

CLOUDY WITH A CHANCE OF ENDORSEMENTS: ANALYZING VAPING  
COMMUNITIES THROUGH TAYLOR'S STRATEGY WHEEL AND PARASOCIAL  
INTERACTIONS

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**Title**

Cloudy with a Chance of Endorsements: Analyzing Vaping Communities through  
Taylor's Strategy Wheel and Parasocial Interactions

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to launch a greater understanding of Taylor's Six-Segment Strategy Wheel (SSSW) and how it might pair with purchasing intentions with the use of parasocial interactions and celebrity endorsements. Recent research findings have concluded that younger viewers often consider their parasocial interactions/ relationships to be highly similar to their social interactions/relationships. Moreover, the dissertation presented addresses the question: since friends and family can influence our purchasing intentions; can parasocial influences have the same effect? What is it about parasocial interactions that make them useful to those viewing content? Also, within these interactions, what stands out the most? The present study uses research from the SSSW and other relevant theoretical frameworks to determine what were the most persuasive cues while watching an advertisement.

This dissertation conducted two studies to help resolve these problems in more precise detail. First, a content analysis of YouTube comments for the channel Vape Capital's profile videos provided an insight of the visual sensory appeal of vape tricks and clouds. Also, the social component was also present with micro-celebrities on screen and the vaping community as a whole. Both sensory and social segments were the most used segments that influenced purchasing cues. The second study used focus group as a continuation of the research done in study one. Across the three focus groups conducted, the findings were similar to the content analysis. Focus group participants noted currently and retrospectively that they enjoyed the visuals, and were a separate collective group that disassociates themselves from traditional cigarette smokers. Lastly, although participants mostly liked the vapers on screen, they could not influence purchasing intentions exclusively. However, the micro-celebrities and videos conducted sparked purchasing inquiry. Participants were intrigued by the video and the positive

interaction and stated that they would want to research the specific products listed in the video. Although this study is not a representation of all celebrity parasocial relationships with links to purchasing intentions, the study can spearhead a line of research to connect interpersonal communication and strategic communication.

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To my incredible family: I love you all. Everyone has sacrificed so much to allow Melissa and me to pursue this dream. We both know it has been hard on everyone, but it will be our goal to make your sacrifices worth the wait. Your support, love, and patience have been an incredible help during this difficult time. Thank you for always believing in me.

## DEDICATION

This doctoral dissertation, and more importantly the entire PhD process would not be possible without the love and encouragement of many family and friends. However, this dissertation and PhD is dedicated to my extraordinary wife, the love of my life, and my best friend Melissa Maryann Daniel. It is only with you that this achievement is possible, and it is only with you that I have been able to uncover my most profound and important epiphany of my life.

This epiphany does not mean that I have finally found my research discipline and line, but you are the inspiration for why I was able to arrive at the idea in the first place. This defining moment came when you not only said you would marry me, but knew full well of what road was ahead of us as a lifelong married couple. After all, you moved away from Buffalo to start a new life at the beach, and after only nine months of dating, we were married and set to move elsewhere. After a blissful year of marriage, I took the career change, which forced you to move back to the frigid cold. And although I was worried, you were confident, and although I was unsure, you made the best of an uncertain move, and although times were rough, you spearheaded the charge to continue what we started. Through those hardships, we stayed strong and fought for our careers, and more importantly for each other.

I have spent the better part of 10 years researching the reality of human communication and relationships. While this research has been rewarding, fun, and challenging, it has also brought me to question what a real interaction is and what is a real relationship? Through researching, conversing with other scholars, scrolling through entertainment media, and enjoying our anecdotal exemplar called marriage, I discovered my greatest epiphany:

Melissa, you are the most real thing I have ever experienced and loved in my entire life. The little idiosyncrasies that only I know about are the most rewarding things about being with you. It makes my heart soar that don't have to image any other version of you, because I get to see the best stuff every day. And unlike Parasocial Relationships, which have easy exit strategies, we work for and with each other through good times and during bad. Even through our roughest chapters, I can think of no other person I would want to spend it with. I'm honored to be your husband, and I am so proud of your constant courage, love, and support.

I love you Melissa Maryann Daniel.

Your husband,

Emory Stephen Daniel Jr.



## PREFACE

Celebrity advertising is not considered a new advertising practice, as it has existed with royal advertising as early as the 1760's (Verumi & Madhav, 2004). Society has seen industries like sporting apparel and cigarettes implement celebrities in their advertising to promote their brand. Celebrity endorsements are significantly more prevalent since the inception of social media, and they are implemented and talked about in viewers' daily lives (Djamasbi, Siegel, & Tullis, 2010). However, celebrities are not all created equal, as some stars are promoted through media industries and are known throughout the world. Other celebrities promote themselves through social media and are only known in small, select topic areas. A group of niche-based, micro-celebrity endorsers was the central group studied in this dissertation. There has been little research to address micro-celebrities effectiveness with purchasing intentions. Therefore this dissertation centered on celebrity endorsements in the nicotine industry. Crawford (2013) indicated that the tobacco industry often advertises with the use of celebrities. The present study conducted a similar approach.

Actor and Blu e-cigarette spokesperson Stephen Dorff made a bold claim for tobacco users across the world by stating "It's time to take our freedom back." Dorff led an aggressive advertising campaign to differentiate themselves from traditional cigarettes. The campaign saw initial success, but Lorillard Blu e-cigarettes eventually lost business and sold their company. While e-cigarettes are still present and used, they have lost popularity to a new method of nicotine use. Vaping is a more customizable method of distributing a mixture of glycol, glycerin, water and nicotine, which is known as e-juice. The vaping industry has targeted a new audience by using role-based micro-celebrities to sell their products and has become successful among younger nicotine users. New celebrities create content on sites like YouTube, Instagram, Twitter,

Snapchat and Vine to promote vaping tricks and discuss vaping flavors to an increasingly growing audience. The audiences who view and discuss these videos have developed identities known as "Cloud Chasers" (those who are interested in vaping tricks and clouds) and "Flavor Chasers" (those who are interested in unique flavors such as skittles, chai mocha, and berry). These "chasing groups" have become online, telepresent smoking circles, which can broadcast their talents and ideas to an audience that identifies with the product. The micro-celebrities can act as voice leaders to their audience members and employ communication to audience members who have positive interaction towards them and their channel (Romer et al., 2017).

Celebrity endorsed products, and audience Parasocial Interaction (PSI) are not new research lines. However, vaping companies have started using self-made celebrities through social media to promote their brand through content produced on the web. The present study investigated audience discussion about the YouTube channel Vape Capitol and how they might market towards their target audience. Using the underused ritual view of the SSSW, this dissertation discussed the roles of the ego component of the wheel through personal identity, the sensory segment through the hedonic scale, and the social segment through social identity and PSI with micro-celebrities. More specifically, since the strategy wheel roots the social segment of the strategy in pleasing others (e.g. being influenced to buy a wedding ring for a significant other), and since PSI links to real emotions with spokespeople and viewers, this dissertation asked: is the social segment of the SSSW most present in vaping videos? If not, which segment is most present? Moreover, which of the following segments are found to be a predictor of purchasing intentions? By use of a mixed methodology, this study uncovered the message strategies that are the strongest predictors of purchasing intentions.

To determine these persuasive predictors, this dissertation conducted two studies. The primary reason for both studies was to answer the research questions as effectively and efficiently as possible. First, a content analysis was conducted to evaluate comments from the top vaping YouTube channel: Vape Capitol. Content analysis fits for this study because it allows for the anonymity of participants who commented on the video and allowed for viewers to express their true feelings about vaping. Also, the content analysis made it possible to examine the group in a real place. However, due to this anonymity, defining an audience was almost impossible in a comment section on YouTube. Therefore, a focus group was included to help understand audience demographic and psychographics more effectively. Additionally, focus groups were utilized to allow for some control with questions that are unique to the study itself. Lastly, multiple segments have the ability to exist simultaneously within audience members; therefore focus groups allowed the researcher an opportunity to examine which segments exist with people who identify as vapers

By using micro-celebrities, the celebrity-driven field of nicotine/tobacco, and the more profound connection that people have with celebrities, this research aimed to establish a brand-new research line. Additionally, the research from this dissertation sought to help advertisers understand the effectiveness of role based celebrity endorsers and advance the line of research in areas like the SSSW, PSI/PSR, and celebrity endorsements. Although this exploratory study did not conclusively solve researchers' and advertisers' questions concerning this new line of research altogether, it adds to the argument for why viewers' relationships with celebrities are important. This study provided insight into this original area of advertising and gave an outlet for future research.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

One focus of this dissertation is to address the SSSW, and the influence specific segments have from audience members. The other focus is rooted in celebrity advertising and the interactions that audience members have with them. Crawford (2014) began a discussion with celebrity-driven campaigns, the SSSW, and tobacco research to help specify the phenomenon for this study. Moreover, many studies examine nicotine related products connected to celebrity promotions (Romer et. al, 2017; Baba, 2016; Sangalang, 2015; Basil, 1997). Sangalang (2015) made a call to not only investigate communication with tobacco but with electronic nicotine delivery devices. For example, vaping does not use tobacco, but it is the new delivery method of nicotine that has been causing concern with regards to health. Moreover, tobacco and nicotine are well known for their innovative and controversial advertising using characters, whether cartoon or celebrity (Weinberget et al., 2010). Therefore, the current research project is focused on how nicotine related products use celebrity endorsers in their advertisements to interact with their viewers.

With regards to the chosen focus of study, the market of nicotine is unlike any other manufactured products sold. There are very few products that consumers continuously and knowingly use without being able to quit (Mayo Clinic, 2013). More specifically, since nicotine alters the chemicals in an individual's brain, withdrawal can be a difficult process. Nicotine affects levels of dopamine and noradrenalin, which influences mood and concentration, which smokers find very enjoyable (Mayo Clinic, 2013). Once affected, smokers continue using the products to get the same effect, which may lead to increased usage. However, quitting smoking is difficult. When a person quits smoking, the dopamine levels are negatively affected, which may cause adverse symptoms like depression, irritability, and anxiousness. Smoking provides an

immediate fix for people experiencing problems with withdrawal, which makes quitting very complicated.

Tobacco and nicotine industries are associated with selling cigarettes to adolescents (Crawford, 2014). For many young people, the idea of smoking serves as an escape from stress and depression. Although advertising regulations were enforced heavily in the 1980's and 1990's, the market all over the world highly targets towards younger audiences. Research suggests vaping has dangerous effects on mental health, heart disease, and an increased potential to contract prostate cancer (Raloff, 2016). However, users see vaping as less harmful than traditional cigarettes. Health concerns might explain why some young populations seek this nicotine delivery method as opposed to cigarettes. Recent studies from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) analyzed e-cigarette use amongst middle and high school students (CDC, 2015). Compared to 2013, three times as many students used e-cigarettes in 2014. High school smokers have increased their e-cigarette use from 4.5 percent of adolescents owning e-cigarettes in 2013 to 13.4 percent owning of e-cigarettes in 2014, while middle school students increased even more from 1.1 percent owning e-cigarettes in 2013, to 3.9 percent in 2014. Although the cause of the rise might be perceived minimized health risks, Edgar (2013) interviewed a CDC official and determined one of the main reasons for the excessive growth was the aggressive campaigning of e-cigarette companies. The primary audience seems to involve the Millennial generation.

The Millennial demographic is optimal for marketers given the addictiveness of nicotine and the difficulty to quit. If a person is exposed to nicotine at a young age, it makes for a highly enjoyable product to use for years to come. However, due to the negative stigma attached to tobacco and nicotine usage, a young person's friend(s) might not be inclined to support their

leisure pursuit. Therefore it might be beneficial for the stigmatized user to interact with someone that "supports" his or her hobby (e.g. a celebrity who also vapes, vaping community members). Although not communicating with the stigmatized directly, a celebrity can deliver a social message strategy and convince users that it is acceptable to continue smoking. Vapers' now have an ultimatum: wean off vaping routinely, quit altogether, or remain within the community of those who accept and endorse their behavior. A friend who vapes might be a suitable social outlet for those unwilling to quit, but vapers can also engage in Parasocial Interaction (PSI) with a celebrity vaper form a Parasocial Relationship (PSR) to bolster the bond between the viewer and the content producer.

Parasocial Interaction is a field that has extended dramatically since the initial study by Horton and Wohl (1956), which looked into viewers' one-sided interactions with spokespeople or celebrities. The concept of PSI proposes that while viewers know that a one-sided interaction is not the same as a typical interaction with a friend, family member, or loved one, the interaction is still meaningful in a viewer's life and brings out genuine emotions. Therefore PSI is not the same as a social relationship, but individuals still seek them out. PSI as an interaction is not a substitute for social engagement, but more an enhancement to existing relationships (Giles, 2002). Individuals often seek celebrity engagement as part of their daily lives, and they often compare them to their current relationships (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Also, viewers seek like-minded celebrities that might align with their personal attitudes, appearances, and backgrounds (Turner, 1993). A vaper could align with a micro-celebrity because he/she identifies with these same attitudes expressed within the celebrity's video content. When this alignment occurs, viewers might also gain respect, appreciation, and even trust to what the endorser says. Celebrity endorsement literature confirms this idea of confidence but states that this concept is nothing

new (Tsui & Hughes, 2001). However, the research indicates that PSI leads to attitude and behavioral change (Cohen, 2009) and that celebrity advertising was impactful with either positive (Tsui & Hughes, 2001) or negative (Bartz, Molchanov, & Stork, 2013) results. The idea of PSI linking with behavioral change is not innovative research, but newer outlets have allowed viewers to see celebrities differently than before.

With the implementation of social media, viewers are engaging in PSI more than ever before. Djasasbi et al. (2010) stated that the Generation Y and Millennial demographic were some of the first audiences to establish real, almost social relationships, with celebrities. Additionally, Kassing and Sanderson (2009) found that PSI seems to be evolving with the rise of social interactive media. Audiences feel closer to celebrities now more than ever with sites like Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, and YouTube. Social media has become a stronger avenue for not only celebrities but brands too.

As for brand research, audiences enjoy organizations with a greater connection to their publics (Waddick & Googins, 2014). Relationship selling has also become a much more popular of research, as scholars have published about the impact of celebrities' involvement on social media and their ties to brands (Marwick, 2013). Therefore the emphasis of celebrities, media vehicles, and the connection with the brands are relevant categories to the advertising practice and with research. However, only one study has linked these components together.

To date, Lueck (2015) conducted the only study considering the importance of PSI, social media, branding, and advertising as a common research topic. Her study focused on audience members' perception of Kim Kardashian and the interactions her fans had through Facebook. Moreover, in her study, there was only one research question that dealt with audience attitudes towards the content delivered through Facebook. The findings paralleled actual social human

interaction by stating, “less is more,” in that, audiences were more likely to respond if the post seemed “direct, genuine, and raw” (p. 101). Lueck’s research is an excellent step in the right direction, but this doctoral dissertation approached the concepts presented in that study more in depth. Specifically, this dissertation looked to explore the gaps in advertising and PSI further.

To further examine this line of research, this dissertation contains seven chapters to help explain the complexities of PSI, the link with celebrity endorsements, and centrality of the message merging with the strength of persuasive cues presented by the micro-celebrity. By doing so, the goal of this dissertation was to analyze one of the vaping industries' connections with their audience. The present study explored the background of the e-cigarette and vaping industry. Next, the research in the literature review examined the SSSW, as well as the literature linked by this research. Research connected with the SSSW included literary frameworks such as celebrity and micro-celebrity endorsements, telepresence, PSI, PSR, Social Identity Theory (SIT), and Personal Identity (PI). These frameworks provided an in-depth look for how this study connected the proposed literature with the ritual view and understood each segment's strength with regards to purchasing intentions. Results of this study provided further insight, and a discussion and conclusion looked more into depth with the findings from the analysis while proposing new research considerations.

In Chapter II, this dissertation examined the background of Blu e-cigarettes, their celebrity promotions, the strengths and weaknesses of the campaign, and the rise and fall of the e-cigarette industry. The section acts as a background for discussion of the vaping online community and the incredible success they have had through social media sites including Snapchat, Instagram, Vine, and YouTube. Emerging micro-celebrities perform “vape tricks” and conduct flavor reviews online, comprising a growing and popular community. The present study

explored the past and the present of online vaping community based on the past success of e-cigarettes and vaping, the failure of e-cigarettes, and re-emergent success of vaping.

In Chapter III, literature concerning advertising, PSI satisfaction, micro-celebrities, creative strategies, and audience processing lead to testable research questions of this study to better understand the SSSW. Other theories acted as connective tissue within the Ritual side of the wheel. Lastly, these independent variables served as predictors of strength when tested with the dependent variable: purchasing intentions. Purchasing intentions were evaluated using the intentions from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA).

The present study conducted two methodologies and reported them separately. Content analysis and focus group research are covered in chapter IV, and V. Chapter IV laid out the framework for the methodology, results, and discussion for the content analysis. The content analysis discussed the unit of analysis, adapted scales and representations for coding categories, coding sheet, coding book, training procedures, intercoder reliability, and coding process. The results section addressed the quantitative data of this study. Lastly, the discussion of the content analysis discussed the results and allowed future research to examine how researchers analyze Taylor's six-segment strategy wheel within the vaping community.

In chapter V, the focus group research discussed the recruiting procedures, IRB procedures, recruitment distribution procedures, problem/definition, sampling frames, moderator protocol, interview guide, recruitment, design, and data collection procedures. The focus group contained a sample of 11 current vapers, over three groups. The results section addressed the qualitative data of this study. Lastly, the discussion of the focus groups addressed the results and allowed for future research to examine how researchers analyze Taylor's six-segment strategy

wheel within the vaping community. Additionally, the focus group data also allowed this study to identify multiple segments of vaping audience identification.

In Chapters VI, the dissertation discusses the overall limitations, future research, and conclusion of this study. Each study addressed the questions separately within the discussion, and then an overall future research section regarding both sets of data was included. Although this dissertation did not generalize the entire spectrum of PSI or advertising literature, it did help advance the discussion on this ever-growing field.

The goal of this dissertation is to not only expand on the previously existing literature by analyzing the SSSW further but also consider practical applications and understanding of how PSI and PSR have an influence in creative advertising strategies. The research acted as a beginning of understanding advertising through niche markets, micro-celebrities, and how word-of-mouth communication has expanded beyond face-to-face and into the computer-mediated world of the telepresent. By using these theoretical constructs, this dissertation was able to continue the discussion on a growing line of research.



## CHAPTER II: BACKGROUND

Negative one: I am tired of being a walking ashtray. Negative two: I'm tired of feeling guilty every time I want to light up. I'm Stephen Dorff, I've been a smoker for 20 years, and I just found the smarter alternative: Blu e-cigs. Blu lets me enjoy smoking without it affecting the people around me; because it's vapor, not tobacco smoke. That means no ash, and best of all, no offensive odor. With Blu, you could smoke at a basketball game if you want to, and how 'bout not having to go outside every ten minutes when you're in a bar with your friends. The point is you can smoke Blu virtually anywhere. We're all adults here; it's time we take our freedom back. Come on, guys... Rise from the ashes.

- Blu e-cigarette advertisement: *Blu Cigs YouTube Channel*, 2013

The infant e-cigarette industry aimed to disassociate from traditional cigarettes and "take freedom back" from the negative stigma associated with tobacco. E-cigarettes claim in their advertisements that smokers deserve a social life too and should not be separated from their friends and locations just to smoke for a few minutes. Instead of harming people around them with cigarette smoke, e-cigarettes use vapor, so smokers do not smell unpleasant, while simultaneously not affecting others. Much of the initially proposed appeal in the advertisements is for those who do smoke to have others share their opinions about the matter. Paralleling advertisements from the 1930s and 1940s (Crawford, 2014), which used celebrity endorsers to promote traditional tobacco, e-cigarettes have also used celebrities to promote their brand (Sangalang, 2015). Among e-cigarette products, Blu e-cigarettes dominated advertising on traditional media. Pediatrics data from 2011 through 2013 found that over 80% of all e-cigarette television marketing came from Blu (Duke et al., 2014) and celebrity endorsers overtly market the vast majority of Blu e-cigarettes (e.g., Jenny McCarthy, Stephen Dorff).

Wilson (2014) called for research about the media's influence with e-cigarettes, and that the aggressive media campaigns and celebrities endorsements need to be understood. Blu e-cigarette's celebrity based advertising appeared to have a strong following, which created e-cigarette and vaping use rising among youth (CDC.gov, 2015). Therefore, the purpose of this

chapter is to look at some of the advertising campaigns provided by Blu e-cigarettes and promotions by the vaping industry. Blu remains one of the most prominent examples of advertising because they were the first to promote e-cigarettes and were the most well known. Chapter II examines the history of Blu, their commercials, their success, and their eventual fall in the e-cigarette market share. Through social message strategies and audience Parasocial Interaction (PSI) with known celebrities, Blu created a strong campaign during their rise in the e-cigarette market. However, the longevity expired after the short-lived celebrity endorsements in the e-cigarette market.

### **History of E-Cigarettes: Blu E- Cigarettes**

In 2003 Hon Lik, a pharmacist, invented a device after his father passed away because of lung cancer (Casaa.org, 2012). His method used a high-frequency piezoelectric, ultrasound-emitting element to vaporize pressured liquid nicotine. His invention produced the first electronic cigarette. E-cigarettes became a phenomenon for smoking industries as Europe and the United States introduced the e-cigarette in 2006 (Healy, 2013). Although there were a few companies that sold e-cigarettes in the United States, none were as famous as Blu. Australian entrepreneur Jason Healy founded the Blu e-cigarette brand in 2009. On the Blu website, Healy stated the brand's mission was to create a new identity for smokers:

The cigarette's red, and we wanted to be blue; we wanted to be unique, and rather than a hot, burning color, we wanted to be cool and vibrant. And we think (the color) blue is the best way to do that. Once we did that, we thought, "What a great name for it; people will see the product, and the name is what they see in the color" (Healy, 2013).

The Charlotte, North Carolina-based company consistently held the majority of the e-cigarette market share since its inception in 2009 through 2013. In April 2012, Blu was acquired by

Lorillard Inc. and was the biggest seller in the United States. However, despite a strong advertising campaign and high brand recognition, this success was short-lived.

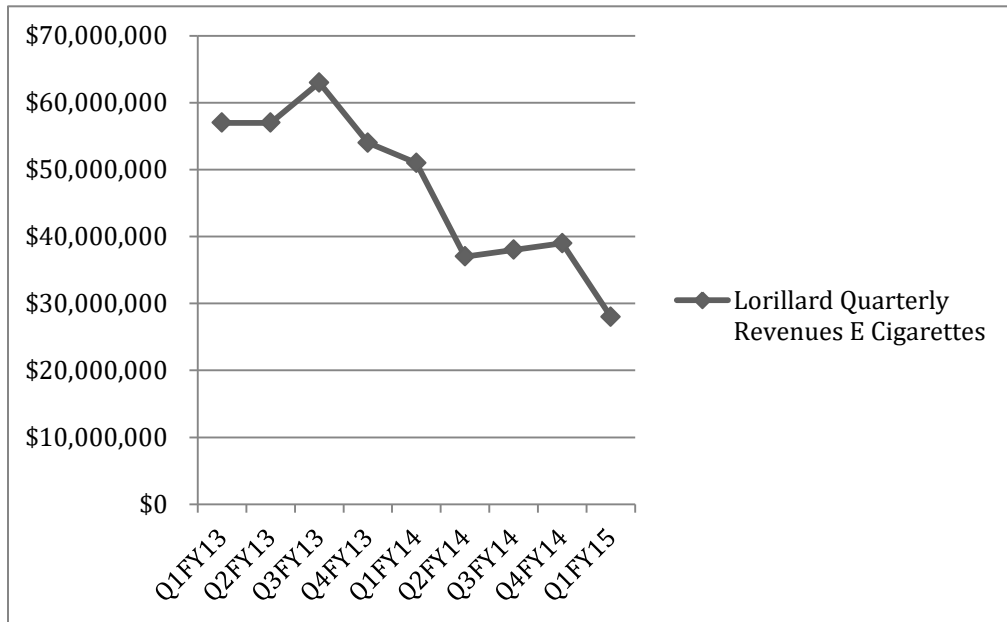


Figure 1. Lorillard Revenues from E-cigarette sales (Adapted from Vape Ranks, 2015)

According to Blu’s website, because of stiff competition, recent studies about the dangers of e-cigarettes, and Blu’s expansion worldwide, the company share dropped by 35% in the second quarter in 2014 <See Figure 1>. The third quarter in 2014 saw continued decreases down to 40% of overall market share (Vape Ranks, 2015). The drop in 2014 created such significant losses for the company that Reynolds’ Vuse gained the top position at a 33.6% dollar share and a 44.2% unit share. Lorillard’s Blu dropped to 23.6% of the dollar share and 17.3% of the unit share (Vonder Haar, 2014). Koch (2014) stated the decline was so significant, Reynolds bought out Lorillard for 27.4 billion dollars on July 15, 2014. This buyout combined two of the strongest e-cigarette producers into one major company in an otherwise declining industry. This decrease was intriguing because e e-cigarettes were much more accessible to advertise than traditional tobacco.

## **E-cigarette Advertising and Restrictions**

Unlike traditional tobacco that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) regulates to be unable to advertise on television, outdoor, and radio, e-cigarettes have not experienced the same restrictions. Neville (2015) stated as of November 2014 the United Kingdom has also made it possible to feature e-cigarettes on television, radio, print, and online. However, e-cigarette companies would have to be socially responsible and not show the product in a "positive light." For example, health officials could not promote e-cigarettes as a healthier alternative to smoking, among other guidelines. Moreover, in April 2014, the FDA proposed new regulations for e-cigarettes, which required disclosure of ingredients used in the product and the delivery of the liquid (Rom et al., 2014).

