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Multicultural Advertising and Updated Branding for Wedding Photographers

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MULTICULTURAL ADVERTISING AND UPDATED BRANDING FOR WEDDING PHOTOGRAPHERS

KAITLYN WIMMERS

HONORS PROJECT

Submitted to the Honors College
at Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with UNIVERSITY HONORS

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ABSTRACT

A traditional image of a couple getting married includes one man, one woman, who are young, white, and do not have children. Yet, demographics of prospective couples have become more diverse in terms of age, race-ethnicity, sexual orientation, and family composition. This project examines the extent to which these changes toward diversity in prospective couples are reflected in wedding photographers’ marketing strategies, using content analysis of photographs (N = 960) from photographers’ Wedding Wire profiles, personal photography websites, and professional Facebook pages. Eight photographers were chosen from the Midwest (Chicago and Indianapolis) and the West Coast (Los Angeles and San Francisco). Photographers were found on WeddingWire.com using the highest and lowest average ratings received, and a minimum of 20-50 ratings. The results suggest that photographers are still adhering to the traditional image of couples. The largest non-traditional representation is shown with non-white couples, with older couples being the least likely to be represented. Unexpectedly, Indianapolis shows more diversity in age and family structure than the other cities. For sexual orientation, as expected, Indianapolis had low representation, and surprisingly, Chicago had the lowest. Based off the findings from the content analysis, I created a marketing campaign for a hypothetical photography company to propose an example that is inclusive of diversity, while still showing the traditional image as well. The marketing campaign includes a Facebook photography page, a billboard, a commercial storyboard, and the home page for the photography company’s professional website.
INTRODUCTION

The United States have undergone significant changes in demographic make-ups and marriage and family patterns (Cherlin, 2005; 2010; Lamidi and Cruz, 2012; Sweeney, 2010). Many couples have delayed their marriage and already have children together. For some couples, this may be their second or third marriage and step-children may in the wedding. Some couples grew up in blended or step-families themselves, and have both biological and step-parents who will be attending the wedding. And in the wake of the Supreme Court decision, same-sex couples now have the opportunity to get married anywhere in the United States (Cherlin, 2005; 2010; Lamidi and Cruz, 2012; Sweeney, 2010). In short, prospective couples are increasingly "non-traditional" in many ways, including their age, family backgrounds, and sexual orientation.

In this Honors project, I examine the extent to which these demographic changes in prospective couples are reflected in marketing of the goods and services that are consumed for a wedding. I focus on photographers for a few reasons. First, photography is an extremely visual communication style. Other aspects of the wedding, like choosing an officiant or hiring musicians, will not give as much insight into the couple. Second, photographs also act as physical records of the wedding, and often becomes an important decision in the minds of engaged couples for this reason. With couples spending over eight percent of their $31,213 average wedding cost on a professional photographer, picking the right one can be a challenge (XO Group, Inc., 2015).

While prospective couples are increasingly "non-traditional" in many ways, including their age, family backgrounds, and sexual orientation, how wedding photographers use branding to their advantage when attracting customers who may not fit in with "traditional" images of family and marriage (e.g., young, white, straight, no children, with one set of parents on each
side) is important. Couples have a variety of options they can use to help them choose a photographer. Many photographers have websites, social media accounts, and print advertisements to entice prospective clients and showcase their work. As couples review these pages and photographs, they may be looking for high quality that they cannot produce by themselves. They may also be hoping to see if the photographer will be able to capture their demographic and family backgrounds, as well as their life stories (Johnson and Grier, 2011).

This Honors project had two goals. First, I conducted content analysis of photographs \( n = 960 \) posted in photographers' Wedding Wire profiles, personal photography websites, and professional Facebook pages to examine representations of “non-traditional” characteristics of the couples in terms of race-ethnicity, age, family backgrounds, and sexual orientation in four major cities in the United States. Second, on the basis of my findings from the content analysis, I created an example of a marketing campaign that is inclusive of nontraditional couples.

Because of the increase in diverse couples and family structures, the research questions posed for this project are important to study so photographers can keep their marketing campaigns current to attract more diverse or "non-traditional" couples and their families. The findings from this project could be used in industries outside of photography, and other professions and companies could recreate their brand to be more inclusive of the growing diversity in the population of the United States.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are three main areas that are important for this project: changes to U.S. demographics, marriages, and families; branding and consumer culture; and multicultural advertising. The changes to U.S. society must be determined in order to evaluate two major points: first, whether a change actually exists; and second, whether those changes are being
represented by wedding photographers. An understanding of the relationship between branding and consumers is important in order to create an appropriate brand image that will relate to potential consumers. How consumers respond to multicultural advertising is important so that an advertising campaign – whether the hypothetical campaign created for this project or a real campaign for an existing company – can reach its intended audience.

