister network programming) were categorized further based on the type of programming message they contained: now, next, later same day, other day or no specific day. “Now” programming messages identify the program that is airing when the graphic appears, while “next ” programming messages refer to the program that will air after the program in which the graphic appears. “Later same day” programming messages refer to a program that is identified as airing later on the network and “other day” programming messages refer to a program set to air on a different day. “No specific day” programming messages are those that promote a program, but do not promote a specific airing of a program. For instance, a graphic that consists of a program logo is promoting the program, but not driving viewers to a particular airing of that program.

Programming messages were further categorized based on the presence of tune-in information. “Day/time” tune-in information communicates specific information about when the program being promoted will air and “none” refers to graphics that include no tune-in information.

## **Reliability**

The lead researcher and a graduate student coded the graphics. The graduate student was trained to code by the lead researcher. After reviewing the protocol and relevant examples, a test run was conducted. Any points of disagreement or confusion were discussed and the lead researcher revised the coding protocol accordingly. Both intercoder and intracoder reliability were assessed by using an SPSS macro to compute Krippendorff's alpha (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). Ten hours of recordings, approximately 17% of the sample, were randomly selected for reliability testing. Intercoder reliability results ranged from .87-1.00 (see Table 1). Five of the ten hours used for intercoder reliability were coded a second time by the lead researcher approximately three weeks after they were first coded to establish intracoder reliability. All intracoder reliability results were 1.00 (see Table 2). In addition, it should be noted that Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to assess reliability for the graphic's duration on screen, a ratio-level measure, as recommended by Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2005).

Table 1

*Intercoder Reliability by Variable*

	<i>N</i>	Krippendorff's Alpha
Length (in seconds)	96	.99 <sup>a</sup>
Type of Graphic	96	1.00
Content of Graphic	96	.87
Character	70	1.00
Logo	70	.95
Type of Logo	34	.96
Holding Shape	70	1.00
Holding Shape Connected to the Bug	38	1.00
Type of Message	96	1.00
Type of Programming Message	92	1.00
Presence of Tune-in	92	.98

<sup>a</sup> This variable's reliability score is not a Krippendorff's alpha score. Instead, it is a Pearson's correlation coefficient.

Table 2

*Intracoder Reliability by Variable*

	<i>N</i>	Krippendorff's Alpha
Length (in seconds)	45	1.00 <sup>a</sup>
Type of Graphic	45	1.00
Content of Graphic	45	1.00
Character	35	1.00
Logo	35	1.00
Type of Logo	14	1.00
Holding Shape	35	1.00
Holding Shape Connected to the Bug	22	1.00
Type of Message	45	1.00
Type of Programming Message	43	1.00
Presence of Tune-in	43	1.00

<sup>a</sup> This variable's reliability score is not a Krippendorff's alpha score. Instead, it is a Pearson's correlation coefficient.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

The 56 hours of television recorded for this study yielded 472 graphics. USA featured 143 graphics, TNT featured 153 graphics, Nickelodeon featured 60 graphics, and the Disney Channel featured 116 graphics. A one-way ANOVA revealed that there was a significant difference in the average length of time (in seconds) graphics were visible on the television screen among the four networks,  $F(3, 468) = 27.49, p < .001$  (see Table 3). Scheffe post-hoc comparisons indicated that the graphics on USA ( $M = 138.10, SD = 196.92$ ) were visible significantly longer than the graphics on TNT ( $M = 44.86, SD = 123.94$ ), Nickelodeon ( $M = 10.75, SD = 2.58$ ), and the Disney Channel ( $M = 6.72, SD = 1.99$ ). However, the standard deviation of the length of graphics on both USA and TNT indicate that there was a great deal of variation. The median lengths of graphics on USA and TNT, 11.2 seconds and 7.4 seconds respectively, should also be noted, as they provide further insight into the length distribution of graphics on those networks.

