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A Content Analysis of Jesus Merchandise

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Despite the growing popularity of Jesus merchandise in Christian retailing, little attention has been given to nontraditional religious media such as Jesus merchandise. The present study examined the persuasive appeals associated with various forms of Jesus merchandise and the primary communication functions that such merchandise fit. A content analysis of 982 pieces of Jesus merchandise revealed that informational and "good times" appeals are the two most common appeals used to promote Christianity. Jesus' name is used in logical or rational appeals designed to change beliefs and promote positive attitudes toward the Christian faith, while Jesus' image is used in emotional appeals. Edification is the most common communication function that fit Jesus merchandise analyzed in this study, with evangelism and public relations finishing a distant second and third, respectively. Implications of using certain persuasive strategies and associating particular values with Jesus merchandise were considered.

Recent years have witnessed a boom in Christian marketing (Borden, 2007; Graham, 2004). In 2002, sales in the Christian retail industry, which includes Christian books, music, gifts, clothing, jewelry, and other merchandise, were more than $4 billion, up from $3 billion in 1996 (Lee, 1997; Hendershot, 2004). In 2004, sales again totaled more than $4 billion (Christian Booksellers Association, 2006), with domestic sales of religious products projected to reach $9.5 billion by 2010 (Demand for religious games, 2006; Twitchell, 2007). As a result of such success, Christian retailers and publishers have begun to look beyond the national to the global market (Garrett & Riess, 2000). Moreover, as a result of the profitability of Christian-related products, large mainstream outlets such as Wal-Mart and Barnes & Noble, as well as online outlets such as eBay and Amazon, sell Christian-themed products including but not limited to books, music, and toys (Moll, 2004; Smith-Spark, 2007).

Some attribute the explosion in Christian-themed product sales to a spiritual revival in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the War in Iraq (Elinsky, 2005; Harrison, 2006). Others link the recent popularity and growth of such merchandise, especially Jesus merchandise, or products such as apparel, gifts, toys, and other accessories with Jesus' name and/or image on it, to Christian-based work in Hollywood. In 2004, Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* earned more than $360 million in ticket sales and became one of the top 10 highest grossing films of all time (Box Office Mojo, 2004). *The Passion's* guerilla marketing efforts included t-shirts, lapel pins, witness cards, nail necklaces, and inscribed nail pendants (Woods, Jindra, & Baker, 2004). Following *The Passion's* success, several television shows with Christ-centered themes were produced for mainstream audiences (Downey, 2006). In addition, Video Hits One's (VH1) annual end-of-the-year award show, *Big in 2004*, named Jesus as one of the biggest personalities of the year, and celebrities such as Ashton Kutcher and Madonna were photographed wearing "Jesus is my homeboy" t-shirts (Nielson-Stowell, 2005). All of this attention to Jesus led one observer to quip, "Americans are flooding to movie theaters, bookstores, malls and their television sets to get their fill of the latest modern trend in American religions—Jesus Christ, superstar" (Nielson-Stowell, 2005, para. 2).

Many critics contend that the current assortment of Jesus merchandise is a superficial substitute for genuine faith, a commercial exploitation of spiritual desires for financial profits, and a justification for evangelical consumption (MSNBC.com, 2004; Badzinski, 2008). Others are concerned that the persuasive appeals used on such merchandise to capture the attention of the buying public may be emotionally based (versus rationally based) in some cases and provide oversimplifications of essential biblical truths in other cases (Prewitt, 2003; Evans, 2006). Even though "Jesus is my homeboy" may breed familiarity and make Jesus appear hip to some individuals outside the Christian faith, such familiarity may also result in flippant or casual attitudes toward God (Werntz, 2006). Through the different types of Jesus merchandise available today, it is evident that the boundary between sacred and secular has become blurred.

Despite the growth of Jesus merchandise in Christian retailing and concerns from critics, little research on merchandise bearing Jesus' name and/or image has been conducted. Most research to date has been historical-critical in nature. For instance, Moore (1994) explores the development of the history of Christian retailing and merchandising of religious objects, including objects with Jesus' image on them. McDannell (1995) includes case studies of the most popular marketing campaigns, noting that her few case studies do not cover all Christian material selling practices in America. Prothero (2003) explains how cultural perceptions of Jesus have evolved throughout American history, from the Enlightened Sage to the Sweet Savior to the Superstar. Fox (2004) uses a combination of rhetorical and historical analysis to describe how Americans view Jesus as a "personal savior," "cultural hero," and "national obsession." Both Prothero (2003) and Fox (2004) acknowledge that representations of Jesus are ever-changing, and little research has been done on modern or contemporary representations of Jesus in popular culture.