*Changes to U.S. Demographics, Marriages, and Families*

In the past decades, demographic compositions, especially among younger people, in the United States have been changing. With the increases in immigration from Central and South America as well as Asia (Grieco 2010), the percentage of non-Hispanic whites in the population has been declining. Are those who identify as part of a racial-ethnic demographic being represented wedding photographs?

Patterns of marriages and families have also been changing. These changes are seen in four different ways: increases in premarital cohabitation, average age of first marriage, remarriage, blended/step-families, and same-sex marriage. First, the median age for first marriage is continuing to rise, especially because of the college educated, who are delaying marriage until after they finish their education and/or start careers (Cherlin, 2010). Are these older couples receiving the same publicity as their younger counterparts on photographers' websites? Second, there are more couples who already have children when they get married. One reason is that there has been a rise in the number of people cohabiting with a partner and more cohabitors than before have children before marriage (Cherlin, 2010). Another reason is the high prevalence of divorce and remarriage. The estimates about the current remarriage rate show that in 2012, there were approximately 30 remarriages that occurred per every 1,000 "men and women aged 18 and older who were eligible for a remarriage" (Lamidi and Cruz, 2012). Among
all 2012 marriages, approximately 31% were remarriages (Lamidi and Cruz, 2012). Many remarriages include children from previous relationships, which creates blended families and other situations that are more complex than a “traditional” family where children have only two parents (Cherlin, 2010; Sweeney, 2010). All in all, couples who are childless or have only one set of parents are increasingly fewer. Are the couples with children who decide to get married receiving the same attention as couples without children on photographers’ websites? What if a prospective bride wants her biological and step fathers to play equal roles in her wedding?

Since same-sex marriage was legalized within the last year, there is some information about cohabiting LGBT couples and their children, but very little about couples who are married. Because of the recent increase in support of LGBT individuals, individuals are coming out earlier in life, so there has been a decrease in the number of LGBT couples raising children than in 2000 (Gates, 2015). Are photographers attempting to appeal to same-sex couples through the photographs used on their websites?

**Branding and Consumer Culture**

In order to create a brand, including a brand for a photographer, it is important to look at all three meaning makers: cultures, consumers, and corporations (Allen et al, 2008). Branding has roots in psychology and information economics (knowledge-based view), but can also be viewed through interpretivist/postmodern research (meaning-based view) (Allen et al, 2008).

The knowledge-based view highlights how brand positioning helps the corporation convey the intended meaning to consumers and positioning can highlight the brand's points of difference when compared to competition; combined, they create the brand equity (Allen et al, 2008). Photographers would be the primary meaning maker when it comes to the knowledge-based view. Prospective couples would be presented with the brand’s meaning (as created by the
photographer) based on how the photographer chooses to present his/her work, but the couples are assumed as creating relatively little – if any – meaning based on their personal lives. The knowledge-based view does not consider how the consumers will react to the photographer’s work and the photographer’s brand.

The meaning-based view uses "experiential and symbolic aspects of consumption;" specifically, the meanings that people value in real life and its influence in the co-creation of branding (Allen et al, 2008). Cultural meaning-making can be defined along "age, gender, and social class lines," and research is starting to support how changes to the "broader cultural, political, legal, and market contexts" can affect meaning-making as well (Allen et al, 2008). Consumer meaning-making can include the effects of self-identity (even an individual's perception of his/her "ideal" self) as well as consumers as part of "webs of interpersonal interconnections" and (sub-)groups (Allen et al, 2008). This project focuses primarily on the meaning-based view, as the research will be focused on the cultural and consumer aspects of wedding photography, and applies that information to the photographer's brand. Photographers can present their work in a certain way, but prospective couples will interpret that work based on their own situations. Photographers need to recognize their target market in the work they choose to highlight, and do so in such a way that the prospective couples view the photographer positively and choose to book him/her.

Since the corporation is also a meaning-maker, the company should recognize current consumer psychology to aid in the brand-building process and learn to "manage the buzz" to promote positive word-of-mouth (Allen et al, 2008). Corporations also need to recognize how social media has created "brand communities" or "publics" of individuals who might not interact with each other, but have "virtual communication" with a common interest (Arvidsson and
Caliandro, 2015). Corporations can use these common identities created via social media to their advantage, if the marketing is done correctly (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2015). Photographers can utilize social media to connect with individuals on a much broader scale. Photographers’ photos on Facebook can offer ways for potential customers – with common identities with some of the photographer’s subjects – to see how well the photographer captures different couples. Social media users might have an interest in photography, an interest in wedding photography, or simply be interested in their friend or relative’s wedding. These interests can lead a social media user to the photographer’s social media pages, and could connect with a customer that the photographer would not have ordinarily booked using traditional means.