A one-way ANOVA indicated a significant difference among the average number of graphics that appeared per hour on the four networks,  $F(3, 52) = 12.74, p < .001$  (see Table 3). Scheffe post-hoc comparisons revealed that Nickelodeon ( $M = 4.29, SD = 1.98$ ) featured significantly fewer graphics per hour than the Disney Channel ( $M = 8.29, SD = 4.48$ ), USA ( $M = 10.21, SD = 3.45$ ), and TNT ( $M = 10.93, SD = 1.77$ ).

Table 3

<i>Presence of Graphics by Network</i>				
	USA	TNT	Nickelodeon	Disney
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Length (in seconds)	138.10 (196.92) <sup>abc</sup>	44.86 (123.94) <sup>a</sup>	10.75 (2.58) <sup>b</sup>	6.72 (1.99) <sup>c</sup>
Number of Graphics Per Hour	10.21 (3.45) <sup>a</sup>	10.93 (1.77) <sup>b</sup>	4.29 (1.98) <sup>abc</sup>	8.29 (4.48) <sup>c</sup>

\* Means sharing a common superscript differ significantly by one-way ANOVA with Scheffe post-hoc. Comparisons were made across rows.

An examination of the basic attributes of the graphics that appeared on USA, TNT, Nickelodeon, and the Disney Channel revealed a number of differences (see Table 4). While all four networks featured a combination of dynamic graphics and static graphics, there were higher percentages of dynamic graphics on Nickelodeon (96.7%) and the Disney Channel (77.6%) than on USA (61.5%) and TNT (41.2%). That being said, there were significant differences between the percentages of dynamic graphics that appeared on all possible pairings of the networks. While all graphics were coded as either dynamic or static, it should be noted that there was no distinction made regarding how dynamic a given graphic actually was. A graphic that included any movement, big or small, other than appearing and disappearing was categorized as dynamic.

There was neither a significant difference between the percentages of more than text graphics on USA and TNT, nor between the percentages of more than text graphics on Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel. However, there were significant differences between the percentages of those graphics on USA and Nickelodeon ( $z = -10.32, p < .001$ ) and on USA and the Disney Channel ( $z = 2.87, p < .001$ ). In addition, there were significant differences between the percentages of those graphics on TNT and

Nickelodeon ( $z = 11.84, p < .001$ ) and on TNT and the Disney Channel ( $z = 6.56, p < .001$ ). While between 50% and 60% of graphics on USA and TNT qualified as more than text, 100% of graphics on both Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel fell into that category.

Table 4

<i>Basic Attributes of Graphics</i>				
	USA <i>N (%)</i>	TNT <i>N (%)</i>	Nickelodeon <i>N (%)</i>	Disney <i>N (%)</i>
Dynamic	88 (61.5%) <sup>abc</sup>	63 (41.2%) <sup>ade</sup>	58 (96.7%) <sup>bdf</sup>	90 (77.6%) <sup>cef</sup>
More Than Text	82 (57.3%) <sup>ab</sup>	77 (50.3%) <sup>cd</sup>	60 (100%) <sup>ac</sup>	116 (100%) <sup>bd</sup>

\* Percentages sharing a common superscript differ significantly at  $p < .001$  by  $z$ -test. Comparisons were made across rows.

The presence of characters, logos and holding shapes within more than text graphics varied by network (see Table 5). The majority of those graphics on USA (74.4%), TNT (77.9%), and Nickelodeon (99.3%) featured characters. On the other hand, just over 20% of those graphics on the Disney Channel featured characters. While logos were included in 100% of the more than text graphics on USA, there were no logos included in any of those graphics on Nickelodeon. Logos appeared in nearly 25% of more than text graphics on the Disney Channel and nearly 80% of more than text graphics on TNT. Of the graphics that included logos, program logos were the most popular kind featured on USA (67.1%), TNT (60.7%), and the Disney Channel (100%). However, it should be noted that there were graphics on both USA and TNT that included network logos. Furthermore, USA featured graphics that included sponsor logos and graphics that included the logo for the network's pro-social campaign, "Characters Unite." There were graphics on TNT, Nickelodeon, and the Disney Channel that featured

holding shapes around the messages being communicated, but there were no such graphics on USA. There were significant differences between the percentages of more than text graphics that included a holding shape on Nickelodeon and TNT ( $z = -10.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and on Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel ( $z = 10.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In addition, it should be noted that while 78.3% of the graphics with a holding shape that appeared on Nickelodeon touched the network bug in some way, none of the graphics with a holding shape that appeared on TNT or the Disney Channel did.