In light of the foregoing, the current study examines Jesus merchandise, a growing multi-billion dollar per year product category and one of a few consumer-oriented categories distributed for mass consumption that is identified with strong ideological values. More specifically, the current study seeks to identify the persuasive appeals and corresponding values associated with Jesus merchandise, a type of religious media that delivers messages about the Christian faith to both Christian and non-Christian audiences (Badzinski, 2008; Einstein, 2008). As such, Jesus merchandise may also be considered as what Hoover (2006) describes

as religious "media artifacts" (p. 36), that is, cultural objects that mediate religious messages to the public and make such messages more accessible to individuals in the private sphere.

The study further seeks to determine which of several communication functions associated with traditional religious media most closely align with current forms of Jesus merchandise. Communication functions such as evangelism directed toward non-Christians and edification or encouragement directed toward Christians have been associated with traditional forms of religious media including radio, television, film, Internet, and print (e.g., Horsfield, 1984; Abelman, 1987, 1988; Stout & Buddenbaum, 1996; Schultze, 1990a, 1990b, 1992, 2002, 2003; Brunstad, 2001; Romanowski, 2001; Loomis, 2004; Hoover, 2006; Schultze & Woods, 2008), but they have yet to be considered in relation to nontraditional religious media forms such as Jesus merchandise.

PERSUASIVE MEDIA MESSAGES AND JESUS MERCHANDISE

The growth of advertising in mass media in the 1920s changed how the Church talked about God. To make their "product" visible in a competitive marketplace of ideas, the Church adopted persuasive strategies and appeals common in nonreligious advertising (Moore, 1994). No doubt there exists an intimate connection in the way the secular and sacred market sells (Twitchell, 2007). As Einstein (2008) explains, messages about religion are persuasive ones, and advertisers and marketers promote religion the same way as other products since "religion is a product, no different from any other commodity sold in the consumer marketplace" (p. 4).

Persuasive media messages—whether straight advertising, public service announcements, or merchandise—seek to affect the reality perceived by consumers. Such persuasive messages often seek to reinforce or affirm positive beliefs or attitudes toward a particular product or service. In other cases, the messages seek to give consumers a new image of a particular product or service, that is, to persuade audiences to believe or feel that they have a need or desire for the product or service they did not previously possess. Frequently, the most direct purpose of a persuasive media message is not to sell a particular product or service as much as it is to promote a positive image or good will in relation to a particular organization (e.g., the Church), individual (e.g., Jesus Christ), or idea (e.g., Christianity) (Harris, 1994; Beasley & Denesi, 2002; Benoit & Benoit, 2008).

In addition, persuasive media messages rely on a variety of appeals or techniques to reinforce or construct new attitudes and behavioral outcomes. These appeals or techniques attempt to associate the organization, individual, or idea with consumers' deepest emotional or physical needs (e.g., safety, love, belonging, self-efficacy), or to widely held cultural values (e.g., happiness, wealth, freedom, power, patriotism). Audiences, in turn, draw an implicit mental link between the object and the desirable qualities or values represented (Cialdini, 1998; Perloff, 2002; Shrum, 2003). Common appeals in persuasive media messages that also appear in Jesus merchandise include the following:

Informational Appeal

This appeal provides information in an attempt to influence the belief component (versus the affective or emotional) of an individual's attitudes (Harris, 1994; Lee & Johnson, 2005). As it

relates to Jesus merchandise, this strategy might include messages that explain what Jesus or Christianity does (e.g., "Jesus Saves") or how it works (e.g., Jesus died on the cross and rose again to save humankind). This appeal may also explain how Christianity is superior to other religions (e.g., Christianity may not be easy, but the benefits outweigh the struggles because it is high quality). An informational appeal may also explain how a product is unique (e.g., by saying Christianity is the *only* true religion) and how it performs in comparison to other products (e.g., believing in Jesus is better than believing in nothing, or Buddha, or Mormonism, and so on).

Good Times

Another popular appeal pairs the product, service, or idea with some form of fun, happiness, good times, or warm feelings. The good times appeal may include but not be limited to adventures such as extreme safaris, escapes such as the beach, party scenes, memories of old times, friendships, family ties, or a number of other similarly fun activities (Tellis, 2004; Hill, Thomsen, Page, & Parrott, 2005). An example of Jesus merchandise that fits this appeal includes the popular Jesus laughing art, which includes an image of Jesus laughing followed by Psalm 2:4: "The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them" (New International Version). Additional examples include a figurine of Jesus playing soccer with two children and a t-shirt that says "Christ is the solid *Rock On* which I stand." This shirt emphasizes the words "Rock On" for a fun feeling.

Fear

Fear appeals describe to an individual what risks or negative consequences might be avoided if one uses or participates in the given product, service, or idea (Herbst & Allan, 2006). As it relates to Jesus merchandise, this appeal might include the negative consequences of not believing in Jesus Christ, such as going to hell, being miserable, or not having a peaceful life. For example, an individual who does not accept Jesus may never know peace: "No Jesus, no peace; know Jesus, know peace," which is a popular expression found on several types of merchandise.