**Multicultural Advertising**

The "growing diversity" in different countries has encouraged multicultural advertising to target cultural and sexual minorities, which can create negative reactions with those in the majority population (Johnson and Grier, 2011). The Johnson and Grier (2011) study is admittedly non-representative, since it uses 109 people from Paris, France, but their findings are important to note since France was chosen since its pressures for assimilation are "higher and more explicit," while the US expectations are "more modest than in other places" (Johnson and Grier, 2011). The Johnson and Grier (2011) study attempts to uncover how to target minority groups without alienating the majority group, which is a much more delicate line to balance in France with the country's greater push for assimilation. If targeting minority groups can be done in France, then the strategies employed could be used in the United States, since it has lower pressures for assimilation when compared to France.

The study tested four hypotheses. The first finding was that distinctive/minority viewers had a "better attitude towards" multicultural advertising than non-distinctive/majority viewers
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(Johnson and Grier, 2011). The second finding was that the "expected interaction between distinctiveness and strength of cultural identification" did not influence how viewers perceived the advertising (Johnson and Grier, 2011). This finding was interesting to note, as the study was an update on prior research. The prior research had observed that the strength of cultural identification would impact response to advertisements, while the Johnson and Grier (2011) study did not hold the finding from prior research to be true. The third finding from the Johnson and Grier (2011) study was that the "two-way interaction" between "distinctiveness and level of cultural embeddedness[/cues] marginally influenced viewers' congruence judgments." The fourth finding was that "felt targetedness" affects the impact of congruence judgments on viewers' attitude towards advertising (Johnson and Grier, 2011). The Johnson and Grier (2011) study demonstrates that multicultural advertising can positively impact minority viewers’ decisions in favor of the company that chooses to use multicultural advertising, as long as viewers feel they are being targeted (or represented) by the advertisement. Photographers can use multicultural advertising to reach a broader demographic, but it must be done realistically (rather than, for example, stereotypically or ironically) in order for potential couples to be interested in the photographer.

In sum, there has been increased awareness that companies must develop their brand in such a way that it catches the attention of their target market (Allen et al., 2008). With improper branding, sales are lost to competitors. As demographics and lifestyles have become increasingly diverse in the United States (Cherlin, 2005; 2010), branding has to be updated to account for this increase in diversity, and marketing strategies need to give firms a culturally relevant and timely image. But how does a firm balance between maximizing the number of potential customers
while minimizing the number of potentially alienated customers? To answer this broad question, I focus on a specific industry: wedding photography.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND PROPOSED ACTIVITIES**

The main research question for this project was: Do contemporary photographers adhere to portrayals of the traditional image when posting photographs to their websites, or is there a shift toward diversity in featured couples? Regardless of how much a photographer has updated their portrayals, how can photographers make themselves more marketable to "non-traditional" couples and their families? How can photographers be inclusive without appearing niche when creating their marketing campaign?

To answer these questions, a qualitative research study using a content analysis (Kassarjian, 1977) was conducted to find answers to the following questions: What representation is currently seen on wedding photographers' professional sites? Are photographers appearing biased and/or discriminatory to "non-traditional" couples and their families?

Once these questions were answered using the findings from the qualitative analysis, the second activity was the creation of an inclusive marketing campaign for a hypothetical photography company. This campaign includes a Facebook page, blurbs for the photographer's website, a commercial storyboard, and billboard advertisements. The campaign is meant to be an example for possible applications of the research findings that can be applied in industries beyond wedding photography.

**METHOD**

*Sample Selection*

To analyze photographers' current marketing campaigns, a content analysis (Kassarjian, 1977) of their websites, WeddingWire.com profiles, and Facebook pages was conducted.
WeddingWire.com was used to find these photographers, because it was a popular site used to find local vendors and also because it had sort options based on number of reviews and average ratings, which makes it easier to select photographers for the study. The consumer rating system on WeddingWire.com is on a five-point scale, which includes: quality of service, responsiveness, professionalism, value, and flexibility, which also provides more insight into how couples reviewed the photographers. The factors on the five-point scale are similar to SERVQUAL, a service quality model that has five factors: reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness (Parasuraman, 1988). Another common database, TheKnot.com, does not offer a sort option based on reviews and therefore will not be used to select photographers.