Table 5

<i>Attributes of More Than Text Graphics</i>				
	USA <i>N (%)</i>	TNT <i>N (%)</i>	Nickelodeon <i>N (%)</i>	Disney <i>N (%)</i>
Character	61 (74.4%) <sup>ab</sup>	60 (77.9%) <sup>cd</sup>	56 (99.3%) <sup>ace</sup>	26 (22.4%) <sup>bde</sup>
Logo	82 (100%) <sup>ab</sup>	61 (79.2%) <sup>ac</sup>	0 (0%)	28 (24.1%) <sup>bc</sup>
Holding Shape	0 (0%)	32 (41.6%) <sup>a</sup>	60 (100%) <sup>ab</sup>	62 (53.4%) <sup>b</sup>

\* Percentages sharing a common superscript differ significantly at  $p < .001$  by  $z$ -test. Comparisons were made across rows.

In regard to the messages communicated through graphics and the proportion of programming-related graphics devoted to retaining viewers, the data indicated that there were a number of significant differences among the networks analyzed. The research questions are restated here for convenience.

RQ1: What is the relationship between the target audience of a cable television network and the content of messages communicated through the graphics on the network?

The data revealed that each network, regardless of its target audience, used graphics to promote programming. Although TNT targets adults and Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel target children, the majority of the programming messages on those

three networks promoted programming only (see Table 6). In fact, there was not a significant difference between the percentage of graphics used only to promote programming on TNT (94.1%) and Nickelodeon (93.3%). The percentage of graphics devoted solely to promoting programming on USA, the other adult-targeted network, differed significantly from the percentages of those graphics on Nickelodeon ( $z = -10.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ), on the Disney Channel ( $z = -15.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and on TNT ( $z = -10.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ). One clear difference between the adult-targeted networks and the child-targeted networks was the use of graphics meant to drive viewers to social media. While both USA and TNT featured graphics that promoted programming and encouraged viewers to use some form of social media, Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel did not. Although the graphics with this type of message did not account for a large percentage of the graphics that appeared on USA (0.7%) or TNT (2.6%), their presence is worth noting. Furthermore, it should be noted that the single programming/social media graphic on USA drove viewers to Facebook and the four programming/social media graphics on TNT drove viewers to Twitter.

RQ2: What is the relationship between the business model of a cable television network and the content of messages communicated through the graphics on the network?

As previously mentioned, each network analyzed used graphics to promote programming. All the graphics featured on the Disney Channel, the only non-ad-supported network analyzed, promoted programming only. The other three networks, which are all ad-supported, also featured graphics that promoted programming only. However, they also featured graphics that contained other types of messaging. For instance, USA, TNT, and Nickelodeon all featured graphics that promoted programming

and drove viewers to the network's website. There were significant differences between the percentages of graphics with this type of message on USA and TNT ( $z = 9.45, p < .001$ ) and on USA and Nickelodeon ( $z = 7.79, p < .001$ ). In addition, all three ad-supported networks featured graphics that promoted the network's official website alone. There were no significant differences between the percentages of these graphics when comparing any pairing of USA (2.8%), TNT (1.3%), and Nickelodeon (3.3%). While TNT also featured graphics promoting the network itself, USA was the network that used graphics to communicate the largest number of different messages (see Table 6). In addition to the types of messages already mentioned, USA used graphics to promote programming that was sponsored, programming that was set to appear on one of its sister networks, and the network's ongoing pro-social campaign and its website, among other things.