Although there have been complaints to file for similar regulations for e-cigarettes (Boxer, 2014), tobacco companies are allowed to advertise e-cigarettes on traditional media outlets. Since research has been ongoing concerning the use and potential dangers of e-cigarettes, Blu and other companies have a unique advantage to be able to advertise their product openly. Although Blu's history ended in a buyout, it is still important to recognize the successful advertising scheme that was part of their birth and initial success. Blu used various strategies to gain an active following through parasocial interaction, celebrity advertising, and social message strategies (consistent with Taylor's Six-Segment Strategy Wheel (SSSW)). All three components listed can help explain the brief, yet significant, success. To further account for their advertising campaign, celebrity advertising must be discussed to recognize the importance of Blu's decision to endorse their e-cigarettes through this method.

E-cigarettes implemented celebrity advertising, much like traditional tobacco, when health claims were unknown/limited. In the 1930s and 1940s celebrity advertising was a very

popular trend (Crawford, 2014). It was not until the 1950s that celebrity advertising started to drop dramatically. During this decade, research on cigarettes began to publicly broadcast the health effects, which might correlate to a decline in celebrity endorsements in cigarette advertisements. E-cigarette advertising started the same way and is consistent with the pattern of increasing publication of health risks and decreasing use of celebrity advertising that traditional cigarettes experienced. Celebrity endorsements may have been used early much like the endorsements used at the beginning of cigarette advertisements, however, much like traditional cigarette advertising, mainstream celebrities did not remain in the spotlight. For example, the Blu advertising campaigns only had two celebrities (e.g. Jenny McCarthy and Stephen Dorff), and they were both featured in 2-3 commercials with no additional exposure. No extra publicity could lead to little interaction with celebrities, which leaves little room for positive or negative emotions with the brand. Relationships rarely follow because the celebrity can seem distant and inaccessible.

### **Vaping on Social Media**

Vaping has created an entirely different culture that those participating in traditional cigarettes or e-cigarettes (Doward & Agerholm, 2016). In 2014, the Oxford Dictionary Word of the Year was “Vape” (Oxford Dictionary, 2014). Instead of having an interest in the nicotine content in e-cigarettes, the young Millennials are more interested in flavors (e.g. skittles, red bull, and sex on the beach) and identified themselves as "flavor chasers" (Madsen, 2016). Also, the vaping community is particularly infatuated with the tricks associated with vaping (e.g. rings, jellyfish, forcefields) and identify themselves as "cloud chasers." Measham, O'Brien, and Turnbull (2016) discussed how policymakers and professionals need to consider why young people engage in vaping, and how their reasoning for engaging in nicotine use may differ from

adults. Community and sensory appeals (e.g. taste) seem to be primary factors, which would parallel research on why smokers take up the hobby (Ranaed, 2016). Also, vapers do not associate with being a cigarette smoker or a non-smoker, but something else entirely (Hess et al. 2017). A new formation of identity has created a face-to-face and online community, consisting of an identity emphasizing the exclusivity of vaping (Oyler, 2016).

Vaping has also created a community of involvement through tutorials, demonstrating techniques to their audience regarding flavors and tricks. For example, Vape Capitol has just under one hundred thousand subscribers on YouTube, with content ranging from tutorials, people who vape professionally, coverage of vaping championship events, vape shop spotlights, and industry leaders (Vape Capitol, 2017). The most popular videos that they distribute are of the competitions, trick tutorials, and industry leaders. Within the trick tutorials, two primary micro-celebrities produce content on the channel and promote Vape Capitol, the vaping pen used, and sometimes the juice they are fond of the most. A\_Kidz and Fresh Skater Jay are two micro-celebrities specific in the vaping community, as this is most likely the way they would be recognizable outside of their personal community of friends and family. Micro celebrity is defined as a person self-promoting themselves through fan management and self-presentation. Essentially, micro-celebrities do not rely on major organizations to boost their popularity; rather fans would promote and follow their content (Senft, 2008). Having a niche persona makes for a unique opportunity as a micro-celebrity can interact with their audience differently than a traditional celebrity could (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Where traditional media does not allow for immediate response, social media gives micro-celebrities the opportunity to post content at their leisure and respond to commenters within seconds of their reply to the video (Bennett, 2012).

Viewers feel more involved with the person who is producing the video because an opportunity for interactions and multiple platforms in which the audience can interact (Bernardo, 2014).

The vaping industry has attempted a persuasive strategy that e-cigarettes or traditional tobacco users have not undertaken in their campaigns efficiently. Although some of the methodologies might be similar, vaping has modernized the way celebrities interact with their public. A literature review is provided to help understand possible message strategies used in vaping communities. Chapter III discussed previous theories that support earlier used advertising methods, as well as introduce new strategies that are unique and beneficial to the vaping companies and their audiences.

## **CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The vaping brands that exist within the community appear to be applying techniques used by traditional cigarettes and e-cigarettes. Through the use of message strategy, vaping companies seem to parallel several persuasive tactics used in the SSSW. For instance, Vape Capitol publishes videos using micro-celebrities, they convey a sense of identity as a vaper, and they create videos with visually appealing content. Therefore, the ritual view of the wheel appears to be very prominent in most cloud and flavor chasing videos, which is a major reason why this dissertation investigates the ritual side of the wheel in depth. First, the previously mentioned tutorials use the social connections through PSI with celebrity endorsers. The social segment also applies to Social Identity Theory (SIT), as vapers tend to identify with other vapers. Second, Personal Identity (PI) is also an important component, more in line with the ego segment of the wheel. Vapers seem to identify with the fact they are vapers, rather than smokers. The distinction increases not only a heightened level of social identity amongst peers but also personal identity as a means of labeling themselves. Third, the Hedonic Scale parallels well with the sensory segment of the SSSW. Previous research states that the aesthetic qualities can potentially lead to attitude change (Rossiter & Percy, 2013). Lastly, due to nicotine being a high-risk product, sensation seeking was reviewed as well with regards to this study. The combination of the literature provided in the subsequent sections provides support for the research questions and methodology for this dissertation.

### **Message Strategy**

The first content area that needs reviewing is the creative strategy executed by the vaping industry. Although it would be difficult to assume the strategies the content producers used without interviewing them, it is possible to determine what strategies resonates the most



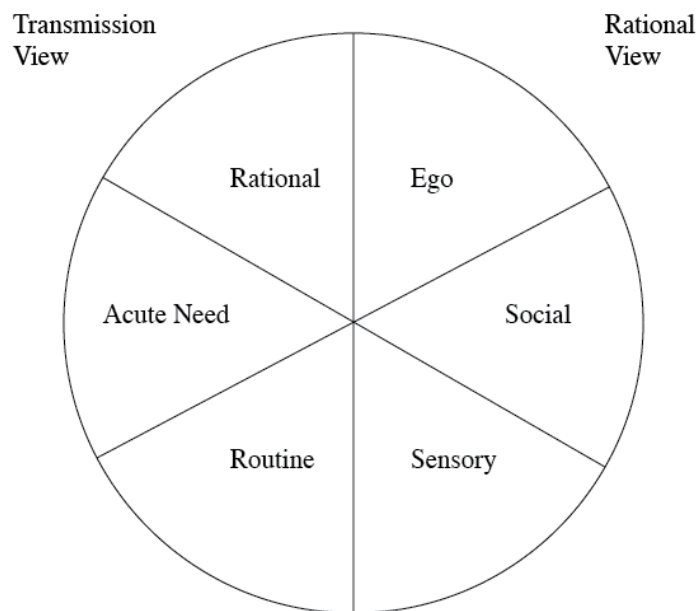
with the viewer cognition while watching and discussing the videos. For this dissertation, the coders looked at dominant SSSW segments within a YouTube comment and determined which segment most resonates in their response. Several studies establish the prominence of the SSSW in creative messaging within an advertisement (Crawford, 2014; Golan & Zaidner, 2008; Park, Shoieb, & Taylor, 2016). The framework has merit for researching creative messaging, but the individual segments were the primary focus of this study.

The SSSW has two halves that contain three segments per half. These include a transmission side, which includes the rational, routine, and acute need segments. Transmission view segments are logically processed through a viewer's cognition and focus on the merits of the argument. Conversely, there is also a ritual view of the strategy wheel, which includes the ego, social, and sensory segments. The ritual view focuses on the emotional components of the message. Taylor (1999) suggests the ritual view segments do not lend themselves to traditional transmitted strong or weak cognitive arguments. Within the SSSW, this study focused more on the ritual side for two reasons. First, a confirmatory view of the model should be evaluated further to determine if the ritual view could be a segment that influences purchasing cues. Second, prior literature has suggested that tobacco-advertising strategies have been found to be most effective within social (Crawford, 2014) and sensory cues (Carpenter, Wayne, & Connolly, 2006). The literature review defines the SSSW and elaborates on the definition and history of the segment. Moreover, as a means for exploratory research, linked several concepts with the ritual view of the model (e.g. SIT, PI, PSI, PSR, Hedonic Scale).

### **Taylor's Strategy Wheel**

Prior literature has suggested that differing purchasing situations need different strategies (Kotler, 1965). Petty and Cacioppo (1981) addressed the idea by stating people interpret

advertisements through a central or peripheral cognitive processing. The central route is deliberate, thought provoking, and considerate of the details within the content. Central processing involves high levels of message elaboration. The peripheral route associates with positive or negative emotions. Attraction, credibility or production quality act as examples for low levels of elaboration. Additionally, the Rossiter-Percy Grid (1991) is a popular resource for consumption of advertising based on a viewer's motivation (informational v. transformational) and an audience's involvement (low v. high). However, Taylor (1999) implemented a wheel-designed model that advertising researchers have recognized as important for the use of mapping advertising strategies.



*Figure 2.* Taylor's Six-Segment Message Strategy Wheel

Taylor offers two previously mentioned separate subdivisions of the wheel entitled the "transmission view" and the "ritual view." Drawing from Carey (1975), Taylor defined the transmission view of communication by terms like "imparting, sending, transmitting, or giving

information to others" (Taylor, 1999, p. 8). The transmission view parallels as the logical view of "structuring and maintaining an ordered, meaningful cultured world that serves as a control and container for human action." (p. 8). Taylor proceeds to suggest that if the transmission view is the information, then the ritual view is the drama. Where the transmission view is information and claim based, the ritual view uses persuasive tactics such as image-based information, emotional and experience-focused persuasive cues. Across these two separate halves, there are six message segments: three transmission based strategies and three ritual based strategies.

First, the transmission subdivision of the wheel includes three message strategies: "rational," "acute," and "routine." Ivan Pavlov's Learning Model was utilized in Taylor's initial study first to categorize the routine segment (Taylor, 1999). Ivan Pavlov conducted an experiment based on a premise called "psychic reflexes." The dogs he used in his experiments routinely salivated when they smelled meat powder. Eventually, Pavlov was able to use a clicker to make the dogs salivate without any powder present. Routine parallels Pavlov's classical conditioning as consumers make decisions just because it is part of their routine (Pavlov, 1926). Pragmatic buying motives often persuade consumers. The process is the customer buys from habit, rather than complex decision-making.

Urgent needs categorize the next segment known as acute needs. Under time constraints, customers are not able to research products effectively and purchase a product based on need. Taylor (1999) used an example of a spark plug to illustrate this segment further. A person may research the different brands of spark plugs, but others might purchase any spark plug to get their car to start. If a product is found to be useful, brand loyalty might be a result if the urgent matter comes up again. For example, Blu commercials applied the acute need segment in their

commercials by using verbs like "need" within the commercial. They reference the need to "puff" while at social outings to make sure smokers get the opportunity to smoke.

The rational segment, which is the last segment of the transmission view of the wheel, initially used the Marshallian Economic Model as a basis (Taylor, 1999). Alfred Marshall was one of the pioneers behind the supply and demand economic curve (Marshall, 1920). Within the model, consumers have a demand function. The demand function specifies what the consumer would purchase in each situation, assuming it solves the problem. Consumers are seen typically as rational, pragmatic, and deliberative individuals. Therefore Marshall indicated that consumers make rational decisions to address their needs. Consumers have the ability to process information from advertisements based on data and informational advertising elements. Purchasing a product was a well thought out decision, rather than a hasty decision.

Conversely, within the ritual side of the wheel, the three message strategies that exist are the "ego," the "social," and the "sensory" segments. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic model categorized the ego segment (Taylor, 1999). From Freud's perspective, consumers are ego-related to fulfill emotional needs (Freud, 1977). The axiom that defines the ego segment is "I am Me," which is to say the advertisements contain the ego segment serve as a form of identity extension for the consumer looking to purchase the product. Ego is used to promote "smokers" as an identity. Personal understandings of self can be illustrated through PI as vapers have already established the aforementioned "chasers" label for areas like flavor or tricks.

Second, Veblenian's Social Psychological Model was originally used by Taylor to characterize the social segment (Taylor, 1999). Within the social segment, products are viewed as statement pieces to show off to other people and be a part of a social community (Veblen, 1899). The community is found to be the most important element in the social segment, as

opposed to individual identity with the ego segment. The social segment associates with social approval and noticeability. For example, much of the advertising used by e-cigarettes was within the social division as both celebrities talked about the embarrassment of stepping outside to smoke or smelling like you just smoked. Most smokers need this reassurance as it helps with their guilt, and can cope with using the product:

Most smokers see themselves as addicts. The typical smoker feels guilty and anxious about smoking but impotent to control it. Psychologically, most smokers feel trapped. They are concerned about health and addiction. Smokers care about what commercials say about them. Advertising may help reduce anxiety and guilt. [Smokers] may be receptive to advertising, which helps them escape from their inner conflicts about smoking. (Pollay, 2002)

Therefore, vapers might need this social cue to relieve the cognitive dissonance they have about the activity, and having a person telling them it is all right is important.

The third and final segment in the ritual subdivision is the sensory segment (Taylor, 1999). The Cyrenaic philosophy first categorized the sensory segment, which stated that sensory cues tie with emotions (Annas, 1995). Products associate with a joyous or happy moment for the consumer based entirely on the senses a person might experience during that time. The product is transformed more like a moment, than an actual product. The Vaping commercials make use of the sensory segment as well. While viewing the videos and vines, the most common element to consider is the aesthetic of the shapes the smoke makes or the size of the cloud. Much like people watching tricks and using their imagination as to what it represents, so to do viewers of the vaping communities wanting to engage in the same behavior. So much so, the vapers and audience members name tricks after what they resemble. However, sensory is not only based on sight, as other senses such as olfactory, taste, haptic, and auditory cues also could be a determining factor in why people might be interested in the activity.

## **Linking with the Social Segment: SIT & PSR**

The SSSW segments act as a model to specify types of advertising messages. The SSSW functioned as the overall guiding approach for the purpose of understanding the ritual view more in depth. The goal of this research is to determine if the ritual view can link with purchasing intentions. Taylor (1999) suggests the relationship is achievable with the transmission view, but viewers do not process the segments in the ritual view with the same logical methods. To help understand components of the ritual side more comprehensively, areas of research involving social cues, ego cues, and sensory cues link with the SSSW.

Before understanding the concepts linked with the social segment, it is important to determine why PSI and PSR are relevant to this study. PSI and PSR studies link with the connection viewers have with celebrities (Giles, 2002). Therefore celebrity advertising is evaluated first. Next, telepresence explains why a viewer might have a real interaction with a celebrity (Lee 2004a). Therefore, the dissertation covers telepresence before discussing PSI. Next, the social segment of the wheel linked with the following concepts: PSI, PSR, and SIT. The research focused on the interactions and relationships audience members' form with celebrities, and celebrities' connections with endorsements of specific products, as audience members feel present during the interaction. Other literature linking with the social segment of the SSSW was the social identity that vapers have with other vapers in their community.

### **Celebrity Advertising**

Over the past 60 years, the idea of celebrity culture and celebrity endorsers has become standard practice. Marketers and advertisers understand the value of recognizable people (e.g., actors, athletes, entertainers, public figures) and use them to promote a brand to their target audience (Belch & Belch, 2013). Brands and endorsers can be mutually beneficial or mutually

harmful to each other, but in advertising, they are still successful overall (Thomas & Fowler, 2016). Daye (2011) found that advertisements without celebrities had significantly lower recall compared to advertisements that contained celebrities. Bartz, Molchanov, and Stork (2013) found that when a celebrity is disgraced the brand suffers adverse effects. Moreover, Lueck (2015) found that celebrity endorsements have effectiveness on social media, but only when mentioning the brand in the framework of a conversation. A reference to a product in the context of the conversation was found to be a better predictor than communicating about a product directly and overtly.

Fleck, Michel, and Zeitoun (2014) state that there are two types of endorsers: external and internal endorsers. Internal endorsers are individuals who work for the firm, and they can be known endorsers (e.g. CEO) or an unknown endorser (e.g. an employee). An external endorser is an individual that works with the firm, and they can also be unknown (e.g. external expert) or a known endorser (e.g. celebrity). More specifically, a celebrity endorser is defined as “any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement” (McCracken, 1989, p. 310). White, Goddard, and Wilbur (2009) estimated that in 2008 between 14 percent and 20 percent of all televised commercials in the United States feature celebrities. Countries like Japan, India, and Taiwan contain an even higher frequency of advertisements featuring celebrity endorsements. Furthermore, in the United States, two billion dollars was spent on celebrity advertising alone (White, Goddard, & Wilbur, 2009). Companies tend to invest in celebrities when they want to improve brand recognition and trustworthiness while promoting attitudes and attachment towards a particular brand and celebrity (McCracken, 1989).

Five justifications are used to understand why celebrities are effective. First, they attract greater attention and achieve higher knowledge, recall, and recognition (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983; Ohanian, 1991). Second, celebrities generate a positive attitude towards the advertisement and increase credibility (Freidman & Freidman, 1979; Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000). Third, celebrities improve persuasion and create positive attitudes as well as improve a brand's marketing position (Till, 1998). Fourth, celebrities generate greater purchase intention amongst consumers (Freidman & Freidman, 1979; Ohanian, 1991). Lastly, they transfer to the advertised brand the positive associations or image that the target has of the celebrity (Atkin & Block, 1983; McCracken, 1989; Till, 1998). The last justification has been found to come with advantages and drawbacks. Thomas and Fowler (2016) indicated that celebrities enhance brands when they are viewed positively. However, if viewers perceive a celebrity in a negative light, the brand can obtain a damaging reputation.

Celebrity attachment can be effective, but the literature states that four variables must be present for positive emotions to occur. First, it helps if the celebrity is attractive to the viewer. Lagner and Eisend (2010) stated especially the immediate positive impression with the consumer an attractive celebrity is more effective. Second, credible celebrities are also beneficial for the long term. Lagner and Eisend (2010) argues that, although attractiveness leads to immediate effectiveness, a celebrity's perceived credibility would have a much longer impact on the consumer's opinion of a brand. Third, the celebrity must be likable. Thwaites et al. (2012) demonstrated when a celebrity has a negative public image, it can have the adverse effect on the celebrity and their market value. Lastly, the celebrity must be endorsing something that matches with their public persona. Studies have shown when the celebrity does not perceivably match the product they are endorsing the campaign is not effective (Zwilling & Fruchter, 2013; Choi



& Rifon, 2012). Conversely, if a celebrity meets all four of these criteria, the endorsement would be more likely to be effective.

Tsui and Hughes (2001) indicate that images of celebrities (pictures) may be necessary to create an emotional attachment for generation Y. Generation Y finds well-respected messengers including "TV and movie stars, athletes, and musicians" (p. 319) appealing (Djamasbi et al., 2010) which might be a reason why vaping and e-cigarette companies utilize celebrity endorsers. Putting a known face to a product might be the strong connection they need for purposes of brand loyalty. For example, vaping companies use celebrity testimonials in their commercials to promote their product. Traditionally, testimonial advertising uses a "regular consumer" because the endorsers can find similarities and empathy with the audience (Martin-Santana & Beerli-Palacio, 2013). However, there is a growing trend of celebrity testimonials because of the widespread belief in effectiveness between advertisers and professionals (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995).

#### *Micro-Celebrity as Social Media Influencers*

The popularity of micro-celebrities must be addressed, as more people move to online sources of information (Fox, 2006) and often trust them more than traditional outlets (Sweeter & Metzgar, 2007). Social Media Influencers (SMIs) are third party endorsers who shape attitudes through blogs, tweets, and other uses of social media (Freberg, et al., 2011). Moreover, SMIs approach very specific needs of a follower, and thus become a source of credibility for that specific issue (Liu et al., 2012). In turn, the followers deliver the information from the SMI to non-followers as a two-step flow through word of mouth communication (Liu et al. 2012). SMIs increase their credibility and have audiences notice and support their particular topic of interest (Booth & Matic, 2011). Lastly, SMI's might also have a potential to affect brand reputation, as

they are “more likely to be sought out for advice and reassurance and more likely to give advice than CEOs” (Freberg et al. 2011, p. 91). Niche based SMIs appear to be credible, reliable, and influential, but they also need to be recognizable. Therefore, this dissertation will look at micro-celebrities and how they act as SMIs through (1) responding to their audience, (2) credibility in their field, and (3) authentic conveyers of information.

Turner (2004) defines a celebrity by three different criteria: (1) celebrity as a way that people are represented and talked about; (2) a process by which people turn into a commodity; and (3) an aspect of culture which is constantly being re-inscribed and reformulated. Much of the celebrity theoretical framework has focused primarily on traditional celebrities. However, the term celebrity can define a much wider pool than ever possible. No longer are media industries responsible for creating celebrities, but rather blog writers, social network participants, and YouTube stars are making celebrity interactions part of their viewers’ daily lives (Senft, 2008). Senft (2008) categorizes micro-celebrity as a prevailing style having others “amp up” their online and offline behavior increasing popularity of self-branding and presentation. The distinction between a traditional celebrity is that micro celebrities have stronger interpersonal bonds. Micro-celebrities have the greater capacity to appear authentic, as they do not get as much return on their promotion. Moreover, they typically have the ability to respond more frequently and with more credibility. Marwick and boyd (2011) state that micro-celebrities are also distinct from inadvertent viral memes (e.g. Star Wars Kid and Tron Guy). The focus of a micro-celebrity acknowledges their desire for popularity, whereas an inadvertent viral meme may grow in popularity without the subjects knowing or approval. Marwick and boyd (2011) also indicate that micro-celebrity involves viewing friends and followers as their fanbase; acknowledging

popularity as a goal; managing fan base through a variety of techniques, and constructing an easily approachable persona.

So as celebrity trends have shifted, research establishes celebrity as a learned practice, rather than a company selling the individual and promoting their fame. While different outlets support traditional celebrities and grow through a media-based platform, micro-celebrities involve people extending their popularity over social media using videos, blogs, and social networking sites (Senft, 2008, p. 25). The idea behind micro-celebrities promotes exposure both online and off, linked through self-branding and strategic self-presentation (Hearn, 2008). Moreover, micro-celebrities differ from traditional celebrities for two distinct reasons. First, micro-celebrities will often not see the same returns on their efforts that mainstream celebrities do (Marwick and boyd, 2011). Although mainstream celebrities do not always see returns, they are more likely than the micro-celebrity. Second, micro-celebrities are more likely to respond to their viewers. Micro-celebrities are seen as underappreciated for not getting the return for their efforts and more compassionate through responding to their viewers, which might explain their rise and appeal. Micro-celebrities are used in this study because vaping celebrities do not have a ton of return on their efforts, and they respond to their fanbases through several different social media sites.

Lastly, micro-celebrity involves viewing ones' friends and followers as a pseudo fan base and constructing an image of themselves as a character to relate with (Marwick & boyd, 2011). The character is usually highly approachable to their audience members (Marwick and boyd, 2010). Authenticity is important because audiences are often turned off by messages that are manufactured (Marwick and boyd, 2010). Most importantly, a micro-celebrity has the ability to be a distinct influencer in the market by authentically choosing a product to represent their niche.

For example, a fashion blogger can assemble an outfit that reflects his/her personal aesthetic and style and then possibly creates a trend amongst those that follow. Authenticity must be conveyed, because if the message sounds like a pitch, it sounds less like word-of-mouth communication and more like a commercial. Despite the authenticity, viewers may not ever actually have an interaction with the micro-celebrity. Even if the viewers does have a genuine social interaction, the viewer will most likely not know the celebrity very well, making their relationship parasocial.

To understand the social elements of parasocial experiences, it is imperative to understand how a viewer and a celebrity spokesperson can interact with each other. Moreover, because of lack of proximity and exclusivity, it would seem difficult to interact with a celebrity socially. Social interaction would be difficult, because how do viewers "know" who the celebrity is or understand their identity outside what they present online? Therefore, telepresence is reviewed in this study to help understand how online realism is known. Lastly, telepresence helps with allowing viewers to inspect PSI as actual social interaction. Finally, the research addressed presence because it further validates that people perceive mediated communication as real.

### **Telepresence**

Lee categorized presence as a psychological state in which the virtuality of experience is unnoticed (Lee, 2004a; Lee & Nass, 2004). The experience is a sense of immersion that a user experiences caused by the media technology being used (Westerman & Skalski, 2010). Also, characteristics of the technology help the immersion. Studies have found that things like image size and quality, a reality of the content (Lombard, Reich, Grabe, Bracken, & Ditton, 2000) and audio characteristics (Petty et al., 2010) all have a way of enhancing this presence that a user

experiences. Different components give an illusion that the medium is absent, and people fail to acknowledge the role of technology in the experience (Bracken, 2005; Lombard et al., 2000).

Although much of the literature categorizes presence as a broad concept, there is research that makes a distinction in the types of presence (Lee, 2004). More specifically, Lee identified three separate types of telepresence: physical presence, which individuals perceive virtual objects as actual physical objects (Lee, 2004b); social presence, which includes the idea that virtual beings are actual social people, (Lee, 2004b); and self-presence, a reality where individuals perceive virtual selves as actual self (Lee, 2004b). Ijsselsteijn, de Ridder, Freeman, and Avons (2000) also identified that another type, spatial presence, is an experience where an individual has a sensation of being physically located in a mediated environment. All of the previously mentioned types give the user a feeling of genuine interaction with characteristics that are presumably not authentic, but people perceive them as authentic.