A total of eight photographers were chosen between the Midwest (four photographers) and West Coast (four photographers) through the procedure discussed subsequently. These regions were chosen to elicit variations in demographics and political ideologies, which could affect the marketing campaigns used in the regions. To narrow the sample further, two photographers were chosen from each of the two largest cities in these regions (based on current census data). For the Midwest, photographers were chosen from Chicago, Illinois, and Indianapolis, Indiana. For the West Coast, photographers were chosen from Los Angeles, California, and San Francisco, California.

In order for a photographer to be chosen for this research, the photographer must have had at least 50 reviews to be considered, as the larger sample size hopefully gave a more honest average review of the photographer. Indianapolis and San Francisco had to have slightly modified criteria for their reviews. In Indianapolis, the highest rated photographer had 45 reviews, and the lowest rated photographer had 12 reviews. In San Francisco, the highest rated photographer met the criteria, but the lowest rated photographer had 23 reviews. Also, the
photographer must have been from (and service) the greater city area. The photographer, for example, could not be listed as "nationwide" or from another state but must include the city in their "radius." A photographer was still considered if he/she is located in a suburb or nearby city and serviced the city. The "average rating" sort option was used, as one photographer from each city was chosen for having one of the highest ratings and meeting a minimum number of reviews (described above); the other photographer was chosen as having one of the lowest average ratings and meeting a minimum number of reviews (described above).

The pictures were drawn from the following sources: the highlight reel on the photographer's WeddingWire.com profile, the "highlight reel" on the home page of their website (if applicable), the wedding photo albums on their website, and the pictures from their professional Facebook page. The sources were reviewed in the listed order until at least 100 pictures were collected. After all of these sources were exhausted, there was one photographer – Jessica D'Onofrio Photography from Los Angeles – who did not reach the minimum of 100 photos. Photographs that do not include a shot of the couple (i.e., ring shots, decorations, etc.) were not included in the research. Between the eight photographers, a total number of 960 usable photographs were considered in the present analysis.

**Coding Schemes and Analytical Plans**

In order to code these pictures, I counted the number of pictures in which “non-traditional” groups were portrayed in the four aspects of changes in prospective couples. These aspects include: race-ethnicity (those except for non-Hispanic whites), age (older than in their 20s or early 30s), family structure (whether they have children; whether they were with only one set of parents on each side), and sexual orientation (same-sex couples). I looked at pictures that showed the couple alone, the couple in the wedding party, and the couple with family.
I calculated the percentage of non-white couples, older couples, couples with children, and gay couples respectively for the total number of photographs collected in each region (n = 339 in Chicago, n = 200 in Indianapolis, n = 146 in Los Angeles, and n = 275 in San Francisco).

**RESULTS**

Figure 1 presents the results for representations of four types of non-traditional groups (when compared to the traditional image of couples portrayed in wedding photographs), including non-whites, older couples, same-sex couples, and couples with children. Of the four types, the highest non-traditional representation was of non-white couples. Percentages of non-white couples within the sample photographs were 45 percent in San Francisco, 39.6 percent in Los Angeles, 28.3 percent in Chicago, and 14.5 percent in Indianapolis. I compared these percentages to the percentages of non-white population in these regions. The results are presented in Figure 2. The percentages of non-white population were drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau website (2016). As shown in Figure 2, the differences in representation of racial-ethnic minority in the photographs across the four cities generally mirrored differences in the percentage of racial-ethnic minorities in the demographic data in each city. All cities experienced under-representation of racial-ethnic minorities. Specifically, the representation of racial-ethnic minorities in the photographs was higher in the two cities in the West coast than the two cities in the Midwest, especially Indianapolis. Chicago had a lower representation of racial-ethnic minorities than San Francisco despite its higher rate of racial-ethnic minorities in the region.

[Figures 1 and 2 around here]

Chicago was also surprising in terms of same-sex representation with only 0.3 percent of the photographs showing same-sex couples. While the representation was low for all the cities, the photographers from Chicago had a lower same-sex representation than the photographers
from Indianapolis (0.5 percent). Both Los Angeles (4.8 percent) and San Francisco (2.6 percent) had significantly higher same-sex representation, even though the numbers were still quite low. There are a few possible reasons for the discrepancy between the West Coast same-sex representation and the Midwest same-sex representation. These reasons include societal acceptance of same-sex marriage is higher on the West Coast than in the Midwest, the photographers chosen were more likely to belong to a minority category on the West Coast than the ones chosen in the Midwest, and same-sex marriage was legalized a year earlier in California than in Indiana or Illinois, which could mean the marriages are more common for the West Coast. This representation could change in the near future with the 2015 Obergefell v. Hodges Supreme Court decision that legalized same-sex marriage across the country. Figure 3 compares the percentages from the photographs to the percentages of same-sex couples in these regions. There is a significant difference between the reported population and the representation seen among the photographers.