Patriotism

This appeal associates symbols of national pride with the product, idea, or service and focuses on patriotism to attract individuals who may possess patriotic ideals (Landa, 2004). Patriotic appeals often rely on patriotic colors (red, white, and blue), patriotic wording such as "In God we trust," lyrics from patriotic songs such as *God Bless America*, lines from famous American documents such as "We the people . . . ," and national symbols such as the bald eagle, the American flag, or American monuments.

Pathos

This appeal involves associating the product, service, or idea with texts or images designed to move the reader or hearer toward guilt, compassion, or sorrow (Huhmann & Brotherton,

1997). In the case of Jesus merchandise, this appeal often presents the suffering savior who was wounded for the sins of the world (Fox, 2004). Examples include a t-shirt that says "I love you this much" or "I died for you," with a picture of a blood-soaked Jesus on the cross with arms spread open wide. Another example is a t-shirt that says "To know what love really means you have to read between the lines." The back of this shirt has a picture of Jesus after being beaten by the Roman guards; "between the lines" refers to the markings from the whip on Jesus' back.

Achievement

The appeal to achievement/power/status pairs the merchandise with a desire to win things such as wealth, respect, better relationships, getting something before everyone else, or reaching a moral triumph such as helping others when it would have been easier not to do so (Hill et al., 2005). Because power is so attractive, this appeal shows an individual how a product or idea will provide that power (e.g., "Victory in Jesus" or "Power in the Cross"). This appeal may show how an individual will win with the product (such as how Jesus will make that individual a winner) or how another person has already won (such as Jesus helped him or her win), thereby showing the product has winning quality (Landa, 2004).

Humor

Humor includes jokes, spoofs, sarcasm, physical humor, and incongruity (Tellis, 2004; Hill et al., 2005). This appeal may pair Jesus' name or image with funny situations such as an out-of-the-ordinary picture or unexpected behavior such as Jesus in a crowd at a rock concert. Humor also includes the use of satire, parody, and irony. Satire uses foolish or absurd situations (e.g., aliens looking for Jesus). Parody mocks existing people, products, ideas, and even sometimes the product itself (e.g., Jesus Christ parodying a superhero as an action figure). Irony uses texts or images whose obvious meaning contrasts the intended or implied meaning (Tellis, 2004) (e.g., "Even Jesus had a fish story").

Shock

Shock appeals startle or offend the individual by doing the unexpected or taboo (Dahl, Frankenberger, & Machanda, 2003). This appeal takes an expectation based on laws, morality, social norms, or customs and goes in the opposite direction. For example, a shirt that says "Jesus loves porn stars" is shocking because the phrase "Jesus loves" is common and expected, but "porn stars" is a phrase not commonly connected to Jesus. A shirt that says "Get stoned like Paul! Stand your ground for Christ!" shocks by using language that typically refers to drug use.

Testimonials

In testimonials, a person, either a celebrity or a person with credibility (i.e., who has expertise in an area, experience with a product, or a degree or certification in the topic), shares how a product has worked for him or her (Rogers, 2001). The person giving the testimony attempts

to show that a product or idea is worth another individual's time, belief, or money by sharing personal experience. For example, if Jesus helped the person wearing a shirt that says "Jesus saved my life," then Jesus may help others. Testimonials often use language that refers to the speaker or uses personal pronouns such as "I" or "me." Examples include a bumper sticker that says "I ♥ Jesus" or one that includes the phrase "Jesus makes me happy."

Pop Culture

This appeal uses elements of popular culture such as a common phrase, a recognizable character, a popular store, or a television show to advertise the product or idea (Landa, 2004). Examples include a t-shirt that says "Jesus. That is my final answer," which uses the catch phrase from the television show *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*. "Got Jesus?" mimics the "Got Milk?" campaign and "John Three Sixteen" is made to look like a John Deere shirt with a silhouette of Jesus carrying the cross instead of a tractor. This appeal may also target a specific group within popular culture by using artifacts from that culture (e.g., language like "fo shizzle" or phrases such as "Jesus is my Homeboy" to target urban and hip-hop culture).

Other Appeals

Other common persuasive appeals include the plain folks, bandwagon, and sex appeals. The plain folks appeal reaches out to average people and tells them this product or idea is for "everyman," not just the celebrity (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2004). For example, "everyday people" drive Toyota, just as "everyday people" choose Jesus Christ. The bandwagon appeal tells the individual "everyone is doing it" (Rogers, 2001), such as "the world has voted: Jesus is king." In the sex appeal, passion, lust, and desire are paired with the product in some way (Landa, 2004). Sex appeals in Christian merchandise may be used subtly. For example, a t-shirt that says "He's leading you on!" relies on the romantic meaning of the phrase in other contexts.