Howe and Sharkey (1998) argue that this experience of telepresence directly impacts behaviors within an interactive environment. However, Lachlan and Maloney (2008) found that if an individual has engaged in a scenario of telepresence more than once (e.g. playing a video game) their behaviors have an adverse effect, or they experience the scenario in an abnormal and artificial way. Additionally, other concepts would suggest that different variables would enhance and take away from the overall telepresence that an individual would experience. For example, small screen size image, poor image resolution, and poor audio quality can take away from the experience (Lombard & Ditton, 1997)

Multiple dimensions work within telepresence (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). Presence as a social actor within the medium is a conceptualization of telepresence that discusses the one-sided interaction of PSI (Lombard & Ditton, 2000). With regards to the Lombard and Ditton (2000)

study, there are availability heuristics that make a celebrity spokesperson seem more real to them. Presence might be a reason people consider micro-celebrities as a part of their "friend circle" with regards to trust and respect. Although research has suggested that participants know that interactions and relationships with celebrities are not the same as close friends, the research also states that when viewers are engaging in an "interaction" with the spokesperson, it is perceived as real (Giles, 2002). PSI can offer a new foundation of advertising literature that only one study explored so far (Lueck, 2015).

### **Parasocial Interaction**

A viewers' one-way experience with a spokesperson is known as a parasocial interaction (PSI). Although the spokespeople typically do not feel them on screen, viewers still perceive realness in the communication. Cohen (2009) refers to these interactions as the emotions and behaviors an audience members experiences while viewing the person in the media. The feelings are often consistent with the emotions that the character is experiencing/trying to convey (Klimmt et al., 2006). The interaction is central as it has the potential to influence advertising a product based on the interaction a person has with the celebrity. Horton and Wohl (1956) further explain that PSI is a "seeming face to face relationship between spectator and performer," (p.215) and that a character can become a greater part of a social network through factors like commitment and identification (Eyal & Dailey, 2012). With greater identification and engagement, audience members can experience a near real world social relationship, even though the actual relationship is one sided (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Moreover, Giles (2002) suggests that these one-sided interactions can become a usual social activity for the viewer. Although viewers do not consider these interactions to be comparable to actual social relationships, they often act

similarly to typical social relationships. Similar emotions can occur that parallel social interaction, which makes them comparable in some ways (Daniel & Westerman, 2017).

Social interactions and PSI often share some similar traits with each other. One such commonality is from Giles (2002), who offers many different levels to PSI and how they compare/contrast with social interactions. For instance, Giles exemplifies two main factors for PSI that shares similarities with social interaction: companionship and personal identity. Companionship refers to the idea that viewers would remind them of other friends that they knew and thus would be able to increase/decrease the value of PSI. Additionally, PI refers to viewers using character situations and behaviors as a way of understanding their lives. Self-reflexive elements help create a strong bond with the viewer, and in some cases, PSI is higher than actual friends (Gleich, 1997). Through companionship and personal identity, there are some similarities on how PSI can parallel and even supersede social relationships.

With PSI, there is also variance in the strength of interactions within the relationship itself (Gleich, 1997). First viewers have to feel the need for companionship, which is gratifying a need for social interaction. Next, people might be so attached to a character, that they would enjoy them in other programs/commercials, which is known as person-program interaction. Lastly, empathetic interaction means that there is some degree of affective, behavioral response (Gleich, 1997). For example, a viewer might verbally address a character, or feel empathy if the character makes a mistake. Within entertainment media and advertising, PSI can be a very sophisticated experience for an audience member. First, scholars tend to debate the effectiveness of centrality of the character during the interaction. PSI research indicated that audience members find television footage more enjoyable and meaningful if the character is addressing them directly (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011).

However, other research has determined an opposite finding. Lueck (2015) suggests celebrities do not have to address the audience directly. An interaction still takes place, and the product appears to be more desirable when the celebrity does not frame their discourse as a commercial. For instance, a viewer might see a vaping machine, otherwise known as a vaping modular (MOD) that was not presented as an overt advertisement but rather works as a tool in the narrative. Seamlessly inserting this product into a video versus a sales pitch leads to more desirable outcomes for the viewer, and thus stronger interactions (Lueck, 2015). Attractiveness is also significant within PSI. Studies have consistently shown that viewers report stronger parasocial interaction with a celebrity when they are perceived as more attractive (Hartmann & Goldhoorn 2011). McCarthy could be seen as attractive thus increasing the desire to interact with her. Dorff could also be considered attractive as a masculine, rebellious type that might create a desire for interaction. However, with niche-based micro-celebrities, the spokesperson may not be seen as attractive. However, the viewer still has a higher PSI possibly because the celebrity has more credibility and match.

Lastly, empathy with the audience is found to be a reliable indicator of PSI. Empathy refers to the idea that consumer can directly relate to the testimony given in the advertisement. The more empathy a viewer feels for the character, the stronger the experience and the PSI (Tsao, 1996). If a viewer can empathize with what the celebrity is going through or can relate to the experience, this might be beneficial to enhance the celebrity's reputation and the brand.

### **Parasocial Relationships**

While PSI focuses on the singular interaction that the viewer has with the character, the idea of PSR focuses more on reoccurring interactions. Horton and Wohl (1956) coined the term parasocial relationship by the way audience members develop a one-sided relationship described



as a perceived real experience. Parasocial relationships (PSR) are relationships between viewers and characters they watch, and can potentially involve emotions and reactions towards the characters after the interaction has ceased (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The viewer, in this case, feels like they are having an interaction long after the program has concluded. Giles (2002) referenced that PSR might develop over a period due to multiple interactions. The relationships that viewers' form with mediated fictional characters can play a significant role in viewers' lives (Eyal & Dailey, 2012). When people spend a great deal of time watching a program, the personalities of the character can be exposed (Nordlung, 1978). In other instances, a person could interact with a character, but would not watch the show afterward, which would not evolve into a relationship (Cohen, 2009). Some of the original research on PSR and interactions stems from the relationships that people would develop towards television news anchors, which in part was due to the illusion of connection that the anchor made while he/she was staring at the camera (Levy, 1979). People create an illusion of presence, where a news anchor feels present by the viewer in the room (Noble, 1975).

Rosaen and Dibble (2008) stated that people typically know PSR are not real, but other research has indicated that the majority of PSR's are similar to interpersonal relationships (Horton & Strauss, 1957). The perceived similarity of relationships occurs because they have similar cognitive and emotional effects on the viewer (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). Development of the relationship also shares similarities with other social relationships. Both types of relationships contained components such as proximity, attraction, similar attitudes or values, and frequency. As time progresses, and if a viewer watches this character for long then comfort, closeness, perceived friendship, and self-disclosure increases (Eyal & Dailey, 2012). However, the main difference between a PSR and a social relationship is the reciprocity of the

relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Compared to an actual friendship, there is little/no real interaction that occurs between the viewer and the character. However, some benefits of PSR are that the character is: highly reliable to the viewer's schedule, have similar and possibly predictable reactive patterns and require minimal obligations (Klimmt et al., 2006). Therefore some individuals may prefer PSR to actual relationships because of vicarious social experiences (Vorderer, Klimmt, & Ritterfeld, 2004) without many demands, obligations, and responsibilities that real relationships may require.

While PSI is not perceived as the same interaction standards as compared to social interaction, the attempt to interact with a celebrity using a comment section does imply a desire for social attachment. Thus, PSI should be taken into consideration when understanding the social segment of SSSW. However, because PSI cannot act as a complete substitute for social interaction, SIT is added to the link of the social segment with regards to vaping communities. Because celebrities cannot always communicate with their viewers, the same viewers need social circles of vapers that they relate with as a means of a collective identity.

### **Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory (SIT) suggests that individuals strive for a positive identity and make social comparisons with other group members (McKinley, Mastro, & Warber, 2014). SIT consists of two separate levels: personal identity and social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Personal identity refers to the identity associated with one's sense of self; whereas social identity is related to the groups that the person belongs to (White, Argo, & Sengupta, 2012). The higher self-esteem a group has collectively, the stronger sense of defined identity they share, and the more positive emotions people create towards being a group member (Gabbiandini, Mari,

Volpato, & Monaci, 2014). Individuals crave to be a part of the overall group identity in part because of the associated positive emotions and self-esteem.

Jones (1991) included three elements that help define the social identity. First, the Jones SIT model includes various factors, which consist of components like demographics of the group, or the development or success of the group. Second, SIT includes group factors such as a code of ethics and a group culture. Third, the in-group must contain a moral intensity. Moral intensity includes the course of action that a group must take when faced with ethical issues (Jones, 1991). All three elements are essential to the positive relationship and desire to be committed to the in-group. Ashforth and Mael (1989) indicate that the relationship between identification and commitment is unclear, whether social identity influences commitment or commitment influences social identity.

The strength of identification (SOI) is also a concern to this study. Dalton and Huang (2014) have indicated that not all group members are keen to protect group image and are not threatened by negative feedback. When adverse occurrences happen, the group must rely on the strength of the individuals' identification itself. Identification strength refers to the extent of the self-definition; positive affect from the in-group and how much a person feels the group is central to their identity (Cameron, 2004). The Cameron (2004) study also indicates not all members of the group feel strongly about group identity. Although most individuals want to be in the in-group versus the out-group, those in the in-group have an added responsibility of painting the organization in a positive light. If an individual has high identification, he/she would be more willing to engage in these behaviors, but this still creates additional and perhaps unwanted responsibilities. Conversely, people with weaker identification strength typically do

not feel the need to protect the group image. A subordinate in this case may not identify with the in-group and may carry out tasks because it is in his/her job description.

SIT would need to be operationalized using determining identity links with the social segment. SIT is examined to determine if there is a relationship with personal and collective identity within a social group. For this dissertation, the vaping community is the evaluated group. Moreover, the strength of the identification is analyzed to determine how much impact social identity has.

### **Linking the Ego Segment: Personal Identity**

The need to feel social identity and be a part of a collective group using purchasing patterns can be important to an individual. However, people might want to announce their sense of self using personal identity. After all, the ego segment of the wheel is based on the axiom "I am Me," which means that the product is an extension of one's self. The "I am Me" declaration can act separately from social identity, as an individual might not need social approval, but rather an own acceptance of identity. Therefore, PI and the ego segment of the wheel is linked together to help scholars and practitioners alike understand the importance of sales and identity.

### **Personal Identity**

New opportunities may or may not have a profound influence in establishing a person's sense of self. Beyer and Hannah (2002) questioned the concept of self and why people change or fail to change as they enter new situations. To understand self and identity, they define three separate terms and discuss considerations when a person starts to take an interest in a group. (1) Self-conceptualization is the root of identity and is "the mental representations of the self that people carry with them from one situation to another" (p. 637). A person's attitudes, values, and beliefs can all be utilized to determine self. (2) Also, it is important to understand that individuals

always come with different skill sets, backgrounds, and areas of expertise; therefore more than one conceptualization can be present. Differences in skill proficiencies make the process of social identity that much more complicated, as some people might enter a group with differing expectations for how to identify the group. (3) Lastly, personal identity refers to the "encompassing idiosyncratic characteristics (e.g., bodily attributes, abilities, psychological traits, interests)" (p. 638). For instance, the idea of interacting with vapers sounds enticing to a cloud or flavor chaser, but each person comes to the group with different and varying degrees of knowledge about the industry. However, their expected roles are different, and they are different people; therefore roles and personalities ultimately result in differing personal identities. Personal identities become a primary role as Beyer and Hannah (2002) determine that people who experience an activity maintain their identity throughout the process of welcoming a group. Many people who join competitive groups and become part of the cloud chasing circuit are often vapers with varying experience (Wang, 2016)

There are many reasons that vapers might want to accede to the "chaser community." Whether it is an enjoyment of the flavor, performing tricks, the match between personal and social identity could all be factors in this process. All of these characteristics could also link to taking risks and engaging in behavior that is not considered healthy, which may increase the behavior more.

### **Sensation Seeking**

In line with personal identity, tobacco users often identify by their behavior of smoking for sensation seeking reasons (Zuckerman, Ball, & Black, 1990). Zuckerman defines sensation seeking as a personality trait reflecting a pattern to find novel, rewarding situations and stimuli, and a willingness to take risks in doing so; the construct also indicates susceptibility to boredom

and disinhibition (Zuckerman, 1994, 2005). Sensation seeking has been found to be a strong positive predictor of behaviors such as smoking (Zuckerman, Ball, & Black, 1990), alcohol use (Newcomb and McGee, 1989), and drug use (Hornik et al., 2001). Substance use involves risky behavior, which provides for high stimulation for the sensation-seeking individual (Zuckerman, 1994). Also, substance use is linked directly to neurological stimulation for the adolescent (Segal, et al., 1980).

SS divides into four different subscales called the sensation seeking scale (SSS) (Zuckerman, Eysenck, & Eysenck, 1978). The first subscale involves thrill and adventure seeking (TAS), which includes a desire to engage in activities involving danger. Second is disinhibition (DIS), which is a desire for social and sexual disinhibition. The third is experience seeking (ES), which is a desire for experiences through the mind and senses, travel, and non-conforming to a norm. Last is Boredom Susceptibility (BS), which is an aversion to repetition, routine, and people who are uninteresting. All four of these subscales can have merit in vaping culture. TAS can apply with vaping for two reasons. First, the activity is considered dangerous to a person's health (CDC.gov, 2015). Second, vapers see the action as a thrilling sensation because of the nicotine delivery (Tackett, et al., 2015). Vapers have achieved greater "highs" compared to traditional cigarettes. DIS can apply because of the dominant negative perception of smoking; adolescents can engage in social disinhibition as a means to disregard social conventions. Hess et al. (2017) indicated that African-American Californian adolescents conveyed they vaped because it looked rebellious to those who did not participate. ES can apply because nicotine most affects levels of dopamine and noradrenalin, which affects mood and concentration, which vapers find very enjoyable. Therefore the desire to vape is increased with subsequent uses. Lastly, boredom could arise, as vapers not only disassociate themselves with cigarette smokers but those who do

not identify as a cloud of flavor chaser. Patrick et al. (2016) found 24% of eighth, tenth, and twelfth graders reasoning for vaping was because of boredom. Boredom was their third most frequent finding behind experimentation (53%) and taste (37%). Other frequencies parallel the four subscales, as good times (22%) and relations (22%) were also present in the study.

Per the previous literature, there are two levels of severity within the identity of a sensation seeker: High Sensation Seekers (HSS) and Low Sensation Seekers (LSS). Zuckerman (1979, 1994) determined that HSS have distinct and consistent preferences for particular types of messages based on their needs for the novel, the unusual, and the intense. HSS significantly prefer messages that elicit intense sensory, affective, and arousal responses. Messages tend to be dramatic, innovative, emotionally powerful or physically arousing, unconventional, fast passed or suspenseful, which are considered high in sensation value (HSV) (Palmgreen et al., 1991). LSS prefer lower levels of the features as mentioned earlier, also known as low sensation value (LSV).

Moreover, those with a high SS personality are more likely to identify themselves with their stimuli of sensations. For instance, a longitudinal study of college students indicated that those high sensation seekers were more likely to initiate smoking and more likely to identify themselves as smokers 20 years later (Lipkus, Barefoot, Williams, & Siegler, 1994). Personality traits like rebelliousness, sensation seeking, and impulsivity, are frequently used for designing messages and targeting populations (Donohew et al., 2002; Zucker, et al., 2000). Identity traits have been used to understand young populations vulnerable to risky behavior such as smoking. Risky behavior typically stems with personal identity, but the literature also suggests that social identity might have some influence as well. Wills, Windle, and Cleary (1998) suggested that

peers can mediate the association between novelty seeking and substance use, including smoking, among adolescents.

Prior literature supports that sensation seekers align with products that identify with their counter-culture (Hess, et al. 2017). Sensation seeking can often appeal to the product just based on the aesthetic qualities of the activity. Potentially, a person watching a vaping video transfixes with the size of the clouds blown or the texture of the rings produced. The present research considers vaping as a high-risk activity, so a visual element might increase the desire to purchase something like a vaping MOD. Therefore, the present study reviews the sensory segment as well.

### **Linking the Sensory Segment: Hedonic Scale**

The sensory segment plays a significant role in advertisements for products that represent the five senses. All products cannot advertise their messages this way, but audiences have been found to be drawn by jingles (Scott, 1990) aesthetically pleasing visuals like color or text or even magazine ads that promote perfume or cologne that engage the olfactory senses (Schindler, 1986). Advertising that engages the senses can result in strong recall and longevity of brand recognition (Nelson, 2002). The SSSW addresses the importance of sensory appeals in advertising, but this dissertation would like to examine the senses more in depth. Therefore, the present study implemented the Hedonic Scale for another addition of review to link to the sensory segment of the SSSW. The current study utilized the five senses as coding categories for the methodology (e.g. visually, auditory, olfactory, haptics, taste).



## Research Questions

This dissertation research has great potential to extend our understanding of message strategy and PSI. Through the previous literature, there is little reasoning relating to the ritual side of the wheel. The ritual segments appear to be present in advertising, but research should make a case for its merits. Moreover, the ritual view segments should be looked at more in depth to understand their potential link towards purchasing intentions.

For instance, our research proposes that PSS and SIT can connect with the social segment. Instead of trying to impress a friend/family member with a gift from an advertisement, PSI might be able to serve the same purpose between the viewer and the micro-celebrity. Although the person knows that the spokesperson is not a friend, it is through PSI that viewers might feel connected with the celebrity. Also, presence is reduced because the PSI is an illusion of an actual relationship. The connection and illusion of space might put in a celebrity in a unique position, being able to give the illusion of a mass personal word-of-mouth advertising strategy for the individuals viewing the material. These propositions fuel a newly understudied area of research in the recent years, despite the growth of celebrity endorsements and Generation Y's and Millennials' attachment to celebrities. Researchers analyzed elsewhere like SIT as well to determine the persuasive strength that groups of vapers possess.

Moreover, due to personal identity with regards to HSS, the ego component of the SSSW needed consideration with buying intentions as well. Bearing in mind that vapers often disassociate themselves with cigarette users, and creating an online community give vapers the ability to achieve the "I am Me" association that the Ego segment was intended to do. Moreover, the interaction with the micro-celebrity might increase/decrease the identity that the viewer has

about being a vaper. Due to the action of cloud chasing, and the vapers that perform the tricks are "cool" can help those who already identify as a vaper.

Third, the study proposes the sensory appeal of the SSSW also falls within the area of a non-traditional informational, persuasive cue for different reasons. Sensory details such as the texture of cloud vape, the shapes the cloud vape, and the colors of the cloud vape might lead to positive emotions for the viewer. Other things like music and background color, can also contribute to overall good thoughts and feelings associating with an informational cue with the product.

Taylor does support the merit of the transmission view of the wheel linked to logical decision-making. Therefore, this methodology needs to include their segments as well. The goal is to understand if vapers, (1) have an acute need with wanting to engage in their hobby immediately; (2) rationalize their purchasing decisions with logic and expressing maximization of satisfaction; (3) routinely use their product and express that routine as part of their purchasing habits. The previous literature has directed the reasoning for the following questions:

***Q1: How are components related to the SSSW discussed in a vaping community?***

***Q2: How does each segment of the SSSW relate to purchasing intentions regarding vaping?***

The present study addressed these questions using a content analysis and focus groups. Both methodologies addressed how SSSW discusses these components among vapers, and how those elements relate to purchasing intentions.

## CHAPTER IV: STUDY ONE

### **Content Analysis – Methodology**

First, this study used a quantitative content analysis as a method to measure the presence and absence of discussion related to each of the six segments of Taylor's strategy wheel in an online community related to vaping on a major YouTube channel. This dissertation used Content analysis for this study to obtain unfiltered, anonymous commentary concerning people's primary reactions to videos from Vape Capitol. Vape Capitol is one of the leading vaping channels on YouTube. Although we cannot identify the commenters from their profile alone (e.g. demographics, psychographics), the anonymity that commenters' have on YouTube allows for responses that would be otherwise unobtainable.

### **Unit of Analysis**

#### *Vape Capitol Videos*

This study used content and comments from the YouTube Channel: Vape Capitol and the profile videos, which feature micro-celebrities that participate in competitive Cloud Chasing. Vape Capitol Studios is the most comprehensive YouTube channel for Cloud Chasing, with a total of 17,724,991 overall views and 106,215 subscribers. One of the main playlists includes videos that profile a different micro-celebrity, who talk about their experience with Cloud Chasing, the custom vaping build they use, how they identify as a vaper, their shared identify with the Cloud Chasing community, and what type of product works best for them. The reason we choose these profile videos is that they feature a plethora of different micro-celebrities, the content in the video demonstrates all segments of the ritual side of the SSSW, and they all promote a particular product within their demonstrations. The present study featured 34 profile videos of the different vapers within the Vape Capitol YouTube channel. Overall the playlist of

34 videos had 3,018,322 views, 13,498 likes, and 817 dislikes, with an average of 88,774 views per video, 397 likes per video, and 24 dislikes per video. All videos were included in the sample, even though Vape Capitol posted a video twice. The reactions for the video posted twice were different, so they remained in the sample. We also coded for categories such as sex of the micro-celebrity in the video, the length of the video, and if there is a presence/absence of overtly mentioning a product/brand in the video.

#### *Vape Capitol Video Comments*

The primary unit of analysis consists of comments to the 34 profile videos. The rationale for using a comment section was that the responses directly relate to the stimuli. Comments on a single video ranged drastically from lowest ( $n = 7$ ) to highest ( $n = 446$ ). Overall there were 1,537 comments on the 34 videos selected for the sample (average = 44 per video). Each comment was coded to determine the frequency of each segment in the SSSW. Also, the coding categories were used to determine if commenters expressed intention to purchase a vaping product. Lastly, each comment was evaluated by the comments entirety, rather than individual sentences within the comment. First, coders determined which of the six strategies of Taylor's wheel was most dominant for each comment. Then the presence/absence of a variety of categories related to the six strategies was coded.

For example, the ritual and transmission view of the SSSW was also coded, indicating if there was a presence/absence of the ego, sensory, or social segment (ritual) or the rational, routine, or acute need (transmission) in the text. After the coders had determined whether a segment was present or absent, they decided which segment was most dominant and entered the number corresponding to the segment. Ahn, Lei, and Taylor (2013) approached their content analysis with the SSSW the same way. However, the current study did not want to ignore

statements that people presented in the comments but did not represent the most dominant segment. For example, although framework connected to the social segment (e.g. SIT & PSI) was present; the social segment may not be dominant in the comment, and thus not coded.

### **Coding Categories**

First, two primary coding categories were used to examine the social segment of Taylor's strategy wheel. First, we implemented a coding category to examine social identity as related to SIT. For this study, the commenters' identification with the video was the primary concern. Therefore, this study uses the Strength of Identification (SOI) Scale as a basis because of the emphasis towards identity and community (Dalton & Huang, 2014). The coder morphed SOI into a coding category focusing exclusively on how a person relates to their community. Coders looked for the presence or absence of statements regarding "Being a Member of a Community," including comments such as "Vapers Unite!" as an example. Coders marked a (1) for present in the sample or (2) absent in the sample.

Second, coders examined Parasocial Interaction, Satisfaction, and Dissatisfaction under the social segment of the SSSW. If PSI was present in any of the sentences within the comment, the interaction was present. For example, if a commenter expressed outreach towards the creator of the video or expressed positive or negative valence towards the creator, then the comment was coded as interacting through parasocial means. Coders marked a (1) for present in the sample or (2) absent in the sample. The PSI satisfaction-coding category used a shortened and adapted version of the Audience-Persona Interaction Scale (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000). However, Auter and Palmgreen (2000) stated that there were different degrees and categories to determine PSS. Therefore coders looked the valence of the PSI that exists and the categories that exist in identifying or not identifying with the micro-celebrity.

Moreover, to determine the satisfaction-coding category, this study looked at the four variables suggested by Auter & Palmgreen (2000), which included: alignment, success, agreement, and aspiration. This dissertation also included Attraction, as it is a predictor of PSI and might be an influencer of satisfaction. Attractiveness means the viewer found the celebrity to be aesthetically pleasing. Lastly, promoting the exploratory focus of this dissertation, a new coding category was created which included negative valence referencing dissatisfaction, which included all of the previously mentioned categories listed in satisfaction, but with a negative valence instead of a positive one (e.g. non-alignment, non-success, non-agreement, non-aspirational, non-attraction). If the comment contained PSI and valence, the coders looked for the dominant coding category from PSS (if the valence was positive) or PSDS (if the valence was negative).

The coder assessed Personal Identity by a simplified coding category based on the Aspects of Identity Questionnaire – AIQ-IV (Check & Briggs, 2013). The AIQ-IV questionnaire was used for PI because it emphasized personal identity specifically and exclusively. The scale referenced items that were an evaluation of the importance of who the participant is. The present study took the same approach by looking at the content to determine if commenters feel they identify as a vaper. Much like SIT, PI was assessed using a nominal coding category, examining the presence or absence of the idea that, "Commenters feel like they identify as a vaper." Coders marked a (1) for present in the sample or (2) absent in the sample.

This study adopted a sensory scale used for food acceptability called the 9-Point Hedonic Scale (Munoz & King, 2007) to examine different sensory information. For this particular study, we assessed the presence/absence of visual cues (e.g. texture of the vape ring, size of the vape cloud, background color), auditory cues (e.g. music in the video), olfactory cues (e.g. perceived

smell of a flavor), haptic cues (e.g. feel of the smoke ring, handle of the vaping MOD), and taste (e.g. perceived taste of a flavor) with vaping in mind specifically. The coder evaluated each comment for the presence or absence of sensory related statements within each comment. If present, coders then coded for the dominant sense represented within the description of the text.