[Figure 3 around here]

It is worth noting that there were more photos of same-sex male couples than those of same-sex female couples. This is inconsistent with the fact that more females than males form same-sex unions and get married (Smith, 2011). There are a few different reasons as to why the same-sex marriage representation is skewed. The overrepresentation of same-sex male couples compared to same-sex female couples is consistent with mass media’s portrayal of same-sex couples: a portrayal of a same-sex male couple shows up with a higher frequency than the portrayal of a same-sex female couple. Cohen and Byers (2014) argue that the hyper-sexualization of (heterosexual) females in U.S. culture leads to the society’s hesitancy to accept
same-sex female romantic relationships and increases a misconception that same-sex female
couples cannot be in a “true” relationship because of lack of sex (“lesbian bed death”).

Indianapolis topped the other cities in two representations: non-traditional age and family
structure. Non-traditional age representation included couples that appeared to be mid-thirties or
older. 8.0 percent of pictures showed couples who looked older in Indianapolis, whereas only 5.1
percent in San Francisco, 1.4 percent in Los Angeles, and zero percent in Chicago presented
those who looked older. Family structure representation specifically refers to the couple's
children also being pictured with the couple. About 12 percent of pictures show couples with
children in Indianapolis, followed by 8.5 percent in San Francisco and 3.7 percent in Chicago.
There were no pictures of couples with children in Los Angeles. There are a couple possible
explanations for why there was so little representation of older adults. It is possible that older
couples may prefer having a smaller wedding, having a friend be the photographer, and choosing
a photographer primarily on price. Since older adults tend to perceive fewer benefits to marriage
than younger adults, receive less pressure to marry from family and friends, and/or may be
responding to economic factors, if older adults choose to get married, a wedding for older adults
is not as big of a showcase as weddings for younger adults (Sweeney, 2010).

Overall, the present analysis suggests that photographers are still adhering to the
traditional image of couples. These results could be due to the subjective nature of wedding
photography. A wedding photographer or an individual couple generally sees the traditional
image of a couple being portrayed in all types of wedding media. Being inundated with this
traditional image leads people to assume that this is the norm in terms of who is getting married
(Strano, 2006). Another reason is that those who are part of the traditional image may be more
likely to be able to afford professional photographers. While this study did not look at
socioeconomic factors as it related to wedding photography, research in this area could provide insight into who is getting married and how they are getting married.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this project, the primary recommendation for wedding photographers is that they should look to the demographic data for their area in order to better represent possible clients. Photographers should break away from the traditional image that has become normalized in wedding media, and instead offer a greater mix of diversity in the images they choose to highlight. This recommendation can be applied to other industries because it is not recommending for marketing efforts to be focused on a niche, multicultural market. Instead, it is recommending that representation match the diversity already apparent in the area where the marketing is occurring. In doing so, the majority populations that have already been marketed to will continue to be targeted by marketing, but they will be targeted alongside the minority populations within their area. This representation of population base rates in company advertising could provide a competitive advantage compared to companies that choose to maintain traditional representation in advertising. For example, companies that use models can hire diverse models to pose for their advertisements while still using models that fit within the industry's traditional image.

A second recommendation is for wedding photographers to feature those couples with the lowest representation across the board: couples with children and older couples. Because of a shift in marriage age – including those who delayed marriage or those who are remarrying – the wedding industry, and wedding photography specifically – is doing little to attract these couples to vendors. This recommendation can be applied to other industries in a broader sense. Industries should look to data showing who is using their goods/services and compare this data to the
demographics of the people shown in their marketing campaigns. If these numbers are not relatively similar, then the company can adjust their marketing strategies to include a greater diversity of representation.

Limitations and Challenges

The present analysis has limitations and challenges. This is not representative and cannot be applied to the entire United States because of its small sample size. The photographers were chosen through a rating system that does not give much indication as to the factors considered for each rating. The fact that the study is not representative could also be a factor in terms of the regions chosen. The results could be different if photographers were selected from the East Coast and the South instead.

Another limitation is that the study lacks inter-rater reliability. All of the picture coding was done by one person, with no additional aid. Race-ethnicity was determined subjectively, and individuals who “looked white” were considered to be white. This strategy could have led to overlooking white Hispanic individuals, among others. If this study were to be continued and/or expanded, it would be important to have multiple people code pictures so there is less subjectivity to the coding system.