In light of the forgoing, the following research question is proposed:

RQ1: *What are the most frequently used persuasive appeals represented on Jesus Merchandise?*

COMMUNICATION FUNCTIONS AND JESUS MERCHANDISE

Swann (1981), proposing a functional method of analyzing religious-based communication, identifies the following functions: evangelism, edification (or nurture of believers), and public relations. Soukup (1989) adds information/knowledge as a fourth communication function, which includes but is not limited to basic day-to-day news items about the religious organization directed toward its members. A fifth function called self-identity/expression is suggested by the literature as well. Although individual forms of communication may possibly support more than one function, a primary function is usually identifiable.

Evangelism describes communication directed outside of the church. Merchandise in the evangelism category includes messages directed toward people who do not profess to be

Christians for the purpose of persuading them to follow Christ (Soukup, 1989). Merchandise that fits this category directly explains the Gospel message of the Christian faith (Loomis, 2004), which includes salvation from sin and eternal life through Jesus Christ (Schultze, 1990a; Sturgill, 2004). The message may offer help with the conversion process by giving instruction and teaching or by asking religious questions designed to bring someone into the faith (Brunstad, 2001). Examples include the Jesus "evangecube" (similar to the popular 1980's Rubics Cube), with the specific steps one might follow to become a Christian, or a t-shirt that says "Why Jesus?" followed by several Bible verses in smaller print that explain the reasons and invite people to make a personal profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

Edification of believers describes a parallel communication function directed to individuals who have already made a commitment to follow Jesus Christ. Merchandise that fits this category is designed to help Christians make decisions, grow in their faith, convict wrong behavior (Soukup, 1989), and support or reinforce beliefs already in place (Horsfield, 1984; McFarland, 1996). Merchandise fitting this function is often encouraging and inspirational (Horsfield, 1984; Morgan, 1998) and may even provide Christians with alternative forms of faith-based entertainment (Brunstad, 2001; Romanowski, 2001; Bakker, 2004). Examples of merchandise that edifies includes a poster of Jesus giving a hug to someone in the clouds, the popular *Footprints* poem, a *Life of Christ* board game that reinforces basic tenets of the faith, or jewelry of all kinds with Bible verses reminding Christians to trust in Jesus ("The Lord"), continue to follow in Jesus' path, and pray without ceasing.

A third communication function is public relations, which relates the religious organization and its beliefs to groups outside its members (Ind, 1990; Stevens, Loudon, Wrenn, & Cole, 2006). Within this function, Jesus' name and/or image might be used to create and maintain a positive image for Jesus and Christianity to those outside of the Christian faith, perhaps as a precursor to more directed evangelistic engagement (Swann, 1981). Jesus' appealing characteristics may be highlighted as a way to help change negative images or attitudes held by certain non-Christian groups (e.g., Jesus is out-of-touch with today's culture, or Jesus is more concerned with rules and regulations than having fun). Within this function, Jesus may be represented as relevant, hip, new, and different (Ries & Ries, 2002). Examples include t-shirts that say "Jesus rocks," "Jesus is my Homeboy," "Jesus would have surfed," or "Sex, Drugs, and Christian Rock-n-Roll," or a picture of Jesus saying "Whassup?" For instance, pictures of Jesus as "Sweet Savior" (Prothero, 2003), Jesus appearing as a child or playing with children, or Jesus with children sitting in his lap (the "maternal" Jesus) present images that confront popular public perceptions of Jesus as the representation of a vengeful, wrathful God (pp. 60–61).

Whereas public relations relates in an informational way to groups outside its members, the information/knowledge function identified by Soukup (1989) characterizes news communication by the religious group directed to its own members. The primary purpose of such member-directed communication, however, is not edification. Such merchandise might be used to help members keep up with developments within the church, provide information about leading Christian figures and their initiatives, or offer reminders of common goals and concerns (Vitti, 1987; Tanner, 1988). Examples include a "national prayer day—meet me at the pole" key chain, a coffee mug that promotes an upcoming event particular to a local church community, or a Christian leaders' calendar that profiles broadcasters and includes descriptions of their ministry initiatives.

Finally, Jesus merchandise may also function as a way of self identity/expression with Jesus and help form a Christian culture (McDannell, 1995; Hendershot, 2004). Products in this category make a profession of faith and dedication to Jesus or a personal statement about Jesus as a way to define one's self to the public as a testimonial. Examples include a "I'm a Jesus freak" bottle cap or necklace, a "hard core Jesus freak" bumper sticker, or a t-shirt that says "I love JC" [Jesus Christ]" or "Jesus saved me."