One of the most used scales for measuring behavioral intentions is from the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 2006). The content analysis adapted the three-item measure from the overall TPB scale and modified it to various items associating with vaping in the video (e.g. vaping machine, accessories) as well as a vaping item not shown in the video (e.g. vaping juice). For this study, the following coding categories were used to evaluate a presence or absence of “Purchasing Expectations,” “Purchasing Wants,” and “Purchasing Intentions.” Purchasing expectations implied that commenters made a statement that they are definitive in purchasing a product. “Purchasing Wants” suggests that commenters made a statement expressing a desire to buy a product. Purchasing Intentions implied that commenters made a statement expressing their intentions to purchase this product that is not definitive. Keeping with the exploratory study, “Purchasing Inquiry” was also included in the coding sheet, as many individuals could express interest in a MOD, build, or juice, but not definitively communicate expectations, wants, or intentions. Instead, commenters were curious about the product and therefore asked about it. Coders marked a (1) for present in the sample or (2) absent in the sample. Coders then coded for the dominant purchasing intention, and the dominant purchasing subject.

Other coding categories looked at the transmission and ritual sides of the SSSW The transmission view included the presence/absence of the rational segment in the comments about vaping (e.g. “I want to vape because it’s better for my teeth than smoking is”). The Coder

assessed Acute need in the comments to determine if there appears to be an immediate need to purchase vaping machines/juice/wires (e.g. "I need to get this MOD now!"). The coder looked for the ritual segment to determine if there are specific times that commenters engage in the vaping behavior (e.g. "I want this because I vape five times a week"). The ritual view included the presence/absence of the ego segment in the comments about vaping (e.g. "I am a long time vaper..."). The coder looked the social segment to determine if commenters were persuaded to show off their pieces as collective identity (e.g. "We represent vape nation"). Researchers coded the sensory segment to determine if people were persuaded by joyous memories based on senses (e.g. "I like the texture of the cloud"). Coders marked a (1) for present in the sample or (2) absent in the sample. Then, the coder picked the dominant segment represented by the strategy wheel.

<See Appendix 1>

### **Procedure**

The coder provided the secondary coder with a coding sheet <See: Appendix 1> and a codebook <See: Appendix 2>. Before any coding of the content took place, the two coders went through the coding sheet and the coding book and reviewed definitions for each coding category. The primary coder explained which coding categories were coded for presence/absence and which coding categories were coded for dominance. After coders had reviewed definitions, coders practiced on five sample comments using the coding sheet. Coders shared their results with each other during the meeting. Once coders understood the definitions of the coding sheet in connection with the comments, the coders came to an agreement for each coding category during the meeting. Additionally, the primary coder explained vaping slang to the secondary coder. Once coders understood the definitions (per the coding book), they proceeded with the random sample of comments for intercoder reliability.



For intercoder reliability, the unit of analysis was randomized for the sample. The coder entered the number of videos and comments in a random number generator and recorded 5 videos and 231 comments. The primary researcher printed the comments out in a notebook and labeled each comment numerically. Also, the primary researcher highlighted the random comments for intercoder reliability the second coder knew which comment to code. Additionally, the primary coder provided an excel sheet with the comment numbers provided, for clarity. The excel document also included each coding category. The primary coder trained the second coder what each heading in the excel cell meant and the numerical value to enter in the cell.

The coders coded the manifest content from the video and the comments present. First, coders searched for the dominant segment that existed in the comment. Second, coders then searched for the remaining coding categories that linked with the SSSW. The coding book provided a detailed explanation and a reference for each content category if the either coder failed to comprehend the meanings presented in the coding sheet. Both people documented all of the following coding categories in a coding sheet, which was translated in more detail through a coding book to ensure definitional consistency between coders to ensure intercoder reliability. A coding sheet acted as the assessment for coders throughout the unit of analysis. Each coder used these sheets as the method of comment each comment within the sample.

Coders read the manifest content of the video and comments presented in the sample. Each researcher coded for all the categories mentioned above and entered the data into an excel file, which researchers transferred to an SPSS file for data collection and analysis. Coders each looked at 5 randomly selected videos (14.7%) of the 34 available videos, and also coded 231 comments (15%) of the 1537 available comments. After coders went through the sample for reliability, the primary coder took the data and tested for intercoder reliability. On the chance the

intercoder reliability resulted in a low frequency, both coders would look through the manifest content and proceed with another training session before attempting a new trial of coding. Given the reliability found in this study between coders, this was not necessary. The present study used Cohen's Kappa for inter-coder reliability. The content analysis in this study is exclusively categorical, which fits Cohen's Kappa well. Also, the current study used two coders, which is unique to Cohen's Kappa (as opposed to Fleiss's Kappa.)

Video categories regarding the video subject (e.g. name, sex) reached a  $\kappa = 1.00$ . Kappas for the comments were as follows: Aspects of Identity:  $\kappa = .88$ , Strength of Identification:  $\kappa = .82$ , SSSW presence/absence:  $\kappa = .85$ , Type of SSSW:  $\kappa = .81$ , Hedonic Scale:  $\kappa = .81$ , PSI presence/absence:  $\kappa = .81$ , Parasocial Satisfaction:  $\kappa = .87$ , Type of Parasocial Satisfaction:  $\kappa = .86$ , Type of Parasocial Dissatisfaction:  $\kappa = .82$ , Purchasing intentions presence/absence:  $\kappa = .85$ , purchasing categories:  $\kappa = .86$ , purchasing subjects:  $\kappa = .82$ , and overall reliability:  $\kappa = .92$ . Inter-coder reliability was high, so the primary researcher proceeded with coding the rest of the videos and comments, recorded all of the data in an excel spreadsheet, transferred to SPSS, and calculated frequencies and chi-squares that related to the research questions.

### **Content Analysis – Results**

The data from the content analysis were used to answer the research questions. As previously mentioned in the methods, the coder looked at the dominant segments in the manifest content of the comment, while also looking for any coding categories that linked with the added variables associated with the ritual view of the SSSW. The coder transferred the data from Microsoft Excel to IBM SPSS. To answer RQ1, the coder conducted frequency tests for the SSSW segments and the concepts linked to the segments. The data presented in the results will show how many times a dominant segment appeared in a comment. Moreover, the remaining

concepts were evaluated for presence/absence within the comment. For RQ2, frequencies with purchasing intentions were calculated. The coder also conducted chi-square tests to determine which segments were associated with purchasing intentions. Moreover, since there are multiple independent and dependent variables, the coder used a Bonferroni post hoc test to determine significance within the segments. The adjusted residual and p-value were recorded and reported from smallest to largest. Any number higher than a +/- 1.96 z-score had a statistically significant p value of < .05.

To answer RQ1, the frequencies of categories created from the SSSW and the theoretical framework specifically linked with the ritual side were examined. The overall SSSW was not present in every comment in the sample ( $n = 1537$ ), but was present in 644 comments (42%) within the overall sample. Within the comments present, the coder looked for the dominant segment. The sensory segment contained the highest frequency in the sample with 264 occurrences (17.1%). Next, the social segment was the second most frequent from the SSSW with 257 occurrences (16.7%). The ego segment was the fourth most frequent segment overall in the SSSW and the least mentioned within the ritual view with 35 occurrences (2%). The content analysis also examined the transmission side of the wheel. Rational was the third most mentioned segment overall and most mentioned from the transmission side with 79 occurrences (5%). Acute need was represented to a small degree with 9 occurrences (.5%). Routine had no mentions overall, as commenters did not express how often they vaped within the comments.

The Hedonic Scale was well represented in the comments. Specific comments mentioned some sensory detail they enjoyed the video, but it was not the primary SSSW segment represented in the comment. Visual persuasive cues contained the highest frequency at 239 occurrences (16%). Auditory cues were the second highest frequency of 185 occurrences (12%).

The coder also found other senses from the sample was taste with 8 occurrences (.5%), haptics with 5 occurrences (.3%), and olfactics with 3 occurrences (.1%).

The coder also included the AIQ-IV coding category that linked to the social segment in the results. Predictably, we found the AIQ-IV coding category at a higher frequency than the social segment with 406 occurrences (26%). Also linked with the social segment, PSI also was found with a higher frequency of 1055 occurrences (68%). Researchers found PSS with a higher frequency of those comments that featured PSI. PSS frequency was 486 overall occurrences (32%) within the sample. Of PSS mentioned, we found agreement with the highest frequency of 235 occurrences (15%). Alignment was the second most frequent with 130 occurrences (8%) and success closely followed with 100 occurrences (7%). Although rare, the coder found other PSS categories from the sample. Other coding categories included aspirational with 16 occurrences (1%) and attraction with 5 occurrences (.3%).

For the ego segment, the Strength of Identity coding category was found in 356 comments (23%). The finding was another example of the ego segment being present in the comment, but not being the primary SSSW represented in the comment. For example, most mentions of identity were a statement of an overall collective of the being part of a vaping community or a statement of credibility when making a rational argument.

To answer RQ2, the coder included purchasing intention frequencies from the mentions contained in the comments. The content analysis found Purchasing Intentions in 233 (15.2%) of the comments. Among those interested, 1 (.6%) mentioned purchasing expectations,  $n = 15$  (.9%) mentioned purchasing wants,  $n = 5$  (.5%) mentioned purchasing intentions, and  $n = 212$  (13.8%) mentioning purchasing inquiry. Lastly, of the objects desired to be purchased, MODS were the most frequent within the comments  $n = 115$  (7.4%), followed by “other”:  $n = 75$  (4.8%), juice:  $n$

= 25 (1.6%) and wires  $n = 18$  (1.2%). The category of other dealt with products like different types of clothing, carrying cases, or atomizers.

The overall SSSW was found to have significance with relation to purchasing intentions:  $\chi^2(5, n = 1537) = 110.22, p < .000, V^* = .27$ . A Bonferonni post hoc test revealed that the relationship counts with the sensory segment and purchasing intentions were significantly higher than all other segments  $n = 63$  (adj. = 8.7,  $p < .000$ ). The social segment was related to purchasing intentions as well. While a post hoc test for the social segment did not reveal any significant results, the social segment did have the second highest frequency of the categories in the strategy wheel  $n = 257$  (16.7%), and the third highest relationship count with purchasing intentions of all the segments represented  $n = 31$  (adj. = -1.5,  $p = .77$ ). The ego segment was not considered a significant predictor of purchasing intentions after conducting the overall post hoc test. The ego segment was the fourth highest frequency of the strategy wheel linked with purchasing intentions  $n = 7$  (adj. = .8,  $p = .99$ ). Interestingly, many commenters' identified as being a vaper  $n = 406$  (26%), but the comment was either coded more strongly as a social cue than an ego cue or included identity in a rational statement. The author identified him/herself as a vaper with no relationship to the subject in the video or identified as a vaper while criticizing those who engage in the activity of cloud chasing.

The segments on the transmission side found limited/no relationship with purchasing intentions. However, the rational segment of the ritual view of the strategy wheel had the highest frequency with purchasing intentions overall  $n = 79$  (adj. = 8.7,  $p < .000$ ). Moreover, the frequency of the relationship was almost as high  $n = 39$  as the rational segment having no relationship with purchasing behaviors  $n = 40$ . The rational segment was the only other segment that was considered a significant result from the SSSW.

Sensory information also reached overall significance as a predictor of purchasing intentions:  $\chi^2 (5, n = 1537) = 100.95, p < .000. V^* = .26$ . A Bonferonni post hoc test found that visual sensory cues were the strongest predictor of purchasing cues  $n = 84$  (adj. = 9.4,  $p < .000$ ). Although auditory cues had the second highest frequency of the Hedonic coding category  $n = 15$ , it were not found to be significant cues for purchasing intentions (adj. = -2.9,  $p = .14$ ).

Lastly, Strength of Identity had a strong frequency of  $n = 356$  (23%) but was not a significant predictor of purchasing intentions. However, another chi-square test was conducted with regards to PSS and purchasing intentions:  $\chi^2 (2, n = 1537) = 88.33, p < .000. V^* = .24$ . Commenters who positively associated themselves with the micro-celebrity found significance with purchasing intentions  $n = 41$  (adj. = -5.0,  $p < .000$ ). The parasocial dissatisfaction (PSDS) did not determine purchasing intentions, but it still provided some interesting data concerning those who do not like the vaper and thus may have the exact opposite mindset as opposed to someone being influenced by the spokesperson. The findings in frequencies of PSDS were imperative because those who express PSDS are likely to never interact with the celebrity/channel again thus did not express purchasing intentions.

### **Content Analysis – Discussion**

Several studies view advertising messages and how the SSSW applies to the message delivered (Ahn, Wu, & Taylor, 2013; Crawford, 2014; Golan & Zaidner, 2008; Ju & Park, 2015; Lee, Taylor, & Chung, 2011; Ziamba, 2103). However, the present study's content analysis focuses on responses, rather than creative strategies. The goal of this dissertation was to determine which messages resonate in the vaping community. Also, the methodology is set up to determine if these existing segments link with purchasing intentions. The current research study is unique in this regard because while researchers quantify the messages that exist in an

advertisement, this study is more interested in how people talk about these segments. Lastly, the results and discussion will not reflect all advertisements and messages that resonate with an audience. However, the content analysis discussion should be a beginning point of discussing interpretations of the SSSW.

RQ1 asked: How are components related to the SSSW discussed in a vaping community? Per the results of the content analysis, the sensory segment was found to be the most frequently dominant segment among the entire strategy wheel,  $n = 264$  (17%). Social was the second most frequent  $n = 257$ . Rational  $n = 79$ , ego  $n = 35$ , acute need  $n = 9$ , and routine  $n = 0$ .

These findings were relatively surprising because the sensory segment has never been found to be the most prominent strategy in the SSSW. Several studies have found high frequencies of sensory-based advertising (Ahn, Wu, & Taylor, 2013; Crawford, 2014; Ziemba, 2013), but never the most prominent. These findings might infer that while the sensory segment might be low in frequency, but it might be the segment most talked about the most.

Other SSSW studies indicate that one of the most prominent segments represented in advertisements is the ego segment (Ahn, Wu, & Taylor, 2013; Lee, Taylor & Chung, 2011; Golan & Zaidner, 2008; Ziemba, 2013). The content analysis indicated that ego was present; it had the lowest frequency as the dominant theme. There were many instances of people identifying as a vaper. However, the instances were either a part of a greater collective of being part of a group or as a source of credibility. Any ego segment related statements were overshadowed by something larger. For example, some people identified as a vaper, but only to later express the social elements involved (e.g. locations, brands, shops). The issue is with each expression of "I am Me," there were several other implications within the comment of "I am We," which lead to a more central frame. Also, ego was also overshadowed by rational

descriptions. While many expressed their involvement with vaping, it was because they were referencing it as a source of credibility. For example, if someone were curious about a box MOD, another commenter would establish his or her credibility by saying "I was a vaper for seven years" and then continue with a detailed explanation. Although the identification seemed to be present, it was not dominant.

Lastly, the rational segment was also considered an interesting finding in the content analysis. The rational segment was found to be the most present segment from the transmission side. Moreover acute need and routine had relatively low frequencies. Prior research emphasized advertisers have utilized the rational segments more often than the other two transmission segments (Ahn, Wu, Taylor, 2013; Golan & Zaidner, 2008; Ju & Park, 2015; Zeimba, 2013). The presence of rational and the lower frequencies of acute need and routine might infer that audiences observe more rational ads, therefore talk about them more.

Information that linked with the Hedonic scale was present 440 times in the sample. The most prominent senses represented were visual ( $n = 239$ ) and auditory ( $n = 185$ ). Tavasolli & Lee (2003) found similar results as visual and auditory distractions had a high recall with their sample. Although the Tavasolli and Lee (2003) study associated visual cues with recall than auditory cues with English speaking participants, other cues were not nearly as high in frequency; however, future research should look at flavor chaser reviews. The emphasis on taste and smell might contain stronger discussions in those types of videos.

Throughout the sample, parasocial satisfaction appeared in  $n = 486$  (31.6%) of the overall comments. Commenters exemplified satisfaction by expressing a liking to the celebrity. Viewers commented on things like, agreement in method ( $n = 235$ ), alignment with use of MODS ( $n = 130$ ), encouraging them with heartfelt messages about their success ( $n = 100$ ), wanting to be like



the vaper ( $n = 16$ ), and the idea that a particular vaper was attractive ( $n = 5$ ). Some commenters would express pride that the celebrity was from their hometown, or they were in class together in high school. The celebratory comments gave the impression that the vaper had "made it" to the high platform and thus commenters praised the celebrity for it. Other commenters expressed satisfaction, noticing the celebrity from Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, or Vine, and stated that they were not only watching on YouTube but also following their work on different platforms. The results can infer that there is a parasocial bond that is taking place as people express positive messages towards on-screen talent (Lueck, 2015)

Continuing with the social segment, the commenters often expressed their social identity, even when people would express parasocial dissatisfaction. Parasocial dissatisfaction reached a frequency of  $n = 240$  (15.6%). At a cursory glance, PSDS was much more frequent on more popular vapers' videos. PSDS is most likely because the lesser-known vapers would only appear on the YouTube channel if a person had already subscribed, whereas a more popular vaper might show up on the recommended tab on non-vapers YouTube homepage. Further research should look into PSDS and discuss how in-group members act as buffers towards dissenters.

There are several reasons that social cues would be the most central in the comment sections in these videos. First, viewers might want to imitate behaviors seen through media (Bandura, 1962). Bandura's experiments found that adolescents on a screen that interact with a "BoBo Doll" and are praised and not scolded for their actions were found to influence children to reenact the same behavior seen on screen. Many commenters were enamored by the size of the clouds or the tricks and look up to the skill of the vapers and overtly stated they wanted to become just as skilled as those performing on the YouTube channel. Commenters revealed alignment, agreement, success, aspiration, and attractiveness in the sample. Individuals

expressed parasocial satisfaction with the vaper because of the video. Although coders explored the praise and validation that commenters published on comment threads, future research could see if the comments influence the behavior. The main reason children reacted towards hitting the BoBo Doll in Social Learning experiments is because the adult figured praised child on the screen. Future research could show the activity and utilize positive or negative comments.

RQ2 asked: How does each segment of the SSSW relate to purchasing intentions regarding vaping? Overall, there seemed to be three re-occurring segments connected with purchasing intentions represented from the SSSW: sensory and rational. There were very few mentions of the other three segments, so the focus of the discussion will feature the rationale for potential reasons these three segments were cited the most with purchasing intentions within the comments.

The sensory segment yielded the only significant result with purchasing intentions from the ritual side of the SSSW ( $\text{adj. } r = 4.3, p < .000$ ). The sensory segment contained the highest count with the relationship and purchasing intentions' overall frequency too. The only other segment that found significance with purchasing intentions was the rational segment ( $\text{adj. } r = 8.7, p < .000$ ). The social segment was the third most frequent with ties to purchasing intentions, but was not significant ( $\text{adj. } r = -1.5, p = .77$ ). This dissertation somewhat expected these results because research associates viral advertising with the ritual view of the wheel (Golan & Zaidner, 2008). Viral advertising refers to online advertising through word-of-mouth through media such as e-mail or social media (Chui et al. 2007). Also, in the Golan and Zaidner (2008) study, nearly a quarter of viral advertisements employed the rational segment. The videos from Vape Capitol tend to mirror some of the techniques used in viral advertising. Therefore Vape Capitol might use some of the same segments, and commenters might respond accordingly. Future research

could continue to evaluate audience-purchasing intentions with primary SSSW segments represented in an advertisement.

There are a few potential reasons for why the rational segment links to purchasing intentions. First, in many videos represented in the sample, the micro-celebrity provided a rational argument for why they quit smoking. Although quitting smoking could be a social consideration, some commenters made the rational argument that they wanted to keep their lungs healthier and their teeth whiter. Commenters made a rational claim that smoking was ruining their health, and they wanted to find a method of receiving nicotine, without the effects of a cigarette. The second reason for why the rational segment was so present was that many people talked very specifically about the usefulness of a product. For example, a person would mention they were interested in the MOD within the video because their MOD was not demonstrating the same cloud output. Moreover, commenters realized that the VG: PG ratios were higher on the MOD used on the video, allowing for bigger clouds. Statements in the comments referred to specific accessories pairing with additional sentences of purchasing specific brands of vaping equipment. Another example would talk about the brand name: Hot Wires, explicitly saying that they used Hot Wires for a very particular reason, and claimed they were going to purchase more. Direct use was the reason for the calculative and deliberative logic of choosing wires, which fit within the rational segment (Taylor, 1999).

The content analysis was also able to shed some light on the specificity of the Hedonic Scale and purchasing intentions. More specifically, visual ( $n = 84$ ) cues were found to be the most significant predictor of purchasing intentions ( $\text{adj.} = 9.4, p < .000$ ). Also, although auditory ( $n = 15$ ) cues were not found to be significant ( $\text{adj.} = -2.9, p = .14$ ), they were still the second most linked to purchasing intentions. The comments almost exclusively dedicated auditory cues

to the music during the videos. At a cursory glance, many commenters expressed their liking for the celebrity in the video, but also the song in the video. Viewers often asked the creator of the video if they knew what the song's title was. Occasionally, this led to comments that referenced that they would purchase the song. The music may have ties to the enjoyment of a peripheral cue (e.g. a jingle) for continued viewing by those engaged in the subject material (Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981).

Within the Hedonic Scale, the content analysis found visual sensory appeals as significant predictors of purchasing persuasive cues. Sensory cues, as predictors of purchasing intentions, were an interesting finding concerning persuasive cues. The ritual side of the wheel is typically not associated with purchasing intentions and logical assessment (Taylor, 1999). However, many people commenting admired the display of talent in the video. Whether it was expressing admiration for the size of the cloud, some rings produced in a short period, of the shape of the ring, commenters were interested in how to perfect their skill as fellow vapers. Sensory had a count of  $n = 63$  (adj. = 4.3,  $p < .000$ ) between visual cues and purchasing intentions; many people were curious about how to make the aesthetically pleasing visuals seen. Admiration would be expressed and then comments preceding like Propylene Glycol: Vegetable Glycerin (VG: PG) ratio, type of MOD (e.g. box MOD or mech MOD), or type of wires all seemed to be a spark of interest as those commenter's wanted to emulate the tricks on the channel. Lastly, sensory and all of the other ritual cues associated with purchasing intentions more frequently than any of the transmission cues (except rational having more frequency and predictive power than ego). Through the course of past research examined, the overall frequency of the ritual side of the wheel seems to be the exact opposite regarding what is typically the central persuasive cue for purchasing intentions (Ahn, Lei, & Taylor, 2013). Prior research with

the SSSW indicated that the transmission view was responsible for logical decision making and ultimately purchasing a product. However, the data found in this study suggests quite the opposite. The sensory segment significantly associated with one of two segments with purchasing intentions.

Lastly, unlike auditory cues, visual cues had much more range regarding the reason people commented. For instance, many people enjoyed the vape tricks, referencing the name of the trick specifically (e.g. clouds, jellies, rings, triangles). The commenter would sometimes also reference the vaping machine. Many of the celebrities used custom MODS, and individuals would often ask which type of mod they were using while commenting on how much they liked the one used in the video. Many of the visual aesthetics were deemed pleasing and often contained sentences inquiring about where they could purchase a product.

The content analysis provided a useful methodology for this topic. The method found significant results and presented new ideas for future research. However, providing another methodology can help enhance the answers to the exploratory questions. Therefore, a second study was employed to help researchers understand the SSSW even more. Focus groups increase depth in understanding the identity of a vaper and what influences them to purchase the product

## CHAPTER V: STUDY TWO

### Focus Groups – Methodology

The content analysis methodology provided an excellent opportunity to code authentic and direct commentary regarding the content within the video. However, there are areas of the content analysis that cannot be assessed appropriately without the addition of another methodology. More specifically, there were three main pragmatic reasons why this study implemented a focus group to the methodology. First, there can be no guided direction regarding what to focus on in any individual video. There are multiple persuasive message types that exist in each video, and commenters can describe one content area while neglecting another. Therefore the focus group was implemented as a second part of the study for a more guided discussion regarding particular ideas within the vaping community and specific thoughts about the vaping profile video. The second reason a focus group helped the direction of this study was based on audience analysis. The anonymity of computer-mediated communication acts as an advantage for unfiltered commentary. However, because of the anonymity, it is difficult for researchers to determine what type of audience is commenting. Knowing demographic information is imperative, as it allowed researchers to determine if vapers in different social communities have different experiences. Third, focus groups also allowed for a deeper understanding of the SSSW, as multiple segments can be present (Taylor, 1999). Although there is literature to support the use of dominant segments (Crawford, 2014), the focus groups added more depth to the segments existing in this study. Lastly, focus groups were chosen for this study because they illuminated the ways individuals created meaning and make decisions in a social context through discussion with other people (Blumer, 1969; Patton, 1990). Participant

discussions were rare in the content analysis, but are often more frequent in a focus group setting.

The focus group methodology allowed this study to give voice to the target public and to present results that are grounded in the public's voice. The communication perspective classifies focus groups as being rooted in the "human tendency to discuss issues and ideas in groups" (Sink 1991, p. 197). From a media perspective, focus groups are particularly useful because it allows for depth based on the discussion concerning issues important to the researcher (Deacon et al., 2007). The method is well suited to research areas in which decisions, understandings, and ideas are formulated and sustained in groups (Albrecht, Johnson, & Walther, 1993; Frey & Fontana, 1993; Knodel, 1993; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Lunt & Livingstone, 1996; Morgan, 1993; 1997). Therefore focus groups added more in-depth information for the research questions posed in this study. Focus groups were a fit for the methodology of this study because it provided a dialogue between participants, it could address the research questions more directly, and it helped us understand the vaping audiences better.