Finally, a challenge with this study was that it looked primarily at markets for which we have very little data and that – in some cases – have not been extensively studied. As further research is conducted and released for these markets that can give further insight into the sociological and marketing aspects, this study would need to be updated to include the new information.

Applying Recommendations
Despite the aforementioned limitations, the present analysis has some strengths. The sample for the present study was systematically chosen from a popular wedding website that many prospective couples use. The evidence found in this study showed that wedding photographers continue to portray the “traditional” image of a couple—young, white, straight, and childless. This evidence may inform the photography industry about the urgency of updating their marketing strategies. The recommended marketing update would reflect the changing demographics and marriage patterns in U.S. society. In the next section, I present an example of an inclusive marketing campaign for a hypothetical photography company.

MARKETING CAMPAIGN

The marketing campaign includes four different modes of communication: social media, the internet, television, and outdoor. The items are made for a hypothetical photography company called Tipping Point Photography, and included the company’s Facebook photos page, a professional website home page, a commercial storyboard, and a sample billboard advertisement. After describing the specific marketing examples, I will explain how I chose the company name, logo, and slogan, as well as the photographs that are seen throughout the advertising examples.

*Facebook Photos Page*

Since part of the research occurred on photographers’ Facebook pages, and social media is now how many people connect with friends, family, and companies, Tipping Point Photography has part of their Facebook page created (Figure 4). While the Photos page on Facebook normally takes up the entire screen, the “About,” “People Who Like This Page,” and “Similar Pages” sections were retained on the left column for this sample page. This was done to provide more information about the company on a single page, rather than creating a Timeline
page and a Photos page for the company. By including the left column sections, especially the “People Who Like This Page” section, it not only allows for a sample of the photographer’s diverse pictures to be shown, but also for the diversity in the people who choose to follow – or like – the company.

[Figure 4 around here]

Professional Website Home Page

A large portion of the research for this project occurred on the professional websites for the photographers. The photographs they chose to highlight were coded, a note was made about the characteristics of their photographers if possible, and a mental note was made regarding the ease of use of each website. While pricing was not considered for the purposes of this study, price – along with socioeconomic factors, as mentioned earlier – could provide additional insight into the photographers and who chooses to book them.

Tipping Point’s website offers for visitors to “Jump in!” (Figure 5). This link to additional company details meshes with the imagery of the company slogan, “We’ll take the plunge with you!” Additional page options that can be visited from the home page (if this was a working website) include biographical info in the “About Us,” pricing, a photo gallery, and the option to contact the company. The home page features three sections, which were also the three primary factors examined by this study.

The first section is “Why Tipping Point?” This section outlines how Tipping Point is different from other photography companies. Specifically, the company participates in multicultural advertising that fits with client’s needs. While I mentioned that pricing and socioeconomic factors were not examined in this study, the website offers some brief information on pricing in an effort to reach an even more diverse population.
The second section showcases a highlight reel with five photographs. While other photos would be available on the gallery page, most photography websites featured at least a couple photos on the home page of their website. Since the home page is generally what people see first, it is important to have a glimpse of the photographer’s portfolio available on the home page in an effort to entice viewers to continue to flip through the website. Photography is an extremely visual mode of communication, so showcasing the photographer’s work on the home page also acts as verification that the photographer understands their craft and will be able to deliver on the promises made via text.

The third section discusses the photographers in the company. A non-discrimination statement is included regarding employment practices to further illustrate the company’s inclusivity. Pictures of the photographers are included, and would link to biographies for each photographer if this was a working website. This section is an effort to show Tipping Point’s commitment to “walking the walk,” not just in the couples they service, but in their day-to-day business practices as well. Kathryn Minshew, CEO and co-founder of The Muse, stated, “A company is only as good as its people. The hard part is actually building the team that will embody your company culture and propel you forward” (Marsh, 2015). By showing the photographers that are part of the company and discussing uniqueness of employees and customers, Tipping Point is showing that their employees truly embody the company culture.

Commercial Storyboard

Commercials were not included as part of this study, but after searching for television commercials for photographers, all that really showed up was television shows for photographers who have somehow made themselves famous. Wedding photographers might have a set plan for
how to attract their market (e.g., word of mouth, web advertisements, and wedding database searches). But, their marketing campaigns might be attracting only those in their target market, along with a few outliers. Since Tipping Point prides itself on inclusivity, a commercial might reach a broader audience.