Table 6

*Types of Messages in Graphics*

	USA <i>N</i> (%)	TNT <i>N</i> (%)	Nickelodeon <i>N</i> (%)	Disney <i>N</i> (%)
Programming	53 (37.1%) <sup>abc</sup>	144 (94.1%) <sup>ad</sup>	56 (93.3%) <sup>b^</sup>	116 (100%) <sup>cd^</sup>
Programming/Network Website	57 (39.9%) <sup>ab</sup>	1 (0.7%) <sup>a</sup>	2 (3.3%) <sup>b</sup>	0 (0%)
Programming/Social Media	1 (0.7%)	4 (2.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Programming/Pro-Social Website	2 (1.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Programming/Sponsored	1 (0.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Programming/Sponsored/ Sister Network Programming	5 (3.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Sister Network Programming	2 (1.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Sponsored	1 (0.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Network Website	4 (2.8%)	2 (1.3%)	2 (3.3%)	0 (0%)
Network	0 (0%)	2 (1.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Pro-Social/Website	17 (11.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

\* Percentages sharing a common superscript differ significantly at  $p < .001$  by  $z$ -test.

Comparisons were made across rows.

\* ^ indicates that percentages differ significantly at  $p < .01$  by  $z$ -test.

RQ3: What is the relationship between the target audience of a cable television network and the proportion of programming-related graphics devoted to retaining viewers on that network?

The data revealed that TNT and the Disney Channel featured programming-related graphics that specifically called out the program that was airing when the graphics appeared, while USA and Nickelodeon did not (see Table 7). Graphics promoting the next program set to air accounted for the largest percentage of programming-related graphics on Nickelodeon (70.7%) and the Disney Channel (42.2%). Nevertheless, there

was a significant difference between the percentages of those graphics on Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel ( $z = 3.78, p < .001$ ). While TNT did feature programming-related graphics that pertained to the next program set to air, USA did not. There were significant differences between the percentages of programming-related graphics that promoted the next program on TNT and Nickelodeon ( $z = -8.69, p < .001$ ) and on TNT and the Disney Channel ( $z = -5.27, p < .001$ ). All four networks, regardless of target audience, featured programming-related graphics that pertained to a program airing later on the same day in which the graphics appeared (see Table 7). While there was a significant difference between the percentages of these graphics on USA and TNT ( $z = -3.80, p < .001$ ), there was not a significant difference between the percentages of these graphics on Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel.

RQ4: What is the relationship between the business model of a cable television network and the proportion of programming-related graphics devoted to retaining viewers on that network?

The data revealed that while the three ad-supported networks all featured programming-related graphics encouraging viewers to watch a program set to air on a different day, the Disney Channel did not (see Table 7). There were significant differences between the percentages of these graphics on USA and TNT ( $z = 7.12, p < .001$ ), on USA and Nickelodeon ( $z = 14.40, p < .001$ ), and on TNT and Nickelodeon ( $z = 6.38, p < .001$ ). All four networks, regardless of business model, featured programming-related graphics that did not promote a particular airing of a program. While the percentages of these graphics were relatively low on USA, TNT, and Nickelodeon, over 25% of the programming-related graphics on the Disney Channel fell into this category. As such, there were significant differences between the percentages of graphics that did



not mention the specific day a program was set to air on the Disney Channel and USA ( $z = -5.85, p < .001$ ), on the Disney Channel and TNT ( $z = 5.33, p < .001$ ), and on the Disney Channel and Nickelodeon ( $z = -3.75, p < .001$ ). It should also be noted that while USA (97.5%), TNT (77.9%), and Nickelodeon (22.4%) featured programming-related graphics that included specific tune-in information, the Disney Channel did not.