### **Problem/Definition**

Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) came up with a design for the steps of conducting focus groups. Per the research questions provided, the "problem defined" involved purchasing intentions based on SSSW and the PSI with vaping micro-celebrities. By implementing this concept, the participants were able to interact directly with the moderator addressing the inquiries guided by the research questions. Moreover, respondents built upon each other's responses, which can provide a more in-depth look into vapers experiences. Lastly, after researchers collected the data, the results were efficient to interpret. The focus group data gave the study a second level of meaning that continued from the results gathered in the content

analysis. The next step listed by Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) identified the representative sample based on the population selected for this study. The representative sample included vapers and e-cigarette users.

### **Sampling Frame**

A focus group research design was used to determine how audiences view a particular advertisement utilizing the ritual side of the SSSW. To accomplish the focus group design, researchers established audiences first. Audiences from Djamasbi et al. (2010) observations concerning Generation Y and Millennial attachment with celebrities was the primary age demographic analyzed. More specifically, researchers used 18-35-year-old current vapers and e-cigarette users for the particular sample due to their higher potential for the likelihood for celebrity attachment. All participants fell within the proposed generational sample desired.

Also, since the Ego segment of the SSSW consists of the ideology of "I am Me," it is beneficial to have a sample that already associates with being a vaper. Vapers already understand the differentiation made with vaping culture versus traditional cigarettes/tobacco users. Lastly, the dissertation should explicitly disclaim this study was not intended to recruit people to smoke/vape. The goal of the focus groups was to understand micro-celebrity endorsements from the audience's perspective. By showing content to current vapers, the moderator did not expose the video to those who are unfamiliar with the product. Thus, the moderator did not create new nicotine users. Utilizing the previously mentioned sample, it increased the likelihood of vapers paying attention to the content without condemning the activity. Otherwise, the instrument could have reflected the adverse effects of tobacco, instead of the content presented in the video.

The sample for this study consisted of 3 focus groups, with 3-4 participants in each group, overall containing 11 participants for the overall sample. Moreover, each session lasted



about 45 minutes per group. These numbers made sure those who are less likely to respond in groups have an opportunity to be seen and therefore allow them to express their viewpoint (Morgan, 1993). Lastly, this study looked at a distribution of e-cigarette users and vapers and included those groups so that the focus groups had both vapers and e-cigarette users to allow for different perspectives about the act of cloud chasing. Of the three groups, two groups had one person who currently used e-cigarettes versus vaping.

Lastly, the participants looked for PSI instead of PSR within the video. The subjects did not need any prior experience with the micro-celebrity spokesperson before they viewed the advertisement. However, social and personal identities are essential to this video. The content relates to a vaping personal identity and the social identity of the community. People who were non-vapers were excluded entirely for the lack of identity (both social and personal).

Although the groups were smaller than commonly desired for focus groups, this dissertation argues that the research can make assumptions based on the responses for two reasons. First, there was still dialogue that occurred between respondents, as the participants referenced each other's discussion points frequently. Second, after the third focus group, our dialogue reached saturation, as responses became routine and comparative to the previous groups. Therefore, although the groups are small, and this study did not use them for certain assumptions based on the vaping community, they can start a discussion for future research.

### **Moderator**

Daft and Steers (1986) listed four types of moderating styles that would be effective for focus groups. For this study, the focus group included one moderator and demonstrated a participative leadership style within the discussion. With the participative leadership style, the moderator consulted with members about targets and asked about opinions and suggestions.

Moreover, the moderator allowed for participant decision-making and took group members' opinions into account. The participative leadership style of moderation was used to make sure that the views and dialogue were the most important thing evaluated, which is why this study did not use a directive leadership style of moderation. Giving the participants more reign to express their opinions about buying intentions based on the SSSW was essential for continuing the findings from the content analysis.

### **Interview Guide**

Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) stated that some questions per focus group are one of the fundamental parts of this research design. The moderator filling time while limiting attrition was important to the success of this study. Therefore, the primary researcher used eight to twelve questions for group discussion, with the possibility of asking questions based on the discussion by the participants. The interview guide was designed to facilitate group dialogue, rather than two-way communication between the moderator and participants (Krueger, 1998a)

The moderator ensured that members were directed back to the script during the dialogue if a topic starting changing directions. Therefore, the moderator took multiple steps to keep conversation fluid. For example, the moderator often created questions off the script that led participants back if they started discussing a concept off topic. The focus group started the session with preliminaries, which consisted of small talk to make members feel more comfortable. While some preliminaries were occurring, participants engaged in a brief questionnaire listed in Appendix 4. Next, the script referenced issue related questions based on the identity of being a vaper. Third, the script called for video from the content analysis (e.g. Fresh Skater Jay). Fourth, the script called for questions concerning participants' opinions of the video. Lastly, the script contained information for the session by debriefing the group, and to let

them know they could contact the researcher if they had any additional questions. The proposed sequence allowed responses to remain close to the research questions while keeping the subject fresh and fluid. Please see Appendix 3 for the following interview guide that acted as the design for the focus group.

## **Procedures**

### *Recruitment*

The researcher obtained IRB approval to allow recruitment of human participants in the vaping study. The primary researcher recruited participants by an introductory communication course listserv. The researcher contacted the director of the course, and the director put the announcement up on their class Blackboard page. The announcement listed the goal of the study; the methodology used, and requested that all participants must be a vaper or e-cigarette user. Also, the researcher indicated that a \$25 Amazon gift card would act as compensation in a lottery system for those who participated. Participants would also receive credit towards their research participation fulfillment required by their course.

Prospective participants then e-mailed the researcher indicating that they were interested in the study. The researcher sent an e-mail that told participants to be involved with the research; the person must sign a consent form. The consent form ensures their confidentiality and privacy by telling students that the primary researcher would record their names and opinions on a password protected computer. Moreover, the prospective participants' names would not be used, only their first initials for transcription purposes.

The prospective participants contacted the primary researcher through e-mail. Twenty-six students attending the university e-mailed the researcher expressing interest in the focus groups. Thirteen prospective participants responded at a rate of 50% to consent to partake in the

discussion. The other thirteen participants did not consent to participate, and two participants that consented did not show up to the physical location.

Lastly, the researcher would destroy all video recording and transcriptions once it was collected and analyzed. The primary researcher told participants that the focus group would involve their opinions on vaping and vaping tutorial videos. Also, they would be asked to watch a video with the vaping tricks, spokesperson, and advertisement to purchase a specific vaping brand. After watching the video, participants would be asked to answer a series of questions regarding the content of the video. Once the participant signed the consent form, the researcher and participant discussed available times to meet with the focus group. Once the 11 participants were gathered, the researcher set up three times in a local media building on campus that included video and audio recording.

### *Participants*

The members of the focus groups were primarily 18-19 years old, with the exception of one 31-year-old participant. Three focus groups were conducted with three participants in the first group, four participants in the second, and four participants in the third group. All participants were undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory communication course. Researchers also considered demographic information for the vapers. The vapers consisted of seven males and four females. Both genders were represented in each focus group. Also, nine members identified as Caucasian, one identified as African American, and one participant identified as Asian (Indian).

The selection of participants was based on the project interest through convenience sampling. Those included in the study were either vapers or e-cigarette users. Two groups had one e-cigarette user per group (2 in total) and the rest of the group members were vapers (9 in

total). The severity of vaping participation varied within group members. For example, Becky was a vaper and her husband was a semi-professional cloud chaser. Boxes of juices and wires were sent to their home on a regular basis. Other vapers were much less involved than vapers like Becky. Kimberly engaged in vaping on weekends and largely borrowed vaping MODs from her friends. Other participants were more active in vaping social media sites. For instance, Joshua and Darrell talked about the same vapers they enjoyed watching on Instagram, whereas other group members were oblivious to the names mentioned. The moderator ensured the vapers confidentiality; therefore Table 1 (below) uses fake names.

Table 1

*Interviewee Characteristics*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Vaper/E-cigarette User</i>
Kevin	M	18	Vaper
Erika	F	18	E-Cigarette
Chad	M	19	Vaper
Carrie	F	18	E-Cigarette
Eugene	M	18	Vaper
Kimberly	F	19	Vaper
Mark	M	18	Vaper
Becky	F	31	Vaper
Joshua	M	19	Vaper
Darrell	M	18	Vaper
Tim	M	18	Vaper

**Focus Group Design**

Due to the limited responses, the primary researcher assigned participants to the group based on their time availability. Once the researcher assembled the groups, they were sent an e-mail regarding meeting times at the on-campus location. The researcher made it clear that their participation is voluntary. The participants were informed that the focus groups should only take 45-60 minutes. Lastly, they were put into a drawing to win a \$25 Amazon gift card as well as

credit towards their research participation requirement for their introductory class. The group members agreed to a time presented by the moderator, and he also confirmed the time. The moderator prepared the room, organized the tables and seats, used a laptop to show the video, and prepared the camera for recording. The first group discussion lasted 46 minutes, the second group lasted for 53 minutes, and the third group lasted 49 minutes, totaling to 148 minutes overall (49 minutes on average).

Table 2

*Interview Characteristics*

	<i>Participants Total</i>	<i>Sex of Participants</i>	<i>Type of Participants</i>	<i>Average Age</i>	<i>Length of Time (Min)</i>
Group 1	3	2 Male, 1 Female	2 Vape, 1 E- Cigarette	18.33	46
Group 2	4	2 Male, 2 Female	3 Vape, 1 E- Cigarette	18.25	53
Group 3	4	3 Male, 1 Female	4 Vape, 0 E- Cigarette	21.5	49
Overall	11	7 Male, 4 Female	9 Vape, 2 E- Cigarettes	19.45	148

Previous research indicates that the setting of the room can help facilitate a more meaningful discussion (Dochterman & Stamp, 2010). The three focus groups for this study adhered to dialogue driven ideology of creating a diamond or “O” shape. The setup allowed members greater potential to communicate as a group, rather than a seeming one on one interview. The camera and computer were positioned over the shoulder of the moderator and beside the moderator respectively. The room was mostly soundproof, disabling outside distractions from the other students in the building.

Once in the local media building used for the focus group, participants were given a period to talk to one another and settle in. Most focus groups were quiet, but a few participants in one group knew each other before the discussion started. After initial pleasantries, participants

took a brief questionnaire concerning basic demographic questions and fundamental close-ended questions as illustrated in Appendix 4. The moderator engaged in some pleasantries to start and reinforced that he would record the focus groups for their audio and video only as an extension of the moderator's memory. The moderator began the session with a discussion starter and asked participants to introduce themselves, provide their name, and a brief description with their experience with vaping (Morgan, 1997)

The moderator then called the focus group together and proceeded through the instrument as close as possible. The only times the moderator moved away from the script was if there was a question of interest based on the discussion currently taking place. The moderator taped the conversation on video. However, he informed participants that he would not distribute their identities in the reporting of the data. The moderator used fake names, so the participants could not be identified.

During the focus group, moderators continued the use of the videos from the content analysis. The moderator used one of the videos from the profile playlist. The moderator used the YouTube channel: Vape Capitol as the example for those participating in the discussion <See Appendix 5>. The demonstration included showing the video, which consisted of the YouTuber: Fresh Skater Jay, the most popular video within the content analysis sample. The Fresh Skater Jay profile video featured all of the ritual view components of the SSSW and therefore made for an ideal exemplar to use for the focus group. Participants were encouraged to share their opinions about the video overall, and the elements concerning the segments of the SSSW. Once again, the concentration was for more focused discussion, which allowed for an additional perspective that the content analysis could not cover. The focus groups also made for interesting

dialogue, as group members interacted with each other concerning their opinions about vaping as a whole.

Once the moderator showed the video and covered the script, the moderator gave the group the opportunity to speak in person. After this opportunity, participants could e-mail the moderator with any additional questions they had regarding the study. The moderator also gave participants a form indicating that they did participate in the focus group and they would be awarded 10 points for the introductory communication course. Furthermore, the moderator told the participants that within a week of the final focus group, the winner of the gift card would receive an e-mail indicating they had won the lottery for the study. After the participants had left, the moderator turned off all recording, collected the memory card, and transferred the recordings of the focus group to a password-protected computer.

#### *Data Collection*

After each focus group, the moderator moved the data from the memory card to a password-protected computer where the moderator transcribed the data. The moderator transcribed the data onto a Microsoft Word document on the previously mentioned computer. The moderator copied the recordings verbatim, and speakers were identified only by their fake name. Sometimes observational notes were also needed in the transcripts for them to make sense. The moderator occasionally wrote down a few reactions during the video or discussion. Although this was rare, individual reactions during the video were noteworthy to the study.

The Moderator evaluated the data in three levels, which involved: (1) Raw Data, (2) Descriptive Statements, and (3) Interpretation (Krueger, 1998b). Raw data consists of reactions that were said by respondents. This information, categorized by themes in the topic, was used to determine consistency with the SSSW and purchasing intentions. Second, using the raw data,



descriptive statements summarized the respondents' comments and provided illustration using the raw data. The moderator made the judgment on which quotes to include acting as the representative for the descriptive statements. Lastly, interpretation built on the descriptive statements by providing meaning to the data rather than merely summarizing. The interpretation acted as the reasoning behind the descriptive statements.

After the transcription process had concluded, the moderator deleted respondents' information off the memory card and the video of the group. The transcription remained on the secure computer until the study reached completion. Afterward, the moderator destroyed transcription of the data.

### **Focus Groups – Results**

The present research study implemented the focus group into the dissertation not only for the sake of answering the research questions but helping build upon elements that the content analysis could not address. When creating the design for this dissertation, the notion of the content analysis proved to be a robust methodology for understanding which SSSW segments exist from an audience standpoint. Commenters often expressed how they felt about the subject material, and thus made the method so attractive. Unfortunately, a content analysis of YouTube comments leaves much to the imagination regarding understanding audience analysis with regards to vaping. Usernames within YouTube profiles did not offer demographic information that could help this line of research. Therefore, focus groups responses would allow for some additional understanding of members of the representative sample in the proposed population.

RQ1 asked: How are components related to the SSSW discussed in a vaping community? The discussion from the focus groups found some very similar patterns that existed within the content analysis. The sensory and social segments tended to be the primary purpose for why a

person would be attracted to vaping. Participants expressed some persuasive cues regarding the ego segment. However, much like the comments, they did not show the same levels as compared to the other two ritual view segments.

First and most prominent within the dialogue, the sensory segment was relatively similar compared the findings of the content analysis, but to a lesser extent. More specifically, the severity of comments during the focus group was not as prominent as was with the results of the content analysis. However, what comments lacked in amount, they made up for in being central to their arguments. When asked, "what do they think of when they think of vaping," every group first responded with "clouds." It was apparent that even before watching the video, people stated they associated vaping with tricks and clouds. For example, Carrie said: "Yeah I was kind of amazed, that some people can do crazy things, just like trick wise. And I was like, I want to learn how to do that." Another prominent example of the sensory segment was:

I had a vine account like they deleted that app but, they would have some dude smoking e-cigs or whatever or vaping and would do cool tricks, and I thought, "Oh that's really cool. How do they do that?" So that's kind of how, I just, watched it online, and it was on Vine. (Carrie)

After showing the video, the consensus was less on Fresh Skater Jay himself and more about his talent. Joshua expressed: "He's good at blowing O's" and "Some of the things he was doing, I thought that was pretty cool, but I just like the visual part." People enjoyed the texture of the rings blown (the rings represented the likeness of a circle instead of an oval), some rings blown, and the technique of the trick. More specifically, there was an aspirational appeal for participants in the groups. Members wanted to be as good as Fresh Skater Jay or other active vapers. For example, Eugene said: "Yeah, especially, I feel like the Vines kind of got me into it. It was just; I didn't know you could do that, I want to learn how to." Participants used Vine as a

way to appreciate the talent. Moreover, with the video, participants took note of the talent level and realized that there was practice involved, and how they wanted to do the same tricks.

Members brought up the social segment frequently, but with mixed valence regarding interactions with vaping celebrities and vaping groups in general. Participants talked about the vaper on screen and the social communities that they belonged to or did not belong. Per the results of the opening survey, most people were indifferent concerning the vaping social community. When given the previously mentioned brief questionnaire about being part of the vaping community, the participants responded neutrally ( $M = 4.64$ ). Following the questionnaire, when asked about digital communities, they were not active members or stated they just followed the micro-celebrities while engaging very little (regarding posting content). There were two instances where members specified they had reached out and contacted Fresh Skater Jay specifically. Most commenters did know of the social presence as most members mentioned that there was a digital community involvement. For example, Becky expressed, "I just think of community. It's like a common bond and people have fun doing it. I think of social media too, like a lot of vapers connect through social media."

While members of the community did not express active content posting in social media, they did, however, mention face-to-face interactions with their peers in how they got started. When asked how they began vaping, every member referred to the concept of their friends doing first. Darrell said: "Same, with what both of them said. My friends vaped and then, they like got me to try it. And I liked it. I thought it was fun. So I started doing it myself" and Carrie expressed "I was also always out with my friends, and they say Carrie you got to try that, and I was like 'Alright.' It was kind of a social thing I guess. I guess you could say I caved to the peer pressure." Social elements were the reason that individuals got started in the actual action of

vaping. Interestingly, the four females that participated in the study all expressed they got involved because of their male significant other. Becky stated: “Yeah, same thing, the significant other doing it and just wanting to participate in something that he enjoyed, and give it a try before judging” and Kimberly stated “I personally chose to start vaping because my boyfriend at the time did it, and it was just easier than like going out and buying a pack of cigarettes, and I felt a lot more healthier when I vaped.” The responses seemed to be thematic with the females in the group. Vaping was not the activity to define who they were specifically, but rather a fun activity to engage in with their significant other.

A social community aside, this research was also interested in the PSI with the micro-celebrity that the moderator presented to participants. Per the results of the focus group, the majority of the members felt little connection with the micro-celebrity Fresh Skater Jay. Although the majority of the participants admired how impressive his talents are, the discussion amongst group members made it almost feel like he was taking the hobby too seriously. As Chad stated:

See, I see, they’re kind of funny. I kind of like to laugh at them sometimes. Just because I’m like: “Wow.” Just because they put so much time into it and I’m like, “Oh God”... That’s actually what kind of made me stray away from it, to be honest.

The previous reaction seemed to be the consensus for most involved. Many thought that a subject like vaping was for fun, and not to be taken seriously. In other words, vaping is not to be considered a sport or to be used in competitions. To the participants, the subject of vaping is a recreational activity and only a small part of their lives.

There were some instances of expressing liking to Fresh Skater Jay, as many participants knew who he was before the video within the focus group. A few participants noted that they followed him on Snapchat and Instagram. Participants overall liked his material because he

seemed chill and relaxed, easily relatable and was just "a regular guy." The down-to-earth attitude was mentioned several times and appeared to be a reason why people liked watching him, specifically.

Moreover, the more severe demeanor or famous a celebrity had/was, the more turned off the participants were by the thought. Not only did participants enjoy niche micro-celebrities more than big names, but they also disliked major celebrities. As Joshua stated:

So, I don't really care if a big celebrity like Leonardo DiCaprio vaped. For vaping, I look for vape celebrities I guess you could call them. Like people who are famous because of vaping. Like Fresh Skater Jay, those are the ones I am looking for vaping, not like the random Hollywood guys.

Lastly, although members may have expressed they did not like Fresh Skater Jay specifically, they did like other vaping micro-celebrities. More specifically, participants expressed high praise concerning reviewers. The results of the opening survey found that members enjoyed vaping product reviews ( $M = 5$ ) as they use reviews it as a reference for purchasing vaping products ( $M = 5.27$ ). As Darrell stated:

To elaborate more on that I think it's just whoever is good at doing their stuff, you can be good at math, and I think some people can be good at doing reviews. Like, they know what the audience wants, and they're like loud and enthusiastic, and keep your attention. I think that's what makes a good reviewer.

The connection that people had with a particular niche based celebrity seem to have some weight for those involved. Participants subscribed to the person enjoyed his/her work and trusted his/her opinion on the subject matter of vaping.

The ego segment of the SSSW yielded responses much like the results of the content analysis. Specifically, the philosophy of the "I am Me" segment of the wheel was not represented nearly as high as the other segments within the ritual view. Statements paralleled to the social segment overshadowed the ego segment within the focus groups, much like the content analysis.

Being a vaper did not constitute high emotions or mentions amongst the group. For many participants, the opinions were almost rejected by the participants. Group members felt like the micro-celebrity was taking the activity too seriously, and identified too much as a vaper. Other people stated that vaping was only a small bit of their life, and people should consider the bigger picture when evaluating someone who participates in vaping:

But for me, it's just one small part of my life. It doesn't define who I am. But I enjoy it, and I don't let it limit me, it's not like a cop out for anything. I still motivated to do other stuff, I mean, I look at a vaper like another human being and a friend, and I don't judge them by that one activity that they do. You know what I mean? And that's one thing that's important, is don't just put a label on someone who vapes and think, "Oh, they're this, they're that" Get to know them first, just like anyone else. (Becky)

Only Darrell related to the person on screen by stating: "I'm actually in the middle between these two and him. I wouldn't go so far as to go to a competition but I do like practicing tricks and stuff, it's fun." The previous comment seemed to be the most in line with cloud chasing, but others admired how an activity like vaping could be a source of pride. Kimberly was not that enthralled by the clouds, but rather his engaging narrative:

I'd say like his back-story. You know, he's like an ex-smoker, and just go into it, and he like grew from that. He went to competitions, and now he's sponsored, and now he's popular with people in this community.

Members also commented how they respected the amount of practice it took to achieve the tricks seen on the video. While most group members saw the aspect of vaping competitively as a waste of time and identifying as a cloud chaser as trivial, there were responses of aspiration for how talented he was. Mark found his talent inspiring, and how if you did something that well, you should be encouraged and praised for the amount of work put in:

Relating it to my life, like I only vape on weekends, so I obviously don't get a lot of practice. And now he said he does it every day, all day. And it took him four weeks, just to master the ring. So that's dedication and commitment.

Lastly with ego, vaping was the “sport” of the layperson. Anyone could participate and with the practice, and anyone could do what he did. The layperson mentality sparked some identity among group members; even to the point of mentioning that vaping had less to do with genetics and more to work.

Because, you look up to LeBron James, but he's 6'7, " and he's really good, and like, you can't do that, I'm not that tall. I can't dunk, I can't play basketball, I could do this. Just sit down and start vaping (Darrell).

The participants only seemed to identify with the people onscreen mildly, and instead related more to reviewers or people who engage in the activity for fun. Although they still state they enjoy the spectacle of impressive vape tricks.

RQ2 asks: How does each segment of the SSSW relate to purchasing intentions regarding vaping? Concerning the ritual side of the wheel, the sensory category still was the main reason why people vaped. As aforementioned, participants found it hard to identify as an individual and as a community with those shown on screen. Many felt like it was too extreme for their liking, and they saw the community as something not to take seriously. Therefore the social and ego segments seemed secondary. Sensory appeals were mentioned within focus group responses, although not mentioned as much as the content analysis did seem to appear consistently throughout the groups. Most participants said how alluring the clouds were; even connecting to why that would be the strongest predictor of why a person might inquire about purchasing a product. Participants talked about how sensory elements may intrigue them to look into buying vaping MODS, juices, or builds, but it would not sway them completely. Kevin stated:

So definitely through visualization, you might say that “Hey I could buy the product” but when you do much more deeper research into it, and then you say that I don't know how to use this one, so I am not going to buy it.

Other comments paralleled this sentiment that they would be intrigued by the products displayed on the screen linked to the talent of the vaper. However, much like the content analysis, it would only raise inquiry instead of wanting or intention to buy. Members expressed that they would do research based on that information. The idea of researching further also paralleled the results of the content analysis as most commenters expressed inquiry about the product, rather than wanting to go out and purchasing it.

The social segment also had some specific comments linked to purchasing intentions. The micro-celebrity appeared to raise interest in potentially buying particular vape MODS. While the PSS that existed with Fresh Skater Jay was different from participant to participant, several members expressed liking to YouTubers that review products. Participants enjoyed other content producers and brought the indication that participants had PSS with people who participate in vaping YouTube videos. However, they might not enjoy Fresh Skater Jay. The content analysis paralleled this sentiment as Fresh Skater Jay received more parasocial dissatisfaction (PSDS) than any other YouTuber in the sample.

Perhaps the most interesting finding in the social segment related to purchasing intentions concerned the vape shop itself. Vaping shops have a very inviting and accepting atmosphere. The store allowed patrons to try different juices, perform clouds in a shop, and to provide support to those who engage in the activity. Josh talked about the atmosphere: "Yeah, like every shop you go into, you can see they all have couches and a lounge area. A lot of vapers there are like, chill, and talk to people, so that's a big thing about community." Tim followed the previous response: "It's like a bar for when you're 18." The other members agreed nonverbally (head nod) with the notion of the 18-year-old bar. Although this community has the bonus of having an online



community, it seems, much like cigarettes, a face-to-face atmosphere is paramount to the success of the vaping business.

Although the ego segment was brought up within the focus groups, no participant indicated it was a reason for purchasing the product. Vaper was more of a byproduct of the activity, because people engage in the activity to be with their friends. Performing tricks, blowing clouds, sharing flavors, and visiting vape shops were ways to meet individuals who were "cool" or "chill." The social segment overshadowing the ego segment also paralleled the content analysis results, as commenters rarely related the ego segment to purchasing intentions. Other segments within the content analysis eclipsed ego, which was the case in the focus group as well.

For purchasing intentions as a whole, the rational side was probably the most prominent throughout all the groups. No participant mentioned that the ritual segments would be enough to influence them to purchase a MOD, a build, or juices. However, research and reviews that followed in their Internet searches would be the main reason people would buy. The ritual side seemed to be the beginning motive for sparking curiosity. However, rational remarks in reviews would be the ultimate reason for purchasing intentions. As Mark stated:

Well like I've previously stated, I've never purchased one, but it makes me want to, and go research to see what he's talking about. Because I never heard of that, like the hotwires he mentioned, so it kind of makes me want to leave and like go research that on my computer and see what he's talking about, and look at the difference of the wires or whatever.