Figure 6 presents six commercial storyboards that I created. The commercial starts out in a similar way to many traditional wedding advertisements: “Congratulations! You’ve said yes to the love of your life!” and “Now who’s going to capture that special day?” But once the viewer gets past those two statements, everything changes. The commercial calls out other photographers for providing cookie-cutter services with the statements, “You don’t want the same tired poses…” and “Your pictures should show how unique you are!” For the latter statement, pictures of different hobbies will appear on the screen to provide an example of one kind of unique quality: interests. The next shot has the statement, “We’re here to showcase YOU & YOUR PARTNER!” and introduces a large variety of photographs. Rather than showing all of the photographs at once, I would recommend dropping in a couple at a time and layering the photographs on top of each other. This way, the viewer’s eyes are not overwhelmed by the sudden influx of all of these different pictures. Also, by taking additional time on this shot, the commercial is able to simultaneously showcase the company’s work as well as entice a large variety of viewers. The final shot for the commercial provides contact information, the company logo, and the company slogan.

The background color scheme used has different shades of red. Since people tend to read from left to right, there is a streak of lighter pink that starts from the top left corner and draws the viewers’ eyes directly to the picture(s) in the middle of the screen. The final shot brings the
reader’s eye directly to the logo through the background color and the size of the logo, then to the information around it.

[Figure 6 around here]

*Billboard Advertisement*

Since billboard advertisements are frequently used for local marketing efforts, their usage was not examined for this study. Billboards could be an effective method of advertising to better reach a broad audience. Because billboards have to be quick reads, the primary focus is on the diversity of photographs that were chosen to be featured. While same-sex couples and older couples were not able to be portrayed due to the limitations of stock photos, there are couples of different races and a couple with a child.

The company slogan, logo, and contact info are included, as is usual for a billboard. The only other addition is the phrase, “Love is in the air!” (Figure 7). This phrase was chosen because of the imagery it creates with its contrast to the company slogan: it creates a dichotomy between air and water. The background color is a fade to a deep red, with the darkest shade of red behind the “Love is in the air!” phrase. The lightest shade of pink emanates like a flash from the corner with the logo as a subtle reference to flash photography, and also to draw the eye to the company logo and website.

[Figure 7 around here]

*Why Tipping Point Photography?*

I chose the name of the company to be “Tipping Point Photography” because the phrase “tipping point” has a few different applicable meanings when it comes to a company deciding to be an inclusive business. Tipping point is defined by Merriam-Webster as “the critical point in a situation, process, or system beyond which a significant and often unstoppable effect or change
takes place.” The phrase has even been used as the concept for an entire book by Malcolm Gladwell. Gladwell, a writer, bestselling author, and speaker, wrote *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Make a Big Difference* in 2000, using research from psychology, social psychology, and sociology (Famous Authors, n.d.; Gladwell, n.d.). Gladwell defines the “tipping point” to be “that magic moment when an idea, trend, or social behavior crosses a threshold, tips, and spreads like wildfire” (Gladwell, n.d.).

Can a photography company really be a tipping point? As was discussed in the literature review, photography is an extremely visual form of communication. In the case of wedding photography, it can be seen almost as representing the entire population of everyone who is getting married. The results of my content analysis suggested that photographs were not representative of the population’s demographics and largely adhered to the traditional image.

With this information in mind, I would argue that yes, a photography company can be a tipping point because the company can break away from the traditional image and feature a variety of couples and families. This process of targeting minorities without alienating the majority will hopefully lead to an increase in the company’s popularity. The increase in popularity would be noticed by other companies, who will then follow suit and offer more diverse representation. This change could reach from wedding photographers, to all photographers, and beyond to other industries. If this widespread change occurs, then the company has become a tipping point.

**Logo**

Since the company’s name is Tipping Point Photography, the company needed a logo that would complement inclusivity and progress, as well as highlight that it is a photography company (Figure 8). A camera is a natural choice to demonstrate the photography aspect of the
company. To show inclusivity and progress, a rainbow takes the place of the camera lens. Often, rainbow colors are used for the LGBT movement, but it has additional, important meanings that make it an ideal choice for the company. Merriam-Webster defines “rainbow” in five different ways, but two of those definitions are especially important here: “a wide assortment or range” and “an illusory goal or hope.” The company is featuring a wide assortment of couples and their families, and in doing so, is moving closer to the goal or hope for better representations of diversity.