Table 7

<i>Types of Programming Messages in Graphics</i>				
	USA <i>N</i> (%)	TNT <i>N</i> (%)	Nickelodeon <i>N</i> (%)	Disney <i>N</i> (%)
Now	0 (0%)	5 (3.4%) <sup>a</sup>	0 (0%)	12 (10.3%) <sup>a</sup>
Next	0 (0%)	20 (13.4%) <sup>ab</sup>	41 (70.7%) <sup>ac</sup>	49 (42.2%) <sup>bc</sup>
Later Same Day	20 (16.5%) <sup>a</sup>	54 (36.2%) <sup>abc</sup>	8 (13.8%) <sup>b</sup>	24 (20.7%) <sup>c</sup>
Other Day	99 (81.8%) <sup>ab</sup>	65 (43.6%) <sup>ac</sup>	5 (8.6%) <sup>bc</sup>	0 (0%)
No Specific Day	2 (1.7%) <sup>a</sup>	5 (3.4%) <sup>b</sup>	4 (6.9%) <sup>c</sup>	31 (26.7%) <sup>abc</sup>

\* Percentages sharing a common superscript differ significantly at  $p < .001$  by  $z$ -test. Comparisons were made across rows.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Discussion**

The results of this study have revealed not only the types of graphics different networks used to communicate with viewers, but also the messages contained in those graphics. Comparisons of the use of graphics by cable networks were made based on target audiences and business models, and the data revealed similarities within groups and differences between groups. However, the data also revealed differences within groups and similarities between groups.

On average, graphics that appeared on USA and TNT were longer in duration than those that appeared on Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel. In addition, on average, more graphics appeared per hour on USA and TNT than on Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel. One possible explanation for these differences lies in the target audiences of these networks. Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel target children so there may be concern about the length and quantity of graphics that appear over programming on those networks. That concern may not be present to the same extent when adults are the target audience, as is the case with USA and TNT. The constraints on inventory that accompany an ad-supported business model could also lead a network to use more and longer graphics to communicate with viewers. Although this argument would explain the observed use of graphics by USA and TNT, it would not do so for Nickelodeon, which is also ad-supported.

In regard to the characteristics of the graphics themselves, there were a number of differences among the four networks analyzed. While all four networks featured a mixture of dynamic and static graphics, the networks targeted at children featured higher percentages of dynamic graphics than the networks targeted at adults. In addition, all of the graphics on both Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel consisted of more than just text. The prominence of dynamic graphics and more than text graphics on those networks may stem from the need to draw the attention of viewers, who are predominantly children. One study found that animated graphics that appeared in tandem with news stories on television drew more attention than text graphics (Fox et al., 2005). If graphics are perceived by industry professionals to function in a similar way when used as promotional tools, it may explain the use of graphics that were dynamic and more than text by the child-targeted networks, as well as the adult-targeted networks.

While characters and logos were included in the majority of more than text graphics on both adult-targeted networks, the child-targeted networks varied a great deal. Nearly all of the more than text graphics on Nickelodeon featured characters, but none of them featured logos. Characters and logos were each present in slightly less than a quarter of those graphics on the Disney Channel. Regardless of the extent to which characters and logos were included in more than text graphics on these networks, the presence of those elements reflects an emphasis on branding that has been observed in other types of media targeted at children, such as food-related television advertisements (Connor, 2006). Aside from branding purposes, characters and logos can be used simply to remind viewers what program is being promoted. Therefore, it is clear why these elements were included in a portion of the graphics on USA and TNT as well. Graphics

on USA and TNT included a wider variety of logos than the graphics on the Disney Channel, but USA was the only network that featured sponsor logos in graphics. USA is an ad-supported network, and therefore, may be seeking ways to expand its appeal to advertisers by including their logos in graphics. In 2011, four of the top ten timeshifted primetime television programs aired on USA (“Nielsen’s Tops of 2011,” 2011). As such, it may be necessary for the network to include sponsor logos in graphics because its viewers are more likely to fast-forward through advertisements and sponsorship elements that appear during breaks between programming segments. This is an issue that will be faced by even more ad-supported networks as the percentage of viewers with a DVR continues to increase. Although TNT and Nickelodeon are also ad-supported networks, it does not appear as though including sponsor logos in graphics is an accepted practice at those networks.