Self-identity/expression is based on the idea that clothing and other artifacts can function symbolically to communicate personal identity, group affiliation, and even personal beliefs (Miller, 2003; Park & Baker, 2007). In essence, merchandise is a token of one's conversion or an outward manifestation of an internal change. It may be seen by others as a personal expression and validation of the wearer's own Christian faith, what some have called "witness wear" (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982).

In light of the foregoing communication functions, the second research question is presented as follows:

RQ2: *Which communication functions—evangelism, edification, public relations, information/knowledge, and self-identity/expression—does Jesus merchandise most closely fit?*

METHODOLOGY

Sampling Procedures

The International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) lists the eight major groups of stores in the Christian retail business (Beres, 2004). Two of the companies on the list, The Munce Marketing Group and The Covenant Group, were omitted because they are not direct-to-public retailers. A third company, Mardel Christian & Educational Supply, was not considered because it does not supply the types of Jesus merchandise upon which this study focused. Therefore, we included the remaining five Christian retail groups from the ICSC list: Family Christian Book Stores, Lifeway Christian Stores, The Parable Group, Lemstone Christian Stores, and Berean Christian Stores. Several of these ICSC-listed retailers had supplemental Web sites that included additional merchandise not available in their hard copy catalogs, and material from these Web sites was added to the final sample of merchandise described below.

In addition, since the list provided by the ICSC ignores catalog-only retailers, Christian Book Distributors (CBD) was added to the list to improve the representativeness of the final list of retailers for a total of six retailers. According to the search engine company, Endeca, from whom CDB receives its navigation tools for its Web site, CBD is the nation's largest direct mail and e-commerce Christian retailer. The catalogs for each of the six retailers were collected for the same time period (summer 2007).

Study Procedure

Three undergraduate students served as coders for this project. The use of students as coders can produce reliable results in content analysis (Bucy, Lang, Potter, & Grabe, 1999; Kiernan & Levy, 1999). Coders participated in a two-day, eight-hour group training session with researchers.

Stage 1.   Coders were first instructed to identify types of merchandise appearing in each of the six major Christian retailer catalogs listed above. Merchandise such as books, periodicals, and movies were excluded from consideration because they represent broader categories of products sold by retailers and are least representative of the types of merchandise described in Jesus merchandise trends. For the purpose of this study, merchandise included apparel (e.g., shirts, ties, hats, shoes); apparel accessories (e.g., buttons, necklaces, rings, bracelets); toys (e.g., stuffed animals, action figures, dolls, board games, puzzles); food products (e.g., gum, candy, tea); decorative art work (e.g., scripture plaques, prints of religious art work, posters, select paintings); office/school supplies (e.g., pencils, paperweights, stickers, bookmarks, stationery); decorative home accessories and knick-knacks (e.g., dishware such as mugs, plates, and utensils; refrigerator magnets, door mats, candles); and novelty items (e.g., cell phone charms, key chains, automobile accessories such as bumper stickers, air fresheners, and window clings).

A total of 12,585 pieces of merchandise fitting the aforementioned definition of merchandise were identified among the six retailers. All merchandise included a brief text description along with some kind of image. Additional items appearing on the Web sites of several retailers, which did not appear in their hard copy catalog, also had text descriptions of each piece of merchandise and some type of zoom enhancement feature that allowed for closer inspection of the merchandise by coders.

Stage 2.   After merchandise among the six retailers was identified, coders were then instructed to determine which of the merchandise items identified in Stage One was Jesus merchandise, that is, which merchandise included a representation of Jesus' name, Jesus' image, or a combination of Jesus' name and image on it. "Jesus' name" included any written reference to the person recognized by the Christian faith as God the Son (Lockyer, 1975), that is, any name the Bible uses to refer to Jesus, including some of the most popular or common references: Savior, Creator, Great Physician, Prince of Peace, Jesus, Christ, Son of God, and Lord when used to refer to God the Son rather than God the Father (Hendry & Cramer, 2005). It could also include three other types of references: any slang reference using a version of an accepted name of Jesus as in the phrase "Fo Sheezy my Jeezy," where "Jeezy" is a slang version of Jesus' name using rapper Snoop Dog's language; any popular acronym that refers to the name of Jesus such as the J in WWJD (which stands for "What Would Jesus Do?"); and any pronoun that refers distinctly to the person of Jesus such as in the phrase "He died for me."

"Jesus' image" is any visual representation of the person recognized by the Christian faith as God the Son. Many arguments exist over what Jesus actually may have looked like (Prothero, 2003; Rausch, 2003), and many cultural and subcultural groups have created their own version of Jesus to line up with how they look and/or act (Fox, 2004). This has created a wide range of Jesus depictions that differ in race, stature, countenance, and style of dress. Jesus is often depicted in silhouettes or in other abstract visual representations as well. Therefore, in this study, Jesus' image is any visual representation of a person either labeled Jesus or implied to be Jesus based on context or usual association of that image with Jesus. Jesus' image in this study included depictions of Jesus as belonging to any race or cultural group. Silhouettes and crucifixes were also considered, providing they show Jesus in a commonly perceived way or the figure as Jesus is labeled as such.