The participants seemed to be highly media literate as their purchasing intentions for any product would follow the same processes, vaping was not an exception.

## **Focus Groups – Discussion**

RQ1 asked: How are components related to the SSSW discussed in a vaping community? With some small differences, many of the results found in the content analysis were very consistent with the results found in the focus groups. However, the discussion of the focus group covers some of the elements that the content analysis section did not discuss.

The social segment was expressed similarly to the content analysis when it came to the interaction with the micro-celebrity. PSI satisfaction amongst focus group members was mostly in line with the commenters' opinions of the micro-celebrity. The severity of identifying as a vaper seemed to play a role in the perceptions they had for the subject in the video. Group one appeared to be on the decline regarding the recreational activity saw the video as "taking it too seriously," "a waste of time," and advocating harmlessness with vaping. To the group, the activity was meant to be "just for fun" and that no positive outcomes could come from the video. Groups two and three seemed to identify more firmly and thus saw the celebrity as down to earth, and he was very approachable. One focus group member from group three also mentioned that he would not be "earning a doctorate anytime soon," but he seemed to be the contact for someone interested in the activity. Other group members in-group three expressed several variations of the comment.

Moreover, members in the second and third group were curious about the Vape Capitol channel. The participants wanted to see more trick videos within the duration of the group session. The participants seemed curious about some of the products. The third group, were already familiar with the content on that channel, so their interaction with the micro-celebrity was overtly expressed as "indifferent." Although the focus group had similar interactions compared to the content analysis, the majority of vapers within the focus groups expressed either

mildly positive or mildly negative comments. Because the focus groups were face-to-face, participants might not feel comfortable engaging in the same hyper-negativity that existed in the comments. Hyper-negativity might be more present because of anonymity within the comments, versus a more subdued indifference or dislike towards the celebrity when talked about face-to-face (Walther, et al., 2010). Reactions reflected that PSS or PSDS did not exist nearly as much in the focus group compared to the content analysis.

Perhaps the most glaring difference between the content analysis and the focus group was the idea of social communities within the social identity of a vaper. Most participants did not identify as a vaper specifically, but they did mention that it was a great recreational activity while hanging out with friends. As previously indicated in the results, participants only started vaping because their friends were already doing it, which is consistent with research about smoking (De Vries, et al., 1995). Another interesting finding of the social community was the exclusivity that vaping provided with their friends. A common theme amongst those in the focus groups was "You can vape with your friends anywhere." For example, groups two and three referenced places like school bathrooms, their car, their room, or the local vape shop. The use of specific private areas was a very interesting implication, as every location mentioned in the focus group was a private area for a vaper. People who participated were in a small circle of like-minded individuals and aimed to block out dissenters, which seemed to include parents.

Reactions from group three also revealed that people found the vape shops to be comparable to a bar for adolescents. Again, the locations for community conveyed that the notion of vaping was less about the actual activity, and more enjoying the company of other younger people. Lastly, all groups felt like vaping was for anyone and everyone. Therefore, it might be a more plausible hangout for them versus a basketball court or a skate park. Since

several participants claimed that a person did not have to be exceptional at vaping to be part of the in-group, the activity might be preferable to some people versus a location to hang out based on a skill set such as playing basketball or skateboarding.

Per additional content analysis observations and focus group themes, audience recognition needs to be established specifically within the vaping community. Therefore, lumping cigarettes and vaping together did not allow interested parties to reach a connection with those that vape. According to the Millennials represented in this study, cigarettes were for an older generation. Millennials, on the other hand, were more associated with vaping. The activity of vaping is seen as a fun activity that can occur anywhere and around their friends both face to face and through computer-mediated communication. The focus group members found their persuasive social cues with their personal friends primarily. The members still used the trick videos as a bonding mechanism with their friends. However, they would engage in the activity recreationally, and would not take the competition element seriously.

With regards to the sensory segment, focus group participants yielded almost the same results as the content analysis. Focus group one indicated that the way they started regularly participating in vaping was through trick videos. Several participants in group one even went so far as to suggest that the visual elements were still visually impressive and alluring even after their negative views towards the subject. Members of group two were excited to see more as they all wanted to try the tricks seen in the video after the session had concluded. The visual elements were unanimously the strongest indicator of persuasive cues within the ritual view and were the main reason why participants were interested. Moreover, although some participants expressed non-nicotine alternatives with vaping, and one person appeared to align with flavor chasing as well as cloud chasing, all participants indicated that the flavors were not uniquely the selling

point. It was either the nicotine in a healthier package or the trick videos that sold them on the continuation of the activity. Flavor chasing might not have been represented in the focus groups because the video that was being shown concerned cloud chasing specifically. However, when one group member mentioned specific flavors as part of the discussion, the variety seemed to spark some interest with other participants. Future research might want to look at flavor-chasing videos for additional perspectives.

Another focus group result that was similar to responses in the content analysis was ego seemed to exist in a small amount, but other segments often overshadowed it. The ego segment within the focus group dealt with the theme of health identifiers. Every focus group conducted referenced the prospect of health with regards to vaping. Similarities between a few members of the panel ended somewhat because members referenced they were on the decline from smoking and vaping because of health. Group one referenced that while vaping might be slightly healthier than cigarettes, it is still an unhealthy habit. Conversely, the majority of groups two and three expressed approval towards the health benefits of vaping. Participants stated that there were no health concerns with vaping and health was one of the reasons why they switched to the activity and identified as a vaper instead of a smoker. Health may indicate a rational approach from the SSSW, but most responses that declared the difference between vaping and smoking. Participants of groups two and three had declaration of identity and the awareness that they were living a healthier lifestyle than cigarette users.

RQ2 asks: How does each segment of the SSSW relate to purchasing intentions regarding vaping? Although the responses mirrored the content analysis almost identically, the major difference is that the participants talked about how each segment related purchasing in sequence. The content analysis could only determine which segments related to buying intentions, but the

focus group responses demonstrated the same intentions, and in what order participants used the segments.

The first segment linked with purchasing intentions in the sequence is the social segment. Participants in the focus group stated that the primary reason they started vaping is that their friends were vaping. Most individuals conveyed that a friend had either a vaping pen or a MOD and allowed them to use the vaping mechanism. Interestingly, the participants unanimously declared that there was no pressure in the decision-making process. If the participant did not want to engage in vaping, the friend did not press further in persuasive appeals. However, participants did take their friends' suggestion and tried it for the first time. Participants in all three groups also mentioned that in middle school or high school they would see a plethora of people in school bathrooms vaping and thus wanted to try it. However, it was also well established that the initial purchase of a vaping MOD is expensive, so some participants either continue using their friend's MODS or bought cheap vaping pens that they "could find in gas stations." Since the purchase of a MOD is, on average, \$100-\$150, those in the focus group saw that as a significant expenditure and could not base their decision exclusively on social pressures. However, much like the results of the content analysis, what did occur was they became more involved and inquired more about the topic.

The social segment also pertained to online social communities. One member expressed that although his friends were the reason he got started in vaping, before he purchased his MOD he went online to look at micro-celebrities on Vine and YouTube. Thus, the focus group member made a connection with the micro-celebrity presented on screen. Participants claimed they were unlikely to post their material, but they were more than inclined to follow celebrities who vaped.

Viewing the celebrities also created an opportunity for PSR as they sought out multiple interactions with particular micro-celebrities.

The results of the content analysis and the focus groups seem to parallel most while watching the micro-celebrities' videos. The responses conveyed that friends sparked the idea for vaping inquiry, but the sensory segment is what started the idea to engage in the activity routinely. The first thing participants thought of when they heard the term vaping was "clouds" and that vaping videos were the reason people became more engaged to participate in the activity. For example, one participant stated that he and his friends would have mini competitions with one another. He and his friends would attempt to see who could blow the biggest cloud or make the most aesthetically pleasing ring. The tricks were one of the strongest points of interest as it made the participants want to engage in the activity more. Moreover, once they realized that their tricks did not achieve the same quality as the skills in the video, they started looking at different outlets in which the micro-celebrity existed. For example, a participant stated that he began watching the micro-celebrity on Vine, researched him, and then followed some material on YouTube. From there, the participants decided to purchase the product, and since the initial purchase of a vaping build was not cheap, they needed to do research on the product.

Groups two and three reflected the rational and ego segment were influential in the purchase of a vape MOD. Taylor (1999) alludes to decision making within the rational segment as very thought provoking at carefully selecting a product viewers see as relevant to the consumer. Participants indicated this purchase to be important because the amount of money it costs. Most participants were insistent on making sure they bought a high-quality product. Therefore, friends were the sparks to gain interest in the topic and visuals were the spark for

participants to inquire specifically about the product. Rational decision-making was then the main predictor for actual purchasing intentions. According to the responses, the decision-making process occurred in two different fashions. First, participants used collective reviews online. Retrospectively, participants recalled that any actual purchasing behavior came after they visited a website with multiple reviews. The other method of procurement decision-making was through online video reviews. The reviews could also be argued as a link to the social segment because participants would seek out a micro-celebrity talking about the specific product. However, the major difference between the social segment and the rational segment in this particular example is that (1) participants were looking for the product they were researching and not the YouTuber. Second, they followed the argument specific to their research, instead of following the celebrity each time they posted online. Participants seemed to take the strategy of an emergent public where they became invested in vaping, but only when it was specific to them (Keith, 2012). However, some participants did indicate that they still follow the micro-celebrity online and watch their videos frequently because they enjoyed how he/she conveyed his/her message.

Interestingly, all the persuasive segments found were in line with the results of the content analysis. The findings seem to support specific segments when it comes to predicting persuasion within advertising. However, what this combined research also suggests is that the ritual segments have some validity for predictive persuasive power as well. Because of the multiple segments that appear to exist, the next section of discussion addresses potential audience explorations found in the focus groups. Future research can help continue the discussion with these categories.



## **Audience Explorations**

As mentioned at the beginning of the focus group section, the remainder of the focus group discussion explored the characteristics of a potential vaping audience. However, as stated in the methodology, the categories listed are merely a result of some of the comments that reached saturation within the discussion. Additional responses might reveal other categories not represented in the subsequent sections. The groups presented are the beginning of an argument concerning specific vaping audience types. The current study is exploratory; therefore, future research is welcome to help researchers and professionals understand vaping audiences and communities more in depth.

Since the content analysis could not achieve this through the vague structure of audience, the focus group acted as a method of specifying the categories found with the focus groups conducted. Also, the participant responses also link multiple SSSW segments with proposed audiences. Through the trends of comments, the following six segments were coded and processed to help advertisers and researchers alike understand some interesting findings from those who engage in the activity of vaping.

With regards to the SSSW, Taylor (1999) stated that the six segments do not necessarily have to contain one segment per strategy, which the focus groups emphasize in the subsequent section. The following results consisted of two overarching themes: social gifts and behavioral risks. Sections within these themes will include: the group represented within those themes, a quote on behalf of the persons, a categorization of the audience, the segments that relate with the descriptions, and literature to support the multiple segments represented.

## **Social Gifts**

"Social gifts" is a term coined by Driver (1991) that involved ritualistic consumer behavior. Social gifts are rituals in society, and they act as rewards for being a part of a group. Groups implement these ritual behaviors frequently, but advertisers use them as well. For example, Treise, Wolburg, and Otnes (1999) explained the social gifts related to drinking rituals. Although risk does not have to be involved, the risk-related behavior could often form in tight-knit communities. Driver (1991) argues that these gifts (1) provide order in our society, (2) they allow for the experience of community, and (3) they provide a chance for the individual to be transformed in some significant way.

The participants in the focus groups talked more about social ideas concerning their experiences vaping, rather than talking about the subject of the video. Social gifts is used to describe how participants within the focus groups felt about the subject of vaping and how they interacted socially with other friends who vaped. The ensuing responses yielded three categories that relate to social gifts <See Table 3>. First, participants in the focus groups identified as recreational vapers, which vaped for the fun of the activity, instead of the serious competitiveness as the videos in the sample demonstrate. Second, participants within the focus groups identified as peer-pressured personas, which consisted of those who were influenced by their friends to engage in the recreational activity. Third, participants within the focus groups identified as vape reviewers, which primarily concerns the rational segment. However, the social segment is also present because of the validity multiple reviews provide on a website. The subsequent sections provide further elaboration, and a theoretical framework to support the segments found in the responses.

Table 3

*Social Gifts Segment of Vaping Audience Category*

	Proposed Vaping Audience Category	Theory Association	SSSW Present
	Recreational Vapers	Theory of Planned Behavior, Ritual Behavior	Social, Sensory, Routine
Social Gifts	Peer Pressure Personas	Social Influence, Looking Glass Self	Social, Ego
	Vape Reviewers	Product Reviews	Rational, Social
		Elaboration Likelihood Model,	

*Recreational Vaper*

“People just do it, and both of them said it, just because it’s fun, and tricks are fun.”

(Erika)

Participants referenced that they vaped, blew clouds, and performed tricks mainly because it was fun. Most members referenced, at least when it came to vaping, that it was a hobby. Extreme messages both for and against vaping were largely ignored and scoffed at because of how serious the vapers on screen were. Vaping is an activity for any person that wants to participate, but not engage with the same level of severity as the professional vaper.

More specifically, the label of a recreational vaper is rooted in recreation and leisure studies. The field of recreation focuses on social behavior and how people engage in a particular activity through the explanation for, "why does a person do something for fun?" Leisure is a fascinating topic, but there are very few theories that are unique to recreation specifically (Henderson, Presely, & Bialeschki, 2004). However, one model that tends to stand out is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) within this field (Ajzen & Driver, 1992; Hrubes, Ajzen, & Dangle, 2001). The category utilized within our focus groups named recreational vapers has

concerns similar to those who intend on engaging in behavior. Normative components link with the social issues those individuals have with participating in an activity for fun. The sensory segment is also present as they are a primary influence on positive/negative attitudes about the subject of vaping. Lastly, a few comments mention routine as a justification for not taking the activity too seriously, which links with perceived behavioral control. Recreational vapers are just one instance that the persuasive cues from SSSW are quite complex.

The combination of social, sensory, and routine segments can also parallel with ritualistic consumer behavior literature. Rook (1985) described consumer habits as episodic and repeated over time. The activities are often scripted and acted out with formality, seriousness, and intensity. Rook also categorizes ritual behavior into four separate categories: (1) ritual artifacts, (2) a ritual script, (3) ritual performance roles, and (4) a ritual audience. Ritual artifacts are considered sacred objects during ceremonies. Ritual scripts identify those artifacts, establish rules, designate proper personnel to use them, and describe them precisely. Ritual performance roles carefully state what group members expect when performing the script. A ritual audience is an audience that observes the performance. The act of cloud chasing serves as the script of the performance for like-minded vaping audience members. Rituals belong with recreational vaping because they exist primarily in the performance roles of the activity. For the participants, the established rules is that vaping is supposed to be done for fun, and not as a serious endeavor. Moreover, a performance is supposed to take place, but not for competitions like the video suggests. The lack of severity within the performance might be why the participants seemed more engaged with a more relaxed and chill celebrity, rather than someone who vapes professionally. The micro-celebrity violates the script and performance roles. Therefore, the ability to relate is essential to the success of the ritual.

### *Peer Pressure Personas*

“It was kind of a social thing I guess. I guess you could say I caved to the peer pressure.”  
(Carrie)

The participants represented in the sample did not appear to be innovators, but rather individuals that would fall in the early or late majority on a diffusion of innovation slope (Rogers, 2003). Whether it was a significant other or just a group of friends, members of the focus groups seemed to be influenced less by the people in videos, and more by their friends. Perhaps even more interesting is that participants were already friends before they engaged in the activity. The proposal of this audience category would be that vapers develop trust with people, rather than the activity itself before they get involved.

Peer pressured personas would be primarily influenced courtesy of the social segment through social influence. Berkman (2000) categorized social influence as the effect that others have on individual and group attitudes. Simons-Morton and Farhat (2010) argued there were three main reasons for social influences. First, social context determines the opportunity for interaction through a social network. Second, social networks are a map of all these relevant ties between individuals and groups (Valente, Gallaher, & Mouttapa, 2004). Third, group membership is a socializing experience that allows for others to change the perceptions that are consistent with the group. Information provided in the introduction supports this notion, as does the responses from the focus groups. Groups referenced areas consistent with all three categories that have a relationship with social influence. There were opportunities to vape as Joshua stated: "everyone vaped in middle school and high school bathrooms." From there, they established networks, as these were the friends the participants associate. Last, the group of participants had the opportunity to change attitudes as a social entryway into the group. Members of the focus group did not convey any indication of coercion or manipulation to get them to vape. Instead, it

seemed that the participants' were influenced by their perception of what their friends were doing, which introduces the ego segment of the peer pressure persona.

The social segment of the SSSW is present within peer pressure through the complex balance between an individual's personal identity versus the perception of the way others see them. Most of the people in the focus groups did not necessarily identify themselves as "vapers," but rather vaping was just something they did. However, all members expressed they gave into some level of peer pressure. Although their peers did not seem to pressure them actively, it was the perception of pressure that existed intrapersonally. Vapers might exhibit a sort of looking-glass self (Cooley, 1902), which is a social and ego related theory that explains how a person perceives their peer's attitudes towards his/herself. The participants might think that while their friends are not overtly judging them, they ultimately feel less attached to said person unless they engage in the activity. Participants did not convey pressure, but they did declare they engaged in the behavior anyway. The lack of pressure might mean it was only their perception of demand, and thus a switch in behavior. The Peer Pressure Persona is strongly related to their ego, but it is their perception of social norms that helps with the persuasion process.

#### *Vape Reviewers*

Well, I'm like the same, I am very curious, so me personally I would not just go ahead and buy it quickly. I would do a lot of research on it, but I think that a lot of people would because they, as he was saying, they see him doing it, this guy, and they would just say "Oh, he could do it, he's cool, if I have that product I can do it too." (Kevin)

The previous section indicated within focus groups, rational segments were often utilized, as every user within the groups mentioned that they look through reviews before they purchase anything. The videos were mostly useful in creating interest, but without reviews, the purchasing intentions of a product are relatively meaningless. Participants also indicated that there is so much jargon associated with vaping, that viewers have to look up additional sources just to be

able to understand what they are watching. For the participants represented, they made sure to do their homework before purchasing anything for themselves. The revelations that existed fueled the next potential group, as some participants felt stronger about purchasing when they had a good reason to do so, and social support backing their choice.

Rational and social segments are represented well in the audience category of vape reviewers, as product review literature hint at these two segments. Product reviews are user generated responses and ratings that retailers published on the website (Lackermair, Kailer, & Kanmaz, 2013). Ratings and word-of-mouth (WOM) are then aggregated to feedback profiles and posted. Asynchronous communication exists due to the bi-directional communication models (O'Reilly, 2005). Therefore, there is an element of trust of the first-hand experiences with the product, the reliability of the source communicating the rating, and some comments that confirm or deny specific reviews. User reviews are very important in decision-making processes for the customer (Lackermair, Kailer, & Kanmaz, 2013). Their study found that the evaluation was often of the stars associated with the rating of the product, which refuted an early study by Pan and Zhang (2011). The Pan and Zhang study stated it was the reviews that were the most helpful to the consumer going through the product. The case of the participants in the focus group provided examples of both. Group members expressed the importance of reviews and the ratings and commentary provided with the product. Product reviews were very important to the group members, as the vaping MOD was considered very expensive. Therefore, participants relied on this credible information to make their purchasing decision.

Perhaps more importantly than the idea of the review itself is the cognitive process necessary to arrive at purchasing the product. Expanding from the results of the content analysis, the participants raised inquiry about vaping MODs, juices, and other accessories, but did not

overtly talk about purchasing intentions. The participants stated the social element is important to vaping, and the actual rational reviews are what lead to the purchasing behavior. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) often associates with the cognition needed to influence by any given persuasive attempt (Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981). The two principal components from the ELM are there are two routes of processing information: (1) a central route and (2) a peripheral route. The central route associates with evaluating arguments critically. Taylor (1999) argued that the central route is relatable to the rational segment of the SSSW. The peripheral route, on the other hand, looks at less significant persuasive cues like perceived expertise or attraction. For this study, participants indicated they would process the reviews centrally, but there are also indications that the social segment exists as well. Participants may enjoy a positive review, but it is only because of the social substance of multiple reviews that creates validity for those who research the product.

### **Behavioral Risks**

Although social gifts are highly important frames within the discourse of the focus groups, there are also elements of rational assessment of the potential dangers of nicotine usage. The perceived risk varied from group to group regarding vaping versus other traditional forms of nicotine. Group members engaged in social and rational appeals when it came to associating their recreation as risky, but healthy. Therefore, behavioral risks are a section that need separate evaluation.

Wolburg (2001) defined behavioral risks in a plethora of different ways (Wolburg, 2001). For this research, the Health Belief Model (HBM) has merit in describing the risk-related assessment associated with the focus groups. First, the arguments in the HBM asserted that individuals would take action to avoid or control ill-health conditions if four conditions are met



(Rosenstock, 1991). First, they must believe the condition to have serious consequences or risks. Second, they must regard themselves as susceptible to these conditions. Third, they must believe that a course of action would be beneficial in reducing threats. Fourth, they must believe that the anticipated rewards or benefits outweigh the perceived barriers for the course of action (Becker, 1974).

For most of the focus group participants, they saw the action of vaping to be risky and rebellious, but they also justified it in three ways. First, they criticized those vapers who took the activity way too seriously, even though they still engaged in the activity itself. Second, participants found danger and pride in vaping but did not want to rebel so much that they hurt their health. Lastly, their course of action of justifying any potential hazards is to disassociate themselves with traditional nicotine users (e.g. smoking cigarettes). All three of these audience segments are evaluated separately under the risk behavior category.

Table 4

*Behavioral Risks Segment of Vaping Audience Category*

	Proposed Vaping Audience Category	Theory Association	SSSW Present
	Closet Vapers	Stigmatized Activities	Social, Ego, Rational
Behavioral Risks	Health Concerned Rebels	High/Low Sensation Seeking, Cognitive Dissonance	Rational, Social
	Not Your Father's Nicotine User	Social Identity Theory, Personal Identity	Social, Ego, Rational

### *Closet Users*

“But, I don’t know, like watching those videos, and how much people really cared about it ... and I was like, this is just kind of stupid.” (Chad)

Perhaps one of the most interesting findings represented among the focus groups were how easily people who identified as vapers poked fun at other vapers. There was an active desire and liking to blow clouds and rings, but there were participants that would ridicule and snicker while watching the performance by Fresh Skater Jay. Participants bragged about their clouds, and/or held mini competitions, but were easily able to laugh at other people who do it. There was a persona of "being preppy" or "douche" as the participants stated, and those strong stigmas latched on to their identity where they were almost ashamed of it but also enjoyed vaping nonetheless.

Social Stigma is a common occurrence in people's daily lives, as others have discontent or disapproval with an individual or a group on social grounds (Goffman, 1963). Goffman argues that there are three forms of social stigma (1) external deformations (e.g. scars, obesity, leprosy), (2) deviations in personal traits (e.g. alcoholism, drug addiction, nicotine use), and (3) tribal stigmas (e.g. ethnic groups, nationalities). Moreover, Falk (2001) stated that these stigmas are based on two categories, existential and achieved stigma. Existential stigmas are those behaviors and conditions that the stigmatized has very little/no control of their actions. Conversely, people earn achieved stigma because of the conduct attributed to attaining the stigma. People outside of the community stigmatize vapers because of their deviations in personal traits and their achieved stigma. More specifically, the participants were aware of these stigmas, and while they do not seem to be afraid to admit they are vapers to their groups, as they do not like performing their activity in public. The participants were well aware of what they looked like to other non-vapers

and still made fun of the activity as they saw it when the video. The participants seemed to have a parallel societal experience, where they were part of the group, but not at the same time.

Closet users responses mirror some traits similar to those of the peer pressure personas, which means the primary SSSW segment involved are ego and social segment. However, Closet Users tend to engage in the behavior of disassociating some of their identity with the activity rationally, while simultaneously poking fun of the very same behavior in which they engage. Participants are well aware that the vaping group is stigmatized (Goffman, 1963), which may cause vapers to still engage in the behavior, but desire to make fun of it too. Participants may know what the stigma is with the social group, but they avoid being labeled as one would lead to a false-positive statement that they might not enjoy (Brookey, 2000). However, what is unique is that the focus groups tend to engage in the same mockery while downplaying their role in the activity.

Participants in the focus group might just grasp onto social cues to the point of wanting to please everyone by not getting too attached to one particular identity.

#### *Health Concerned Rebels*

Personally for me, if I never vaped and I said this like earlier like before I even started I thought it was like "douchey." My dad calls them "douche flutes" for lack of a better word. Like, it's a trend, like cool, but now I don't want to do it. I went down the wrong path, but vaping really was not what I was expecting (Carrie)

The participants in the focus groups were extremely health conscious. Tobacco and cigarette users were discussed as gross and unappealing, but they seemed to be intrigued by the sensation-seeking one would have for a cigarette. Within the focus groups, the consensus was that vapers want to be rebellious, but not so rebellious that they risk their health. For example, even before the discussion, the opening survey found an average ( $M = 6.18$ ) of those who felt vaping was healthier than cigarettes, and more enjoyable ( $M = 6.55$ ) than the tobacco counterpart.

Health Concerned Rebels also engage in rational and social appeals through the means of sensation seeking. The responses recorded indicated that both HSS and LSS were present in the conversations. High sensation seeking was present because participants mentioned that they wanted to be rebellious, and engage in an activity that was edgy or rejected by mainstream standards (Zuckerman, 1979; 1994). However, the group also had implications of low sensation seeking because they wanted to engage in something risky, as long as it did not danger their health. Participants found the activity of vaping to be marginally healthier than other activities (such as tobacco or harder drugs). Vaping becomes even more appealing because it is an activity that might be criticized by parents, but it was their perception that it was misunderstood. Even though participants in the first group stated that there were zero health benefits to vaping, the other groups justified vaping as marginally healthy. One health-related discussion was that vaping makes their throat feel better during a cold.