The variety of messages communicated through the graphics on the four networks examined may provide insight into the priorities of the networks. Though programming was promoted heavily through graphics on each of the networks, the actual content of the messages differed. All (100%) of the Disney Channel’s graphics pertained solely to programming. While the majority of the graphics that appeared on the three ad-supported networks pertained to programming, not all of the messages focused solely on programming. Over 90% of the graphics on Nickelodeon and TNT did promote programming only, but a much lower percentage of graphics on USA fell into that category (37.1%). All three ad-supported networks featured graphics that promoted programming and the network’s website, as well as graphics that promoted the network’s website alone. While the percentages of those graphics differed by network, their

presence reflects the use of integrated marketing communications within the cable television landscape. Cross-media promotions have been found to draw more attention than promotions that utilize just one form of media (Tang et al., 2007). As such, it is beneficial for networks to encourage viewer interaction on multiple platforms. The inclusion of graphics that promote more than just programming may also illustrate the need of ad-supported networks to maximize the types of messaging included in graphics. As a non-ad-supported network, the Disney Channel has more freedom to use the breaks in between programming segments to communicate with viewers than ad-supported networks do. While the graphics on the Disney Channel did not drive additional interaction like the graphics on the ad-supported networks did, that does not necessarily mean that the network does not drive interaction in some other way.

The adult-targeted networks, USA and TNT, featured graphics that promoted programming and encouraged viewers to access some form of social media. USA, in particular, has an incentive to drive viewers to social media because the network's very own social media platform is attracting sponsors and generating revenue (Lafayette, 2012). As the popularity of social media continues to grow, graphics driving viewers to social media may be featured more on networks with audiences that are deemed old enough to be targeted with that type of messaging. Although there were similarities between the messages communicated by the graphics on USA and TNT, there were also significant differences. USA's graphics included a larger variety of messages, including messages promoting sponsored programming and programming on a sister network. USA clearly uses graphics to take advantage of the benefits of sponsorship and synergy, which impact the revenue streams on which the network relies. As previously

mentioned, USA features programming that is often timeshifted (“Nielsen’s Tops of 2011,” 2011). Therefore, the network may also feature graphics with a wide variety of messages because its viewers may use their DVRs to bypass any type of content that airs during the breaks between programming segments. There is a possibility that TNT features graphics that include sponsors or promote programming on TBS, its sister network, but graphics of that nature did not appear on the network during the sampling period.

As mentioned above, the majority of the graphics on both networks promoted programming in some way. The type of programming message included in those programming-related graphics may provide insight into the programming priorities of the networks. Aside from the graphics that did not drive to a specific airing of a program, all of the programming-related graphics on the Disney Channel promoted a program that was set to air on the same day in which the graphics themselves appeared. Nickelodeon, which also targets children, did feature graphics driving to programs set to air on a day other than the one in which the graphics appeared. However, the majority of the programming-related graphics on that network were meant to retain viewers on the same day. The focus on retaining viewers may be influenced by the Disney Channel and Nickelodeon’s target audience, children. Concern regarding the attention spans of viewers, as well as their ability to remember to tune in on a specific day could underlie the abundance of graphics meant to retain viewers on those networks. The Disney Channel may use graphics to drive viewers to programming set to air on another day, but there may not have been a programming event warranting that type of promotion during the sampling period.

Although USA and TNT both featured graphics meant to retain viewers, they featured higher percentages of graphics meant to drive viewers to a program airing on a different day. Both of these networks air original programs that have enjoyed varying levels of success (Morabito, 2011a, 2012). The high volume of popular original programming on USA recently prompted the network to start airing programs on Friday night, where it had not aired original programming for a number of years (Morabito, 2012). The need to build a loyal audience for original programming may influence these networks to use graphics more to promote programs airing throughout the week than to retain viewers on the day they see a graphic. USA and TNT rely on their ability to draw viewers to programming not only to increase the popularity of the programming, but also to generate advertising revenue. This may be yet another reason why they utilize graphics to promote programs that have been deemed priorities regardless of when they air. The importance of generating advertising revenue may also explain why there were graphics driving to programming set to air on a different day on Nickelodeon, which is also an ad-supported network.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Conclusion**

In an increasingly competitive media landscape, it is crucial that cable television networks be able to attract and maintain viewers. The results of this study clearly indicate that the four networks analyzed use graphics to do so. Key findings included the use of graphics to drive viewers to social media by the adult-targeted networks and the exclusive use of graphics to promote programming by the non-ad-supported network. In addition, the use of programming-related graphics by the child-targeted networks to retain viewers and the use of those graphics by the adult-targeted networks to drive viewers to programs set to air on different days are worth noting.