[Figure 8 around here]

**Slogan**

The company slogan is, “We’ll take the plunge with you!” “Taking the plunge” is often used to describe marriage, which is perfect for a wedding photography company. The idiom, “take the plunge,” is defined by Dictionary.com to mean “to enter with sudden decision upon an unfamiliar course of action, as after hesitation or deliberation.” An unfamiliar course of action can refer to the increasing diversity in who chooses to get married. Since committing to another person, no matter who they are, is an unfamiliar course of action, Tipping Point Photography is offering to be there through the marriage process and capture the decision and the subsequent celebration.

**Photographs**

All photographs used are from the website Upsplash. Upsplash offers free high-resolution photographs, which are all released under the creative commons public domain license. The only exception is under the “Similar Pages” heading on the Facebook page. All of those logos are from actual companies, and many were found using a Google search for “photography company logo.”
Because the pictures were chosen from a stock photo website, options for representation were limited. Non-white couples were the easiest to represent, which matches the data for non-white representation being the highest of the three categories. The other three categories were difficult to represent, with older couples experiencing the lowest representation. For the remaining two categories, I used pictures of people not necessarily on their wedding day as supplements. Couples with children were represented by individuals pictured with their children and same-sex couples were represented by individuals, as well as some non-wedding photos including two same-sex people (not necessarily in a romantic relationship).

**Brand**

Tipping Point Photography has taken steps to be a meaning-maker. They have presented their audience with their inclusivity in two specific ways: the diversity shown in their advertising (primarily through photographs) and the components (i.e., company name, logo, and slogan) included in the marketing. While the company has tried to be thorough, they have reached the extent of the knowledge-based view of branding and must recognize the meaning-based view of branding.

What brand is Tipping Point attempting to convey to their audience? Tipping Point Photography’s goal is for their company to be synonymous with inclusive business practices. Tipping Point is supposed to exemplify sensitivity and representation of minority groups in the wedding industry. The company has tried to represent its inclusion of diversity, but how is the company’s effort interpreted culturally? Is the advertising well-received by those within the targeted groups and in society at large? How are the marketing techniques interpreted by individual consumers? Those who fall into the categories of different ages, different racial-ethnic
minorities, couples with children, or same-sex couples may individually interpret the advertising in a different way based on their own self-identity and experiences.

If Tipping Point has been successful at illustrating their brand for consumers – and consumers have reacted positively to their marketing strategies – then wedding photography could begin to make a shift toward better representation of diverse populations. This better representation in wedding photography can impact representation in all wedding rituals, and could move into other industries. This shift in marketing strategies could create a society that is more aware, respectful, and inclusive toward diversity. If this societal shift occurs, then Tipping Point has truly lived up to their name.

CONCLUSION

Using content analysis of wedding photographs from popular photographers’ social media in four major U.S. cities, I found that contemporary photographers are largely still adhering to the traditional image of a couple, despite the increases in diversity in demographic characteristics of prospective couples. While the research in its current form cannot be seen as representative of all photographers in the United States, additional research can and should be done to analyze business practices on a broader scale. Future research is warranted in this area. As greater diversity continues to be introduced to society, industries need to continue to find ways to harness that diversity in their business practices.

I created a marketing campaign that would offer one example for companies that are looking to diversify their advertising strategies. The example provided is not inclusive of all strategies, but – as with all marketing – would need to be modified based on the industry, the company, and the target market. Some companies have already started to be more inclusive, and
while there is some minor backlash to this practice, there is generally more positive publicity for the company.
REFERENCES


Figure 1. Percentage Representation of Non-Traditional Groups in Wedding Photographs for Four Cities
Figure 2. Percent of Non-White Representation in Wedding Photographs versus Percent of Non-White Population in Four Cities

Source: % non-whites (all except for the “white alone, non-Hispanic” category) in the population for each city was found in the U.S. Census Bureau website, “Quick Facts.”
Figure 3. Percent of Same-Sex Couples Representation in Wedding Photographs versus Percent of Same-Sex Couples Population in Four Cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Pictures</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indianapolis</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: % same-sex couples in the population for each city was found in the 2010 state census data from the American Community Survey.
Figure 4. Tipping Point Photography Facebook Photos Page
Figure 5. Tipping Point Photography Professional Website Home Page
Congratulations! You've said yes to the love of your life!

Now who's going to capture that special day?

You don't want the same tired poses...

Your pictures should show how unique you are.

We'll take the plunge with you!

Call TODAY!!!

312-123-4567

www.tippingpointphoto.com

TIPPING POINT PHOTOGRAPHY

We're here to showcase YOU + YOUR PARTNER!
Figure 7. Tipping Point Photography Billboard Advertisement: “Love is in the Air”
Figure 8. Tipping Point Photography Logo