Justifying risky behavior as being "not as bad" will most likely leads to some mental disagreements within the participants' mind. Cognitive dissonance might also be associated with the rational segment within the Health Concerned Rebels audience category. Cognitive dissonance exists when a person holds two or more contradictory beliefs when performing an action. (Festinger, 1957). Within the subject of cognitive dissonance, there are four popular paradigms that people utilize to justify their actions: belief disconfirmation, induced compliance, free choice, and effort justification. Belief disconfirmation occurs when a contradiction of previous beliefs occurs, and the subject refuses to believe the contradiction (Festinger, Riecken, & Schachter, 1956). Induced compliance refers to the dissonance a person feels when others tell them something will be interesting, and yet they experience the exact opposite feeling (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). Free choice occurs most commonly in post purchasing decisions, when

people are unsure of the product purchased because the competing product they did not purchase might be better (Brehm, 1956). Last, effort justification occurs when people engage in dull, mundane, or even unpleasant tasks because they will be worth their efforts, in the end (Lee & Schwartz, 2010). Participants most likely experience belief disconfirmation as their parents state how unhealthy or ridiculous vaping is to them. Therefore, vapers refuse to believe the contradiction introduced by authority figures. Moreover, they surround themselves with like-minded dissenters to further rebel. Socializing with like-minded rebels might also be the reason they seek sanctuary in the over 18 bars.

*Not your Father's Nicotine User*

...And it was not at all what I expected because vaping I categorized with cigarettes, and to me, honestly they're completely different. Like they shouldn't even be used in the same sentence, so once I was in the group, things were different. When I think of cigarette smokers I think it's disgusting and nasty, and just people who are not taking care of themselves, and vaping it's all these preppy people, who are trying to look cooler? I don't know. It's just totally different, and I was kind of mad at myself for putting them together (Kimberly)

Lastly, vapers did not like being associated with cigarettes. Although health was a concern and differentiation between the two activities, vapers found other differences. One, they felt like cigarettes were for their parents, and vaping was more a Millennial hobby. Second, participants felt like they were part of a social media community, and were able to use websites like Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, and Vine to communicate with their peers. Third, the participants were upset that lawmakers lumped cigarettes with vaping. To them, vaping is considered healthier, more supportive, and less harmful than smoking. Therefore participants thought the law should not lump the two together. Lastly, vaping could be done wherever, and whenever. Smoking has location limitations, and due to the increased social considerations of the group, they liked that they could vape in most places as they so choose.

The proposed audience segment seems similar to the Health Concerned Rebels because the Rebels often justified health claims because their health concerns were not as present when compared to traditional tobacco. However, participants offered social, ego, and rational arguments mirroring SIT to justify how the two activities were different. Social Identity Theory (SIT) suggests that individuals strive for a positive identity and make social comparisons with other group members (McKinley, Mastro, & Warber, 2014). First, the participants had trouble labeling themselves as vapers as opposed to someone who identifies being a smoker. Second, participants actively labeled themselves as Millennials versus older generations who smoke. The older generations were marked by the participants as smokers and did not understand vaping. Lastly, participants were active in state laws regarding vaping. They assessed the rational arguments provided by lawmakers who were categorizing smoking and vaping together. Joint laws were considered unjustified by those who vaped, stating that the two activities were entirely different from each other.

Beyer and Hannah (2002) questioned self and why people change or fail to change as they enter new situations. Personal Identity (PI) refers to the identity associated with one's sense of self; whereas social identity is related to the groups that the person belongs to (White, Argo, & Sengupta, 2012). They define self and identity by three separate terms, which discuss what considerations are present when a person starts to take an interest in a group. (1) Self-conceptualization is "the mental representations of the self that people carry with them from one situation to another" (p. 637). A person's attitudes, values, and beliefs can all be utilized to determine self. (2) Also, it is important to understand that individuals always come with different skill sets, backgrounds, and areas of expertise; therefore more than one conceptualization is present. The balance of skills between members makes the process through an identity that much

more complicated, as some people might enter a group with differing expectations for how members should identify the group. (3) Lastly, personal identity refers to the "encompassing idiosyncratic characteristics (e.g., bodily attributes, abilities, psychological traits, interests)" (p. 638). Although some PI was present, it was only a by-product of being in a social group. The PI that exists with participants consisted of the distinctive characteristics. Participants did not feel that vaping defined them and did not carry any representation, but rather identified with interests, abilities, and traits. The talent in the video was respected, and in some cases aspirational, but participants still sneered at the micro-celebrity. However, participants found some identity in the ideology that the tricks and clouds were attainable and that vaping was for everyone. Participants felt that you could not have a genetic advantage over another vaper, unlike sports (e.g. basketball). Although the PI was limited, some quirks were mentioned in the focus groups.

Table 5

*Proposed Vaping Audience Categories*

	Proposed Vaping Audience Category	Theory Association	SSSW Present
Social Gifts	Recreational Vapers	Theory of Planned Behavior, Ritual Behavior	Social, Sensory, Routine
	Peer Pressure Personas	Looking Glass Self, Peer Socialization	Social, Ego
	Vape Reviewers	Product Reviews, Elaboration Likelihood Model	Rational, Social
Behavioral Risks	Closet Vapers	Stigmatized Activities	Social, Ego, Rational
	Health Concerned Rebels	High/Low Sensation Seeking, Cognitive Dissonance	Rational, Social
	Not Your Father's Nicotine User	Social Identity Theory, Personal Identity	Social, Ego, Rational

## **CHAPTER VI: LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSION**

### **Limitations**

The current section addresses limitations, provides the importance, and suggests future opportunities for research. First, Vape Capitol appears to be an excellent source to draw from with regards to up to date vaping products and reviews. However, it might be beneficial to draw from a video that isolates a particular segment from the SSSW or features a product in a review. More specifically, as mentioned in previous sections, flavor chaser review videos might be useful to investigate.

Another potential limitation is that coders did not code comments at the sentence or utterance level. Therefore, coders could find several SSSW segments in each comment. For example, comments related the ego segment was mentioned several times in the comments more than the actual count, but another segment was more prominent. Therefore, multiple segments could exist in the comments. Holody & Daniel (2016) made note that although it is possible for multiple frames to appear in a content analysis, the goal was to determine which was the most dominant in the article. The content analysis addressed this issue by including other concepts to link with the SSSW. Therefore, although the segment may not have been dominant, the supporting material supports the presence of the segment.

Age of people in the focus group seemed to be a rather small limitation, as groups had to think retrospectively about how they became a vaper. Participants stated that their peak time for vaping occurred when they were a younger age. The majority of people within the focus group indicated that they started vaping when they were in middle school or high school. Therefore the videos that were displayed were almost obsolete at that point. It might be more beneficial to have focus groups with high school students to understand the activity when it is fresh in their minds.



Another limitation was not using a survey or an experiment research design to determine which segment has the highest relationship with purchasing intentions. First, using a content analysis creates the most authentic environment for commenters to express their opinions with maximum anonymity. Although this means some comments can be considered hyper negative or positive, generally the commenters would not have their behaviors inhibited by a research setting. Moreover, focus groups were implemented to continue the research concerning audience analysis and concentrate on the research questions. Also, while the concept of qualitative and quantitative research is an ongoing debate, Kerlinger & Lee (2000), states that more often than not, most of the qualitative research findings yield similar assumptions and results as their quantitative counterpart.

Additional limitation concerned the focus group sizes and some focus groups included in the sample. Focus group research ideally states that there should be at least 5-8 people per group, and should be at least five overall groups represented in the sample. The focus group sample in this study was significantly smaller and had fewer focus groups overall than desired. However, towards the end of the third group, participants gave responses that were identical to others in the sample, which meant a level of saturation could exist. Second, the present study is exploratory and is not intended to represent the entire vaping population. Third, future research is implemented to expand this study's findings. The goal of this dissertation is to begin a discussion about the effects of vaping advertising, and while the responses might not have reached the frequency desired, a dialogue can further support or oppose the findings in this dissertation.

Lastly, the use of retrospective reactions may be considered a limitation because it could potentially promote vaping. However, the goal here was to allow participants to talk about their early and current vaping experiences rather than to support vaping to the members who had

never engaged in the behavior. Future research might look at vapers in high school and middle school as they are actively participating.

### **Future Research**

The following research can introduce a new line of research combining the disciplines of computer-mediated communication, advertising, public relations, and media studies. Through this dissertation, there appear to be links between parasocial satisfaction and purchasing intentions. Also, the ritual side of the SSSW was found to be an indicator of purchasing intentions. The following section wishes to address the new trends in advertising, where this research fits, and how it can continue to grow.

First and foremost, advertising links to many different disciplines. As Charles Sandage indicated, advertising has been part of many disciplines, claimed by many "parents," and associated with various names, which creates problems with definitions (Ross & Richards, 2008). Moreover, Schultz (2016) indicated that advertising had become a phenomenon similar to a "zombie," in that the traditional advertising had died and in its place created the re-birth of brand communication. Schultz reiterates that there are far too many niches, far too many focuses, and far too many products within advertising.

Therefore, advertisers must focus on new directions. Schultz (2016) suggested the term "relationship selling" be utilized more as strategic communication professionals engage in the sale of products through social media. This term refers to a cross-platform brand oriented communication in which viewers evaluate brand or celebrities actions. Viewers also purchase products based on these actions. Dahlen and Rosengren (2016) also mentioned that 33% of global advertising would rely on Internet advertising. Social media and YouTube are increasing their share and have been more influential than ever (Colliander, Dahlen, & Modig, 2015).

Celebrities are becoming more accessible, as now they are a part of everyday life (Senft, 2008) and individuals can see and even interact with them through social media websites. Interactions and selling include both traditional celebrities and micro-celebrities, which means that this research has the potential to create a line of its own in the future. For the previously mentioned reasons, the research presented in this dissertation needs to act as a discussion point for research to follow this new trend.

Currently, the Lueck (2015) piece is the only study dealing with PSR and advertising specifically. However, this is the first study that focuses on product specific celebrities. Other outlets of this phenomenon exist on sites like YouTube (e.g. makeup artists, video game reviewers, DIY videos), which gives celebrities credibility because it is why they are known. Future research should continue to look into these micro-celebrities, and how they might influence those most invested in the content.

First, the term “micro-celebrity” must be more clearly defined. Kim Kardashian was not promoted by media companies and used social media websites to help build her fame, but given her fame and the popularity of her father, it would almost seem like she was a traditional or micro celebrity. The question needed for further depth for celebrity research is: is the term micro-celebrity still useful? Much of the prior literature from Marwick and boyd (2010; 2011) indicates that micro-celebrities are promoted through social media self-promotion. However, most celebrities nowadays use this self-promotion regardless of the amount of followers. Moreover, there is an inherent authenticity and social interactions that is discussed with the micro-celebrity. The defined macro celebrity cannot achieve this as easily, which might be the main distinction. Through authentic word of mouth communication and a diffusion of innovation (through shared posts), SMIs can create greater brand loyalty, word of mouth, and sales <see

Figure 3>. Lastly, future studies should explore the notion of looking more into niche-based celebrities as SMIs rather than the term micro-celebrities. Niche-based celebrities might contain the same type of authenticity and feedback, but because they are known in one major genre, can act as a source of credibility as an SMI.

The primary focus of this dissertation dealt with a niche based advertising with users active in a small market. Additional research helping determine niche-based celebrity influence will contribute to build upon the findings of this dissertation and continue examining the link between PSR and purchasing intentions. Future research with niche-based celebrities and advertising should also consider approaching new methodologies. For example, experiments with PSI could gain a deeper understanding of participants' immediate reactions towards niche-based celebrities versus traditional celebrities selling the same product (as it is becoming more common). Future research could implement survey research concerning people not necessarily invested in the product or the celebrity, which could help determine influence.

One result that remains attractive for new research is that the more popular vaping videos received considerably more PSDS than those who were not popular. Increased PSDS might exist because once something becomes popular, people criticize it, or individuals may accuse a celebrity of "selling out." YouTube channels can start as people filming projects, and then later are sponsored by major corporations (e.g. Dude Perfect, the Game Theorists, Shay Carl). Adding overt endorsements might make celebrities lose money by a drop in viewership (Lueck, 2015). Also, negative brand association or negative celebrity association can hurt one another. A proposed longitudinal content analysis over the YouTubers' collection might help researchers understand not only when a celebrity is perceived to be a "sellout," but also when advertising becomes less efficient. The research performed in this dissertation would agree with Lueck's

assertion that authenticity is currently the most effective way for celebrities to sell their products. The term authenticity parallels with WOM communication, and it seems to reflect authentic opinions, rather than being paid to sell. If a person is sincere about the company you are promoting, and not being paid to do it (or the celebrity creates a strong enough illusion of non-payment), then it becomes more authentic, believable, and might increase purchasing intentions <See Figure 3>.

Other research could look into negative parasocial relationships with poorly viewed celebrities. Previous research does not consider vaping a healthy and popular behavior, and the celebrities are not well known and only liked in their niche. However, individuals dislike other celebrities, but if people enjoy their product, do people leave their product or endure the spokesperson? Negative PSR does not seem to exist because it has an easy exit strategy (Jennings & Alper, 2016), which means that it is harder to leave a social interaction compared to a parasocial interaction. For instance, leaving a social relationship with a friend or a colleague can be difficult, but since PSI/PSR is one-sided, there is no obligation to stay. However, if the brand/product is well beloved, is there an investment that people must resort to for working out their cognitive dissonance towards the celebrity?

Purchasing cues were seen in this dissertation, as was the awareness and satisfaction of PSR in this study. The presence of satisfaction with purchasing cues means that it would be interesting to see the effects of PSR/PSI and other disciplines. For example, what are the effects of PSR with a PSA, or government issued advertising? Public Relations could also be an outlet, as promotional campaigns involving celebrities might be found as influential and thus PR practitioners might use it more. Future research could also consider charity donations for areas like the Jimmy V. Cancer Research Foundation. The Jimmy Valvano campaign has used famous

athletes, coaches, and sports journalists to help raise awareness for cancer. Experimental research could also be used to determine if audience PSR with a celebrity increases the likelihood for donation incentives. Brown and Basil (1995) conducted a similar study based on identification towards Magic Johnson and HIV awareness. Participants in the Brown and Basil study did express changes in lifestyle and getting tested for HIV, but did not address intent to donate. Future research could help expand the link between PSI and donations.

Unrelated to PSR/PSI, future directions should continue to examine the ritual side of the SSSW. The present study found at least a direction of thought that maybe more cognitive processing is linked with sensory, ego, and social segments of the wheel. Also, research with the SSSW and the ELM by using the ELM's intended methodology of mind mapping might determine which methods work best in specific commercials. It would appear that social and sensory cues were essential in the persuasive messages, as commenters seemed to like the niche celebrities and their tricks displayed on the screen. This research suggests that research should explore the relationship between the ELM and the SSSW further. For example, research could determine if the data found here was an anomaly, or there are more examples of the ritual side of the wheel being prominent in the minds of the viewers.

This dissertation has discussed the SSSW as being divided into the two halves of transmission and ritual components of the model. Taylor (1999) notes the strategy wheel has a distinct connection with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is a dual processing model for information processing. The model was developed by Petty, Cacioppo, and Goldman (1981), and explained how receivers vary in their degree with regards to issue-relevant thinking.

The ELM's primary focus is through two states of cognition while viewing the material. In the model, it indicates that there is a continuum between central viewing processes and peripheral viewing processes (Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman 1981). The central processes are motivated by high cognitive cues, meaning that a viewer pays close attention to primary message details. The peripheral viewing process is on the polar end of the continuum regarding passive techniques in viewing behavior. Instead of a message information strategy, the participant might pay attention to the attractiveness of a celebrity endorser as informative, or they might devote more attention to the jingle, which is not primary to the intended use to the commercial theoretically.

Taylor offers consideration for the rational, acute need, and routine segments (Transmission View) as able to deal with the two levels of the ELM (Taylor, 1999). The rational segment corresponds to the central route of ELM processing. The rational segment deals with informational cues; therefore it fits with the "merits of the argument" (p.14) of the ELM and thus fits well with the central mode of processing. Whereas acute need and routine segments correspond to the peripheral route of ELM processing, and while informative, these two components deal with peripheral cues. Cues such as, "...celebrity spokespersons, hyperbole, emphasis on brand names, therefore it is argued that ELM is easily subsumed under the transmission side of the strategy wheel" (p. 14).

Taylor argues that ritual view of the SSSW are "ritual based and do not lend themselves to traditional transmitted strong or weak cognitive arguments" (p.14). Also, Taylor mentions that at first glance, the ritual view would appear to be the peripheral persuasive cue to the ELM, but then later recanted because these three segments did not conform to traditional informational cues like the ELM would suggest. By isolating the segments of the SSSW, and determining their

strength related to purchasing intentions, present and future studies might be able to offer expansion and clarification to the current view of the SSSW in hopes to explore more research with the wheel and creative research as well.

Per the results gathered from the content analysis, the rational segment was considered to be a primary predictor of purchasing behavior. Not only did commenters express buying intentions when perceivably interpreting the message being delivered by the video, almost half of the comments mention in the rational segment also had some indication of purchasing cues. Commenters would often talk about the type of MODS they were interested in, and they would talk about specifications within the MODS (e.g. PG: VG ratio, types of atomizers, wires), which would be ideal for the best build for blowing clouds or conducting tricks. The purchasing inquiry or motives stemmed from the function of the product and how it would work to perform at the maximum efficiency. All three focus groups exemplified that the only reason they would consider purchasing a vaping product is after they did research on the product first. The research was the primary indicator of actual purchasing behavior, which was brought up in the discussion was the last step in the actual process. Thus, the rational segment is in line with Taylor's proposal concerning the connection between SSSW and the ELM.

However, what was not anticipated was the fact that the sensory segment appeared to be, at the very least, relevant to ELM processing. The presence of the sensory segment might mean that these persuasive appeals might be peripheral. Either the song that was playing in the background or the visual aesthetic of the trick could be an influence for people to at least inquire about the product. There should be some research concerning the idea that the ritual side of the wheel has some predictive power in the purchasing intentions of a product. Future research should examine more sensory, ego, or socially inspired advertising to determine the link between



the SSSW and the ELM. Moreover, future directions should look into content that uses less dialogue and determines if visual or auditory elements are effective with audiences, and determine if they are processing the sensory cues through a central or peripheral route.

### **Practical Advertising Applications**

As this dissertation concerns practices of advertising, it is beneficial to those advertising for and against vaping behaviors and the use of niche/traditional celebrities. Therefore, the present study would like to offer some future directions for practical applications in advertising. First, this section looks at the primary demographics that vapers are associated with. Next, the present study would like to propose a model for advertisers when using niche-based celebrities in their endorsements. Lastly, the dissertation would like to propose a new model and discuss the practical applications that consultants and organizations could utilize when considering a celebrity endorser.

First is the approach of the audience that is a major consideration for future research. Most participants from the focus groups see themselves as young, health-conscious Millennials who vape for recreational purposes. As per most hobbies, people have a varying level of identification towards the activity, but younger demographics are known to attach quicker (Djamasbi et al. 2010). Most focus groups members expressed interest in vaping from middle school or high school and that it was a popular activity. Future directions, either for or against the advertising for vaping products, should consider their message towards high school, as this seems to be an identifying age. For example, a PSA could direct their messages to high school students to warn them about health concerns regarding the product, as they are considered very highly involved with health-oriented messages. Also, any celebrity should use a "down-to-earth" tone to their audience. Since most members of the focus group indicated recreational usage, they

found some of the messages in the video laughable, while other groups liked the stories from the vaper. The aspect of the story leads to the third component of the audiences, which is: less is more. Lueck (2015), referenced the less is more notion with the Kim Kardashian and Sketchers partnership, stating that the more authentic she seemed, the more people would listen. The concept of authenticity is seamless communication, and the celebrity merely feels like he/she is talking as he/she normally would, instead of giving a pitch for a product. In the case of vaping, the visual cues were such a strong predictor (as compared to the other segments), that less dialogue seems preferable. Vaping might benefit from a Leo Burnett approach of advertising, which derives from image-based advertising (Ewen, 1998). The copy might hinder the advertisement, and the mere use of visual stimuli might be enough to spark the curiosity, as the findings from the content analysis and focus groups might offer. For example, many focus group members smiled and even had small moments of awe when they were watching the video.

In addition to the audience, the vaping market is still relatively new; therefore the technology dedicated to the product is still growing. Once organizations (both large and small) discovered what e-cigarettes and MODS were, and the technology involved, the market expanded drastically with new innovative ways to vape. The experimentation led to the community creating and testing different flavors (e.g. similar to smoking a hookah). Since cigarette and e-cigarette culture is still largely ostracized by the general public, and 40 states in the United States have banned all smoking indoors; individuals who vape are finding community in the outlets of social media, particularly through Twitter, Instagram, previously Vine, and YouTube.

Within the social media community, vapers commonly view celebrities on multiple social media outlets (e.g. YouTube, Snapchat, and Instagram). Tricks are often shown with the vaping

device and are skill-based performances for other people to watch and try for themselves. If the audience feels compelled to try the tricks for themselves, but cannot understand how to perform them, then they have access to the other vaping community members on YouTube. The YouTube vaping community has become one of the largest, as creators made compilation videos of individual tricks. Of the most popular videos, vapers conduct tricks such as the "Single O's," "the Dragon," and "the Jellyfish." All of the vapers show loyalty to the brand by including them in their tutorials. For instance, Boosted e-juice and Cuttwood vapers are mentioned or used as sponsors or the juice used within specific videos. Unlike the Blu e-cig ads with major celebrities and consumer testimonials, the niche-based celebrities on YouTube are reoccurring and have several videos with tutorials.

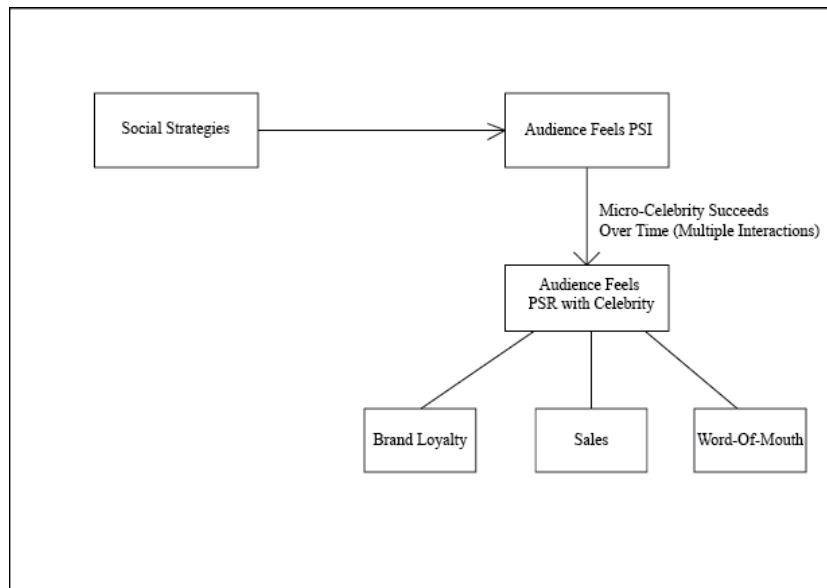
The ideal goal, concerning message strategy and audience analysis, would be to create multiple interactions with the audience, both social and parasocial. If the celebrity interacts with the public through a commercial and then interacts socially through replying to a comment, then there is a greater opportunity for PSR. One focus group member indicated that he had some discourse with some of the vapers that were popular on YouTube. Contact with the celebrity can imply that these interactions are social interactions. However, the viewer still does not have a "relationship" with the celebrity, but rather PSR. Multiple interactions can lead to a parasocial relationship with the audience who are watching the videos. Celebrities utilize social media for reoccurring contact, continuous communication, and the potential for PSR with their audience. Since the celebrities are ones vaping online, doing tricks, and are up to date with products and technology, they are credible within their specific field. Therefore, vaping celebrities have the potential for a long-term parasocial relationship with their audience. Moreover, these interactions transcend past PSI because the users communicate with the commenters by replying to their

posts by offering help. Much like a troubleshooting representative for computer online help desks, these vapers interact with their audience through CMC outlets. Repeated interactions have the potential to create a long-term bond and increase sales for e-juice and vaping MODS via the recommendations the niche-based celebrities suggest.

This research suggests some long-term implications as well. For example, Blu used traditional celebrities (actors) that presented a message about e-cigarettes. After the first PSI with their audience, contact was relatively rare/nonexistent. Even though a viewer might feel PSS and have positive interactions with the celebrity, the single interaction is not enough for an audience to want to view the celebrity again. Conversely, vaping companies appear to have PSI with their audiences, but because there are multiple media platforms utilized, and multiple interactions with viewers, viewers can form a relationship with the celebrities. Parasocial satisfactions and relationships could lead to "earned media," as audience members share with their friends through word-of-mouth communication. PSR might help increase brand loyalty through the multiple viewings of a celebrity or brand on multiple platforms. Lastly, PSR might also increase sales, as there is a bond with a celebrity, a viewer might be inclined to trust the celebrity more. Future studies should test the following model in Figure 3 with different products that use similar tactics (e.g. make-up, video games). As celebrity endorsements seem to increase, it will be imperative for researchers and practitioners alike to understand what influences celebrities can have using these newer possibilities.

Blu e-cigarettes struggled with the concept of incorporating a PSR element with the usage of their celebrities. Although Blu found some success in PSI within their commercials, Blu ultimately failed by not having the opportunity for multiple interactions with the celebrity. On the other hand, niche-based celebrities might have an advantage because they could be perceived

as more authentic and credible towards the subject. Viewers may also perceive these celebrities as doing something for fun, rather than being paid to say something. This is where companies can improve their strategy. By allowing celebrity endorsers and brands the opportunity to interact beyond the one-way engagement, viewers can create a social bond with the brand/celebrity. PSR is used with vaping celebrities through cross platform interaction, but other industries can use the same techniques.