The findings of this study also revealed that the diversity found within the cable television landscape is reflected in the use of graphics by different networks within that landscape. While similarities and differences that corresponded to target audiences and business models were observed, similarities and differences that did not correspond to those variables were also observed. As such, the significance of the results stems from not only the comparisons made, but also from the unique manner in which each network was found to use graphics for promotion.

### **Scholarly Implications**

This study has established a basic level of knowledge about the use of graphics for promotional purposes among the cable networks analyzed. The findings indicate that graphics are used by these networks to strategically communicate with viewers and to



bolster programs or initiatives that the networks consider to be priorities. Therefore, the use of graphics as promotional tools is worthy of further examination by scholars. This study serves as the first step toward building a collection of literature regarding the use of graphics for promotion and there is clearly potential for many more studies examining this topic. Furthermore, the use of graphics for promotion is a topic that can be explored from a number of scholarly perspectives.

### **Practical Implications**

While cable networks monitor their competition, they may or may not monitor the use of graphics for promotional purposes by their competition. This study provides documentation regarding the use of graphics by the cable networks analyzed. The data collected have potential to be used for competitive purposes, both by the networks that were analyzed and others. Having access to information regarding the use of graphics by other networks might influence the development of promotional strategies throughout the cable television landscape. The data collected in this study and future studies regarding the use of graphics as promotional tools may become even more valuable as cable networks face the increasingly difficult task of connecting with viewers.

### **Future Research**

Although this study produced significant findings, additional studies must be conducted to continue building knowledge regarding the use of graphics. There are many cable networks that use graphics for promotional purposes. Therefore, it would be prudent to conduct additional content analyses to investigate the use of graphics by other cable networks. Examining the use of graphics for promotional purposes by broadcast networks would also be worthwhile.

Future studies could make comparisons other than the ones that were made in this study. For instance, comparisons based on target audience could pertain to the gender being targeted. The use of graphics by cable networks could be compared to the use of graphics by broadcast networks. In addition, it would be worthwhile to compare the use of graphics during different day parts on the same network. Future studies may also benefit from including network bugs in the sample. Network bugs can be used for a number of purposes, one of which is promotion.

After additional content analyses are conducted, the antecedents and effects of the use of graphics for promotional purposes can be explored. In-depth interviews with industry professionals could be conducted to gain insight into the decision-making process that precedes the implementation of a strategy for the use of graphics by cable networks. Questions regarding the perceived importance of graphics among the professionals and the use of graphics as part of integrated marketing campaigns could be asked. Future studies may also seek to determine how effective graphics are as promotional tools. A series of experiments could be conducted in order to identify the characteristics of graphics or types of messages communicated through graphics that resonate with viewers.

### **Limitations**

This study was conducted with a number of limitations. Sampling only from the hours in which Nickelodeon is on air and USA is not airing paid programming may have resulted in a sample that was not as representative of each network as possible. This is especially true considering that Nickelodeon is on air for just three hours during

primetime per week. The other three cable networks that were sampled not only garner high ratings during primetime, but they also premiere new episodes during that day part.

Another limitation was the length of the time period in which the sampling took place. Sampling from just two weeks may have resulted in a sample of graphics that was influenced by a major programming event airing on one or more of the networks. In addition, sampling from more than four networks would have resulted in a different sample and in turn, different findings. Comparisons across networks were based on target audiences and business models. Other types of comparisons could be made across cable networks, or even within specific cable networks.

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