Of the 12,585 pieces of merchandise identified by coders in stage one, a total of 982 pieces (or 7.8% of the merchandise) were identified as Jesus merchandise. Disagreements in coding

during stages one and two were settled through discussion with researchers until unanimous agreement could be reached.

Stage 3.   Coders were then instructed to determine which of 13 separate persuasive media appeals most closely fit each piece of Jesus merchandise. The 13 appeals included those defined earlier: informational appeal, good times, fear appeal, patriotic appeal, pathos appeal, achievement appeal, sex appeal, humor appeal, shock appeal, testimonial appeal, plain-folks pitch appeal, popular culture appeal, and bandwagon appeal.

Stage 4.   In the fourth and final stage, coders were then instructed to determine which of five communication functions most closely fit each piece of Jesus merchandise: evangelism, edification, public relations, information/knowledge, and self-identity.

To establish reliability levels among coders during stages three and four, 10% of the Jesus merchandise was analyzed. Inter-coder reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa. The level of coding agreement among coders for type of appeal was .83, and .87 for communication functions. All data were entered into SPSS for analysis. Descriptive statistics and chi-square analyses, as well as chi-square pairwise comparisons following a significant chi square, were performed.

RESULTS

What are the most frequently used persuasive appeals represented in Jesus merchandise, or merchandise that uses 1) Jesus' name, 2) Jesus' image, or 3) Jesus' name and image?

Of the 13 persuasive appeals, the two most common appeals to promote Jesus merchandise were informational (385/982, or 39.21%) and good times appeals (368/982, or 37.47%). Testimonial (99/982, or 10.08%), pathos (62/982, or 6.32%), and achievement appeals (43/982, or 4.38%) also were used for Jesus merchandise. Each of the following strategies captured less than 1%: popular culture (9/982, or .92%), plain-folk pitch (5/982, or .51%), bandwagon appeals (4/982, or .41%), fear (3/982, or .31%), humor (2/982, or .20%), and shock (2/982, or .20%). Patriotic and sex appeals were not associated with Jesus merchandise in this study. The strategies that were either not represented in the sample or that captured less than 1% of the strategies were dropped from further analyses.

More than half of the Jesus merchandise relied on Jesus' name (545/957, or 56.95%) followed by Jesus' image (298/957, or 31.14%) and Jesus' name and image (114/957, or 11.91%) to promote the products. An overall chi-square test on the five persuasive appeals (informational, good times, testimonial, pathos, and achievement) across the merchandise using Jesus' name, Jesus' image, or Jesus' name and image was significant (X^2 [8] $= 244.23$, $p \leq$ .001, *Cramer's V* $= .357$). Informational appeal was the most frequently used strategy on merchandise using Jesus' name to promote the products, while good times was most associated with merchandise using Jesus' image. Both information and good times were common appeals on merchandise using Jesus' name and image to sell the products (see Table 1).

Which communication functions—evangelism, edification, public relations, information/ knowledge, and self-identity/expression—does Jesus merchandise most closely fit?

TABLE 1
Merchandising using Jesus' Name, Jesus' Image, and Jesus' Name/Image by Type of Appeal

	Type of Appeal							
	Jesus' Name		Jesus' Image		Jesus' Name/Image		Total	
Informational	292	53.58% a	49	16.44% b	44	38.60% a	385	40.23%
Good times	140	25.69% b	175	58.72% a	53	46.49% a	368	38.45%
Pathos	4	0.73% c	48	16.11% b	10	8.78% b	62	6.48%
Achievement	22	4.04% c	21	7.05% c	0	0% b	43	4.50%
Testimonial	87	15.96% b	5	1.68% c	7	6.14% b	99	10.34%
Total	545		298		114		957	

Note. Columns with different lowercase letters are significantly different at $p \leq 05$.

Overall, the most common communication function of Jesus merchandise was edification (578/982, or 58.90%), with evangelism (182/982, or 18.50%) and public relations (119/982, or 12.10%) a distant second and third, respectively. About 5% of the merchandise served a knowledge function (48/982, or 4.90%), and 5% a self-identity function (55/982, or 5.60%).

A chi-square test on the five communication functions (evangelism, edification, public relations, information/knowledge, and self-identity) across the merchandise using Jesus' name, Jesus' image, or Jesus' name and image was significant (X^2 [8] = 130.19, $p \leq .001$, *Cramer's V* = .257). The most prevalent function of Jesus' merchandise was edification. About 22% of the products used Jesus' name for evangelism, while 17% of the products used Jesus' name in a way that fit the public relations function. In contrast, about 10% of the products using Jesus' image fit the evangelism category, and 3% fit the public relations category. Finally, about 24% of the products using both Jesus' name and image fit the evangelism category, and 12% fit the public relations category (see Table 2).