*Figure 3. Proposed Model of Parasocial Celebrity Advertising*

Lastly, online communities still use tactics that support the SSSW well. Unlike the other appeals approached by cigarette and early e-cigarette communities, the social need is more complex, as it is maintained both face to face and through CMC. The two divisions of ego and social interact simultaneously to create an online community amongst vapers. Instead of vaping being a by-product of why people are friends, the online community of vapers recognizes their alienation from the outside world. Vapers created their niche market of sharing videos and tutorials about how to create tricks, share vaping tips, and discussing what machines are the best/flavors taste the best. Also, the majority of the videos posted only have the vaper in the

video itself, and whether they are talking to the audience directly, or demonstrating their talent, there is a niche relationship between them and the audience. The telepresent community can be the new social environment for vapers to feel safe and free to interact with other members of a largely shunned population who enjoy e-cigarettes and vaping. However, as mentioned in the one of the focus groups, vapers still find face-to-face locations to feel safe to converse about their hobby in places like vape shops.

Also, consultants and advertisers alike can use the proposed model in Figure 3 when including a niche-based celebrity. From the results in the dissertation, the celebrity should be relevant to the product that the client is trying to sell. Also, through the social segment strategy, the celebrity must be likable. Audiences will more than likely with have positive PSI with this celebrity before the consultant contacts them. When the consultant approaches the celebrity, it must be clear that the product mentioned in the video must be authentic and within the narrative structure of the video (Lueck, 2015). If the celebrity pitches the product like the commercial, then the audience is likely to avoid the company and the niche-based celebrity. Therefore, the authenticity, the narrative frame, and the credibility can often lead to repeated exposure. Repeat positive views can often lead to PSR with the celebrity. In turn, sales can increase, brand loyalty can increase, and word of mouth (through the diffusion of innovations) can increase. From the media planning perspective, the proposed model in Figure 3 is not only low risk it is also less costly. Niche-based celebrities will have more credibility than a macro-celebrity and cost significantly less per post/video. However, Figure 3 is not to be considered a fixed model, as brands can be affected by celebrity behavior (Thomas & Fowler, 2016). Advertisers should keep a careful watch on the status of their celebrity and if PSDS is high, to choose whether or not to

disassociate with their SMI. Ultimately, the credibility and the authenticity of the interaction between celebrity and user is vital to the success of the model.

Parasocial interaction has been found to be useful for a short time with attractive macro celebrity endorsers (Lagner & Eisend, 2010). However, if advertisers want to continue using parasocial tactics, they need to incorporate niche-based celebrities who are credible within the niche market who use the product the most. By using constant social media based endorsements (interactions) through niche-based celebrities, individuals can form relationships. If relationships stay positive, the bonds become stronger, a trust will grow, and audience members will want to buy more products based on PSR word-of-mouth advertising.

## **Conclusion**

The results found from this dissertation revealed two major considerations for future research. First, the sensory and social segments of the wheel are talked about frequently amongst audience. The findings in the content analysis and focus groups indicate that the ritual view is very important to the SSSW, and might have the ability to be linked with purchasing intentions. Second, the results found mentions of PSI in 68% of the overall comments delivered in the content analysis as individuals expressed their contact, approval or disapproval with the celebrities in the videos. Many people expressed agreement, alignment, or even aspiration, as they too wanted to perform the tricks displayed and wanted to inquire about the equipment to help them achieve the same visual aesthetics. The vaping community also appeared to be a tight knit group, expressing identifying nomenclature and drowned out dissenters that threatened their digital community. Vapers even expressed using several forms of media to address awareness and continued interactions, as they wanted to be able to stay in touch with their idols within the cloud chasing community.

Although the lifespan of vaping is unknown, it has indeed moved in a different direction of the traditional spot with traditional celebrities. Per the findings of this research, the vaping community uses a face-to-face and digital community. Users talking about different flavors and competitions create longevity with their product. Those included in the sample know that the general population might not agree with their activity. However, their enjoyment of the visuals and close community creates a bond that binds them and grounds them further in areas of acceptance and satisfaction. The niche-based celebrities allow for this longevity, as the comments would indicate that many of them know and admire the people that have succeeded in accomplishing their dream becoming a competitive vaper.

Since most PSR literature has not explored the areas of strategic communication, it is difficult to determine where the next stages of this research will be able to progress next. However, the initial concept of PSI and PSR originated in 1956 and has not subsided even after over 60 years of development. Over the past 5-10 years, the research on this topic has only increased, as more people tend to look at celebrities in a different light. Parasocially, people bond with celebrities more, they trust celebrities more, they interact with celebrities more, and they form relationships more. Through the constant contact, it is logical that individuals trust those people they develop relationships with, thus allowing them to be strong influencers in our purchasing intentions and behaviors. The increase in influence might just allow for researchers and practitioners to embrace new venues of evaluating all types of interactions and relationships in the foreseeable future.



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**APPENDIX A: CODING SHEET**

1. **Coder:** \_\_\_\_\_ (1) *E. Daniel* (2) *M. Daniel*

2. **Video ID:** \_\_\_\_\_

3. **Video Subject:** (1) M (2) F

4. **Date of Video:** \_\_\_\_\_

5. **Comment ID:** \_\_\_\_\_

6. **Strength of Identification** \_\_\_\_\_ (Dalton & Huang, 2014)

Based on the comment, in consideration of the full text, does the commenter feel like part of a community?

(1) Yes -*Presence* (2) No - *Absence*

7. **Aspects of Identity** \_\_\_\_\_ (Cheek & Briggs, 2013)

Based on the comment, in consideration of the full text, does the commenter feel like they identify as a vaper?

(1) Yes -*Presence* (2) No - *Absence*

8. **Hedonic Scale** \_\_\_\_\_ (Munoz & King, 2007)

Based on the comment, in consideration of the full text, which senses are engaged?

(1) <i>Auditory</i>	(2) <i>Visually</i>	(3) <i>Olfactory</i>	(4) <i>Haptics</i>	(5) <i>Taste</i>	(0) <i>None of</i>
Persuaded by audio elements (e.g. the song in the video)	Persuaded by the visual elements (e.g. smoke rings)	Persuaded by the perceived smell	Persuaded by the perceived touch/feel of the product	Persuaded by the perceived flavor of the product	<i>the Above</i>

9. **Is the SSSW central to/the cause of the comment?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Taylor, 1999)

Based on the comment, in consideration of the full text, would the comment have been written?

(1) Yes - *central/causal* (2) No - *non-central/marginal*

10. **Taylor Six-Segment Strategy Wheel:** \_\_\_\_\_ (Taylor, 1999)

(1) <i>Rational</i>	(2) <i>Acute</i>	(3) <i>Routine</i>	(4) <i>Ego</i>	(5) <i>Social</i>	(6)	(0)
Persuaded by pragmatic buying motives	Persuaded by a “Need” to have something immediately	Persuaded by a Repeated desire to have something	Persuaded by “I am Me”, as an individual identifier	Persuaded by statement pieces to show off to other people	Persuaded by joyous or happy moment entirely based on senses	<i>None of the Above</i>

**11. Parasocial Interaction** \_\_\_\_ (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000)

Based on the comment, in consideration of the full text, does the commenter feel like they had a connection with the micro-celebrity?

- (1) Yes -*Presence*      (2) No – *Absence*

**12. Parasocial Satisfaction** \_\_\_\_ (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000)

Based on the comment, in consideration of the full text, does the commenter feel like they had a perceived liking towards the micro-celebrity?

- (1) Yes – *Enjoyed/Identified with the micro-celebrity*

**\*If 1: Code #13**

- (2) No – *Did Not Enjoy/Did Not Identify with the micro-celebrity*

**\*If 2: Code #14**

- (0) Neither enjoyed or did not enjoy

**\*If 0: Do Not Code #13 or 14**

**13. Parasocial Satisfaction** \_\_\_\_ (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000)

Based on the comment, in consideration of the full text, how did the commenter express their liking towards the micro-celebrity?

- |  |  |   |  |   |   |
|--|--|---|--|---|---|
| (1) <i>Alignment</i><br>Celebrity<br>reminds me of<br>myself/has same<br>qualities | (2) <i>Success</i><br>I hope celebrity<br>achieves their<br>goals, wishes<br>them well | (3) <i>Agreement</i><br>I agree with<br>the Micro-<br>Celebrity | (4)<br><i>Aspirational</i><br>I want to be<br>like the Micro-<br>celebrity | (5)<br><i>Attraction</i><br>I find the<br>micro-<br>celebrity<br>attractive | 0) <i>None</i><br><i>of the</i><br><i>Above</i> |
|--|--|---|--|---|---|

**14. Parasocial Dissatisfaction** \_\_\_\_

Based on the comment, in consideration of the full text, how did the commenter express their disliking towards the micro-celebrity?

- |  |   |   |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| (1) <i>Alignment</i><br>Celebrity<br>doesn't remind<br>me of<br>myself/has<br>different<br>qualities | (2) <i>Success</i><br>I hope celebrity<br>doesn't achieve<br>their goals,<br>does not wish<br>them well | (3) <i>Agreement</i><br>I disagree<br>agree with the<br>Micro-<br>Celebrity | (4)<br><i>Aspirational</i><br>I do not want<br>to be like the<br>Micro-<br>celebrity | (5)<br><i>Attraction</i><br>I find the<br>micro-<br>celebrity<br>unattractive | 0) <i>None</i><br><i>of the</i><br><i>Above</i> |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|

**15. Purchasing Intentions**\_\_\_\_ (Ajzen, 2006)

Based on the comment, in consideration of the full text, does the commenter feel like they would purchase the product?

- (1) Yes -*Presence*      (2) No – *Absence*



**16. Purchasing Intentions\_\_\_\_\_** (Ajzen, 2006)

Based on the comment, in consideration of the full text, how did the commenter express their desire to purchase a ›product?

(1) <i>Purchasing Expectations</i> “I expect to purchase this product”	(2) <i>Purchasing Wants</i> “I want to purchase this product”	(3) <i>Purchasing Intentions</i> “I intend to purchase this product”	(4) <i>Purchasing Inquiry</i> “What is the name of the product being used”	(0) <i>None of the Above</i>
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**17. Purchasing Subject\_\_\_\_\_**

Based on the comment, in consideration of the full text, what specifically did the commenter want to purchase?

(1) <i>Vaping Machine</i> Commenter talks about purchasing the entire machine	(2) <i>Juice</i> Commenter talks about purchasing vaping “juice”	(3) <i>Hot Wires</i> Commenter talks about the specific product mentioned in the video	(4) <i>Other</i> Commenter talks about purchasing anything other than the prior 3 coding categories	(0) <i>None of the Above</i>
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## APPENDIX B: CODING BOOK

1. **Coder ID:** Coder associated with the study will numerically assign their names from the content analysis tool option
2. **Video ID:** Coders will numerically identify the video from the content analysis tool option from the sample of 35 videos (e.g. 1, 5, 15)
3. **Video Subject:** Coder will numerically identify the subject in the video by sex: male or female  
**Thumbs Up Frequency:** Coder will list how many “thumbs up” the video contains  
**Thumbs Up Frequency:** Coder will list how many “thumbs down” the video contains  
**Comment Amount:** Coder will list how many comments are associated with the video being analyzed
4. **Video Date:** Coders will identify an 8 digit date of the video in the space provided. For Example, January 01, 2017 would be 01/01/2017
5. **Comment ID:** Coders will numerically identify the comments labeled from the content analysis tool option from the sample of 1598 videos (e.g. 1, 5, 15)

*The remainder of the content analysis is qualitatively defined and quantitatively assigned. Additionally, the coder will assess a main theme of each comment, but some categories can have more than one unit of analysis present. Coders will look through coding categories 9-20 for any presence, and if the comment does not relate to any category, all categories will be marked as absent.*

6. **Strength of Identification:** Based on the individual comments labeled, the commenter establishes his/herself as a member of the community provided in the video (e.g. *Vapers Unite!* or *We vapers need to stick together*)

7. **Aspects of Identity:** Based on the individual comment labeled, the commenter states a declaration of identification towards the activity provided in the video (e.g. *I am proud to be a vaper*)
8. **Hedonic Scale:** Based on the individual comment labeled, the commenter states that specific senses are engaged from the content shown in the video
  - a. **Auditory:** Senses are engaged by the audio elements in the video (e.g. *What is the name of the song? or I like the vapers voice*)
  - b. **Visually:** Senses are engaged by the visual elements in the video (e.g. *I find the vaper to be attractive/unattractive or Those vape rings are amazing*)
  - c. **Olfactory:** Senses are engaged by the olfactory elements in the video (e.g. *I cannot stand the smell of smoke or I love how this flavor of juice smells*)
  - d. **Haptics:** Senses are engaged by the perceived touch or feel of the product (e.g. *I like how that vaping machine feels*)
  - e. **Taste:** Senses are engaged by the perceived taste of the product (e.g. *I like/dislike the flavor of this juice*)
9. **SSSW Central to Comment:** Based on the individual comment labeled, coders will identify if the SSSW is present or absent in the comment. If none of six categories are present, then the coder will identify the comment by inserting the 2 in the cell
10. **SSSW Category:** If 12 is present, then coders must list which segment is present in the comment. Multiple comments can be present in each comment. Each segment will be labeled by a number associated with the segment

- a. **Rational:** Commenter labels the content in the video by the Rational segment. Which means they are persuaded by pragmatic buying motives (e.g. use/ease of the equipment or *Vaping keeps my teeth clean*)
- b. **Acute Need:** Commenter labels the content in the video by the Acute Need segment. Which means they are persuaded by the “need” to have something immediately (e.g. *I need to buy this, now*)
- c. **Routine:** Commenter labels the content in the video by the Routine segment. Which means they are persuaded by repeated desire to do something (e.g. *I want to buy this product because I vape everyday*)
- d. **Ego:** Commenter labels the content in the video by the Ego segment. Which means they are persuaded by the “I am Me” as an individual identifier (e.g. *I really identify with vaping or I identify with this vaper*)
- e. **Social:** Commenter labels the content in the video by the Social segment. Which means they are persuaded by statement pieces to show off to other people (e.g. *Vaping makes me feel like I belong to a community*)
- f. **Sensory:** Commenter labels the content in the video by the Sensory segment. Which means they are persuaded by joyous or happy moment entirely based on senses (e.g. *I love this song or the trick looks amazing*)

**11. Parasocial Interaction:** Based on the individual comment, does the commenter feel like they have a positive or negative valenced connection with the subject in the video? Or does the commenter appear to reach out to the subject within the video? If the comment expresses apathy or ambivalence, then the this coding category will be listed as absent

**12. Parasocial Satisfaction:** Based on the individual comment, does the commenter feel like they have perceived satisfaction or dissatisfaction to the subject in the video. Coder will either identify the comment as positive (satisfaction) negative (dissatisfaction) or neutral (apathy or ambivalence)

**13. Parasocial Satisfaction:** Based on the individual comment, how did the commenter express their liking towards the subject in the video

- a. **Alignment:** Subject reminds the commenter of themselves (e.g. *The vaper vapes like I do*)
- b. **Success:** Hoping the subject achieves their goal (e.g. *Good luck with the competitions!*)
- c. **Agreement:** Commenter agrees with the micro celebrities opinion (e.g. *I agree with the vapers technique* or *I agree with the vapers opinion*)
- d. **Aspirational:** Commenter wants to be like the subject (e.g. *I want to vape like this vaper*)
- e. **Attraction:** Commenter finds the subject aesthetically appealing (e.g. *This vaper is hot*)

**14. Parasocial Dissatisfaction:** Based on the individual comment, how did the commenter express their dislike towards the subject in the video

- a. **Alignment:** Subject does not reminds the commenter of themselves (e.g. *I don't like how this vaper vapes*)
- b. **Success:** Hoping the subject doesn't achieve their goal (e.g. *I hope you fail at vaping*)

- c. **Agreement:** Commenter agrees with the micro celebrities opinion (e.g. *I do not agree with the vapers technique* or *I do not agree with the vapers opinion*)
- d. **Aspirational:** Commenter wants to be like the subject (e.g. *I do not want to vape like this vaper*)
- e. **Attraction:** Commenter finds the subject aesthetically appealing (e.g. *This vaper is ugly or too much for me*)

**15. Purchasing Intentions:** Based on the individual comment, does the commenter feel like they would like to buy or at least ask about the products in the video. Coder will either identify the comment as present (I am expressing interest in the product) or absent (I do not express interest in the product)

**16. Purchasing Intentions:** Based on the individual comment, and if the coder listed present for coding category 18, the coder will identify that the commenter will express their interest towards a product

- a. **Purchasing Expectations:** Commenter makes a statement that they are definitive in purchasing a product
- b. **Purchasing Wants:** Commenter makes a statement expressing a desire to purchase a product
- c. **Purchasing Intentions:** Commenter makes a statement expresses their intentions to buy this product that are not definitive
- d. **Purchasing Inquiry:** Commenter expresses interest in a product, but does not give a statement of expectation, want, or intention to buy

**17. Purchasing Subject:** Based on the individual comment, and if the coder listed present for category 18, the coder will identify something specific that they are interested in

- a. **Vaping Machine or MOD:** Commenter expresses interest in an entire machine (
- b. **Juice:** Commenter expresses interest in a type of brand, type and/or flavor of juice
- c. **Hot Wires:** Commenter expresses interest in the specific product mentioned in the videos
- d. **Other:** Anything the commenter expresses interest in that is not listed by the previous three coding categories (e.g. shirts, hats, etc.)

## APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

### I. 'Preliminaries

- a. Introduction: Moderator introduces self as a graduate student seeking help with dissertation and asks all group members to make introductions.

Moderator provides backgrounds and ground rules as follows:

- i. Today, we will be talking about vaping, micro celebrity advertising, and the trend of cloud chasing. The overall purpose is to gain a better understanding as to why people vape and what are the main reasons people are influenced to vape. There is no hidden agenda to our discussion. Please view this as an opportunity to share thoughts and opinions freely. Over the next 60-90 minutes, we'll talk about vaping, view an advertisement and talk about the opinions on the ads. There are no right or wrong answers to anything I ask – only your honest opinions. Please speak one at a time and regard the taping devices as simply as an extension of my memory so I can provide a clear and accurate account of what is said here today. Everything you say, of course, is confidential and the results of this discussion will be reported anonymously
- ii. We will have some discussion and then watch a video and then discuss your thoughts and opinions on the content.
- iii. Does anyone have any questions before we proceed?

### II. Issue and related discussion questions

- a. Introductory questions



- i. When you hear the term vaping, what comes to mind?
- ii. How often do you typically vape/smoke in a given week
- iii. Why did you choose to vape/smoke
- iv. What do you find most appealing about vaping/smoking to be engaged in?

b. Vaping Advertising

- i. Some individuals conduct vaping tricks or review juice flavors online.  
Have you seen these videos
- ii. What do you think of those videos

III. Behavioral Intentions

- a. Have you ever used the videos before as reference to purchase vaping juices or machines?
- b. If yes, What were the primary reasons that the videos influenced your intentions to purchase vaping supplies?

- Break for 5 Minutes -

IV. Watch YouTube video of Fresh Skater Jay

- a. What is going on in this video for you
- b. Do you feel more positively towards vaping after seeing this ad
- c. Do you feel more positively towards Fresh Skater Jay after seeing this ad?
- d. According to you, what was the most powerful message shown on this video?
- e. Please take a minute and imagine that you haven't vaped before, would you, as a non-vaper find this video interesting? What specifically would stand out for you to engage in this activity?

- f. What is your purchasing intentions to buy hotwires
- g. What are your intentions to visit Vape Capital

V. Closing

- a. Thank you for participating in today's discussion. I appreciate your willingness to share your opinions about the advertisements open and honestly. Please be assured the information you shared today is confidential and the results and discussion will be reported anonymously.

**APPENDIX D: VAPING DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. Please Provide your Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Please Provide your Sex:    M\_\_\_\_\_       F\_\_\_\_\_
3. How often do you typically vape in a given day (on average)?
  - a. 0 ml of juice
  - b. 1-3 ml of juice
  - c. 4-6 ml of juice
  - d. 7-9 ml of juice
  - e. 10ml of juice or more

Please respond to the following statements by answering between 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. If the statement does not apply to you, please circle the 0 if the statement is not applicable to you?

4. Vaping is a healthier alternative to smoking a cigarette

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Ag	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A

5. Vaping is a more enjoyable alternative to smoking a cigarette

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Ag	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A

6. I consider myself part of a vaping community

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Ag	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A

7. Vaping Videos were an influence for why I started vaping

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Ag	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A

8. I enjoy watching vaping trick videos

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Ag	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A

9. I enjoy watching vaping product reviews

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Ag	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A

10. I use vaping videos as a reference to purchasing vaping juices or machines

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Slightly Ag	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A

## APPENDIX E: DESCRIPTION OF FRESH SKATER JAY PROFILE VIDEO

**Audio:** (To House Electronica Music) My name is J.T. Mattias, and I am from New York, and now I reside in San Diego, and we're at Vape Capitol studios. I've been vaping close to 2 years now. The way I got into vaping, I just saw an electronic cigarette in a store, I used to smoke cigarettes, and I wanted to get off. I wanted to keep my teeth nice and white So, that's how I started.

*What's your typical build?* My typical build is 5 rep, 22 gauge, centerpost sleeper build, using Hot Wires. There's all types of different builds for like, doing tricks and clouds. Clouds you want a lower gauge wire. You can't have too much vape production coming out when you're blowing O's. You end up like, choking or something like that. There's definitely differences in builds between the two.

*What's your typical VG: PG Ratio?* I know my VG:PG ratio is like, 90/10. There's not much difference between VG ratio whether you're blowing clouds or blowing O's.

*What Competitions Have You Been In?* The different competitions that I competed in were at Manhattan Fog House, at Beyond Vape Downy, at Vape Day, and at Vape Aura. And I took place in all those contests

*Can Anyone Do Vape Tricks?* There's definitely a skill set involved with blowing O's and tricks. Anyone can do it, but it like takes a lot of practice to perfect all of your tricks, and get them down how you want them. It took like 3-4 months to get my O's, like perfect, and how I really wanted them to be.

I like using AV MODS, they don't heat up as much as other MODS would, and then the Addys, I like really deep juice wells, because I don't like juicing so much. So I like to like juice a lot and then have it sitting in my well and just keep vaping on it all day.

*When did you become a cloud chaser?* I knew I had what it took to enter trick contests because I met the AV Life guys in Henley. They sent me a sponsorship and they flew me out to San Diego to compete in the pro vape circuit. So I performed in front of a big crowd. It was really fun, so that's when I knew I had what it took to join these trick competitions.

*How do Competitions bring the Community together?* Definitely trick competitions and cloud chasing competitions, definitely bring the vape community together. Everyone gets to pile up in one big vape shop and you get to see everyone coming from different places that you haven't seen in like, so long. And, it's all fun, it's all laughter, it's just the whole competitions are just fun for me.

*Where do you see the Industry in a Year from now?* Well I see this, in a year from now, being like all over the place. Like, more contests, I see more vape commercials popping up. I know it's

going to blow up soon. When I go to these cloud competitions and trick competitions, it's all fun for me, I'm all about having a good time, and I'm all about the vape family.

My name is J.T. Mattias, I'm from New York and now I live in San Diego, also known as Fresh Skater Jay on Instagram. I want to thank Vape Capitol for having me here, and vape on.

**Video:** Video featured on a black background with J.T Mattias in a profile camera shot. J.T. is wearing a black EAVE vaping shirt (who produce MODS) and a black VAPE LVFCU Hat. J.T. is blowing white rings during B-Roll segments as his interview answers are heard. J.T. talks to the interviewer, and rarely looks at the camera during the video. Questions (in italics in the audio section) appear on screen, as the interviewer is not heard. There are still frame images of vapers, competition logos, and the Hot Wire Logo.

**Taylor's SSSW Present:** Sensory, Social, Ego, Routine

## APPENDIX F: TABLES

Table F1

*Hedonic Scale Frequencies and Percentages*

	Absence	Auditory	Visually	Olfactory	Haptics	Taste
Hedonic Scales	1097	185	239	3	5	8
%	71%	12%	16%	.2%	.3%	.5%
% of those Present	0	42%	54%	.7%	1%	2%

Table F2

*SSSW Frequencies and Percentages*

	Absence	Rational	Acute Need	Routine	Ego	Social	Sensory
SSSW Type	893	79	9	0	35	257	264
%	58%	5%	.5%	0	2%	17%	17%
% of Present	0	12%	1%	0	5%	40%	41%

Table F3

*PSS Frequencies and Percentages*

	Absence	Positive	Negative
PSS	811	486	240
	53%	31%	16%

Table F4

*PSS and PSDS Type and Frequency*

	Absence	Alignment	Success	Agreement	Aspirational	Attraction	
Type of PSSS	1051	130	100	235	16	5	486
%	68%	8%	7%	15%	1%	.3%	
% of those Present	0	27%	21%	48%	3%	1%	
Type of PSDS	1297	31	12	178	1	18	240
%	84%	2%	.7%	12%	.06%	1%	
% of those Present	0	13%	5%	74%	.4%	8%	

Table F5

*Purchasing Intention Type Frequencies and Percentages*

	Expectations	Wants	Intentions	Inquiry	N/A
PI Type	1	15	5	212	1304
%	.06%	.9%	.3%	13%	85%
% of those Present	.4%	6%	2%	91%	0
	MOD	Juice	Wires	Other	N/A
PI Subject	115	25	18	75	1304
%	7%	2%	1%	5%	85%
% of those Present	49%	11%	8%	32%	0