TABLE 2
Merchandising Using Jesus' Name, Jesus' Image, and Jesus' Name/Image by Type of Function

	Type of Function							
	Jesus' Name		Jesus' Image		Jesus' Name/Image		Total	
Evangelism	123	21.90% b	32	10.50% b	27	23.50% b	182	18.50%
Edification	283	50.40% a	230	75.40% a	65	56.50% a	578	58.90%
Public relations	96	17.10% b	9	3.00% b	14	12.20% b	119	12.10%
Knowledge	9	1.60% b	32	10.50% b	7	6.10% b	48	4.90%
Self-identity	51	9.10% b	2	0.70% b	2	1.70% b	55	5.60%
Total	562		305		115		982	

Note. Columns with different lowercase letters are significantly different at $p \leq 05$.

The question arises as to whether the types of persuasive appeals differ across the five communication functions. The result of the chi-square analysis examining the differences in appeals across the five functions was significant (X^2 [16] = 511.69, $p \leq$ .001, *Cramer's V* = .366). Informational appeals predominantly fit the evangelism category, while good times appeals fit the edification category and information/knowledge. Testimonials primarily fit the public relations category (see Table 3).

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that the two primary persuasive appeals to promote Jesus merchandise are informational and good times appeals. Prevalent secondary appeals include testimonials and pathos. Of these four strategies, informational and testimonial appeals rely on Jesus' name to promote Christianity, while good times appeals and pathos relied on Jesus' image. Jesus' name and Jesus' image were displayed on merchandise ranging from gel pens to posters to coffee mugs.

Jesus' Name

The findings suggest that Jesus' *name* is used to promote Christianity on various kinds of merchandise through the use of logical or rational appeals; in contrast, Jesus' *image* is used predominately in emotional appeals. In other words, Jesus' name is used to elicit thought about Christianity, while Jesus' image is used primarily to elicit feelings or emotions associated with Christianity. Jesus' name provides the audience of Jesus merchandise with information about the Christian faith, such as "Jesus loves," "Jesus died for a reason," "Jesus gives real peace," "Jesus is alive," and "Jesus is risen."

Jesus' name is used on merchandise to promote Christianity by having individuals who have experience with the Christian faith share how it has worked for them. A testimonial prompts the consumer to think that "if Jesus worked for them, then Jesus will work for me." It should be noted that testimonials associated with Jesus merchandise differ to some extent

TABLE 3
Communication Functions by Type of Appeal

	Types of Communication Function Type of Appeal										
	Evangelism		Edification		Public Relations		Knowledge		Self Identity		Total	
Informational	122	69.32%a	194	34.52%b	15	12.71%b	9	18.80%b	45	84.91%a	385	40.2%
Good times	33	18.75%b	271	48.22%a	24	20.34%b	36	75.00%a	4	7.55%b	368	38.4%
Pathos	11	6.25%c	45	8.01%c	4	3.40%b	1	2.10%b	1	1.89%b	62	6.5%
Achievement	7	3.98%c	30	5.34%c	3	2.54%b	1	2.10%b	2	3.77%b	43	4.5%
Testimonial	3	1.70%c	22	3.91%c	72	61.02%a	1	2.10%b	1	1.89%b	99	10.3%
Total	176		562		118		48		53		957	

Note.   Columns with different lowercase letters are significantly different at $p \leq 05$.

from typical brand advertising in that the "witness wearer," rather than an expert or a celebrity, champions the product or Christianity. Thus, the success of the testimonial appeal relies heavily on the extent to which the target market can relate to the "witness wearer." As reference group theory predicts, consumers are persuaded by testimonials from people they consider similar to themselves (O'Guinn, Allen, & Semenik, 2006).

Jesus' Image

Jesus' *image* on various kinds of merchandise helps to promote Christianity by evoking emotional responses either by associating the product with some form of happiness or by triggering guilt, compassion, or sorrow. A picture of Jesus' face with a crown of thorns upon his head, for example, may elicit compassion from certain individuals. The current findings show that eliciting feel-good association—for example, fun/happiness/good times/warm feelings—was a popular strategy in Jesus merchandise. Such popularity may stem from the research suggesting that advertisements that trigger emotional response are more effective than advertisements requiring a substantial amount of thought (O'Guinn et al., 2006).

Does Jesus merchandise capture the attention of the public by using strategies that are emotionally manipulative? There is little evidence from this study to support the position that such strategies are used unfairly to emotionally manipulate the consumer (Prewitt, 2003). Despite the fact that pathos was the fourth most prevalent appeal identified, this appeal accounted for less than 7% of the appeals; moreover, fear and shock appeals constituted less than 1% of all strategies used in Jesus merchandise. The limited use of fear appeals such as "refuse Jesus = hell" suggests that stereotypical "fire and brimstone" approaches are not as common as seeker-sensitive appeals, which include appeals to fun/happiness/good times/warm feelings (Prothero, 2003). Our findings also show that shock appeals are not common to sell Jesus merchandise, despite some claims that religious imagery in advertising is becoming more dramatic and controversial (Mallia, 2009).

Certain tactics, including sex and patriotic appeals, were identified in a general search of Jesus merchandise. Although sold by independent vendors, merchandise using these appeals was not sold by the six mainstream vendors that comprised the present sample. For example, some independent Web sites sell items such as "the dirty Bible verse" calendar, or a "What Would Jesus Do?" thong. Similarly, patriotic appeals were not used to sell products offered by vendors included in the present study. In fact, more often than not, patriotic appeals refer to God rather than Jesus, for example, a t-shirt that says, "God bless America," or "in God we trust."

Communication Functions

Results indicate that most of the Jesus merchandise in this study fit the edification communication function. Thus, most Jesus merchandise, like much popular religious media, targets Christians for their personal growth. However, this study could not determine whether Christians are more interested in purchasing Jesus merchandise for personal fulfillment than for sharing the gospel with people who do not profess to be Christian (i.e., the evangelism function), or for promoting Jesus and Christianity to nonbelievers (i.e., the public relations function). Additional research is needed to determine how audiences actually make use of such merchandise. As with other religious media, it is likely that merchandise fitting one category, for example,

edification, may be used primarily for evangelistic purposes and vice versa (e.g., Horsfield, Hess, & Medrano, 2004).

Jesus' *image* is often used on Jesus merchandise as a way to motivate and inspire individuals professing faith in Christ. Images provide believers with visual representations of Jesus and His sacrifices made on their behalf. The success of images to motivate and inspire may, at least in part, be due to affective responses triggered by the images. Jesus' image also fit the evangelism communication function. The use of images to evangelize may be grounded on the premises that visual messages are more likely than print ones to attract the attention of nonbelievers and remain lodged in their memory.

In contrast, Jesus' *name* served principally a public relations function in promoting Christ to nonbelievers. Moreover, Jesus merchandise that fulfills a public relations function is typically a print message.

How is Jesus portrayed on merchandise? The high use of "feel good" strategies—fun/happiness/good times/warm feelings—associates Jesus and Christianity with the "good life," emphasizing the community of Christian believers. Moreover, if material consumption is equated with the "good life" (Lawson, Sleasman, & Anderson, 2007), then advertisements targeted at the consumption of Jesus merchandise provides consumers further assurance of a good life.

Jesus merchandise also portrays Jesus (and Christianity) as something desirable, for example, "Jesus saves" and "Jesus takes care of everything." The fact that 75% of the strategies were classified as informational appeals and fun/happiness/good times/warm feelings' appeals points to the need to further dissect these two kinds of appeals. Informational appeals, for instance, could distinguish between characteristics of Christianity (e.g., "Jesus saves," "Jesus died on the cross and rose again") and evaluative statements (e.g., "Christianity is the only true religion," "Believing in Jesus is better than believing in nothing"). Further inspection of the images of Jesus would also provide a more accurate picture of how Jesus is portrayed on Jesus merchandise. For instance, are the most common images of Jesus depictions of Jesus as a child, a shepherd, or a king? The results of the present study also raise the question, what appeals are most effective in selling Jesus merchandise? Rather than isolating the appeals to sell Jesus merchandise, future work is warranted to identify what appeals work best to peddle these products.

The present analysis has provided a snapshot of the strategies used to sell Jesus-related merchandise, addressing the call for research recognizing the connection between spirituality, advertising, and marketing (Marmor-Lavie, Stout, & Lee, 2009). Clearly, spirituality translates into demand for products worth billions of dollars (Kale, 2004), and the strategies used to sell those products warrant further investigation. The question becomes to what extent spirituality should be branded and promoted the same way as other products and goods. Where is there a bigger brand than Jesus Christ, for example?

No doubt, the eager disciple of Christ can now accessorize—not only with Bible in tow but also by clothing the outer person with t-shirts, bracelets, and fish stickers—to correspond with the reborn inner person. Yet one wonders whether in the midst of a marketing frenzy, has the thrust of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18)—which encourages Christians to evangelize and disciple the nations—given way to the comforting, edifying effects of the latest in gospel apparel? Or is this trend simply a reflection of a rediscovered boldness among believers, demanding recognition in the marketplace of ideas with their born-again dollars?

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