

Processes and Outcomes in the Creation of Radio Commercial Advertising

A Two-Step Qualitative Analysis

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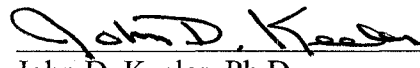
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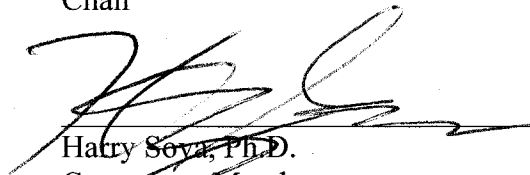
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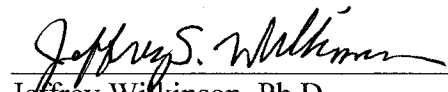
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Processes and Outcomes in the Creation of Radio Commercial Advertising

A Two-Step Qualitative Analysis

Abstract

As radio approaches a century of existence, the aural medium faces an increasingly uncertain future. Several factors, including industry consolidation and increased competition, have conspired to jeopardize radio's position as a medium of choice for listeners and advertisers alike. This study examined radio commercials and the people who create them to determine if—and how—the radio industry is responding to the new challenges it faces in the competitive advertising arena. The study systematically explored both the content of a group of radio commercials that were produced by local radio stations and a variety of influencing factors, including organizational processes at the radio stations, which were antecedent to the creation of that content, using a two-step qualitative approach. In the first step—utilizing Burkean Cluster Analysis—a group of 96 radio commercials was evaluated to identify any writing tendencies that confirmed the existence of what Ryan and Peterson referred to as *convention and formula*. The results gave strong indication that the creators of these radio commercials followed a particular *convention and formula* in their work—that there was an agreed-upon correct way to produce radio commercials. In the second step—utilizing Ethnographic methodology—a group of ten persons who bore primary responsibility for the creation and production of radio commercials at the selected radio stations were observed and interviewed to assess the impact of antecedent factors, including the work environment and the aspects of the media organization, on that process. The results strongly indicated several factors. First, the creators of radio advertising content were profoundly overworked, consistently

worked long hours, and were unable to give the attention to content they believed the clients deserved. Second, organizational cultures tended to allow advertising clients to exert undue influence on radio commercial content—often in negative ways. Third, when many of the specific antecedent factors present within the media organizations were considered en bloc, a *general* sense emerged that seemed to indicate that the radio commercial production process as a whole was not highly valued. The study suggests that in the rapidly changing and highly competitive media environment, a new paradigm for radio station management is essential, one in which critical commercial production staffing issues are addressed, an effective system of recognition and reward for commercial production staff is developed, and the standard policy of free radio commercial production is reconsidered.

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Chapter 1—Statement of the Problem

As radio approaches a century of existence, the aural medium faces an increasingly uncertain future. Subsequent to the Telecommunications Act of 1996, several factors, including industry consolidation and increased competition, have conspired to jeopardize radio's position as a medium of choice for listeners and advertisers alike.

Industry consolidation has invited scrutiny on several levels. First, consolidation has created several radio giants—such as Clear Channel, Cumulus, and others—giving them the opportunity to take advantage of economies of scale never before available. Inevitably, this has led to some level of personnel reduction at many local stations and increased centralization of content decision-making. In many instances, the resulting perception from listeners is that stations with primarily music formats play a smaller number of songs over and over again, and that stations with news or talk formats often present a singular voice with less diversity of alternate perspectives. Second, relaxation of the local ownership rules has provided these same media giants with the opportunity to operate multiple stations in a single market. This has led to the now-common practice of establishing market clusters that are intended to create a competitive advantage in the advertising arena. In many instances, the resulting perception from the advertising community is that cluster organizations flex their corporate muscle, driving advertising rates up. Third, while the post-1996 radio industry paradigm of consolidation of ownership and clustering of stations within a single market was made possible by changes in national policy, it was made reality by the industry's ability to “go public” and use Wall Street money to fund acquisitions (and the ensuing consolidation). In every

instance, this has led to unrelenting pressure on radio stations to increase profit margins and return on investment for stockholders each year. As a result of these changes, the radio industry currently finds itself facing a critical look from listeners, advertisers, and even Wall Street investors and analysts.

At the same time, radio—like all media today—has also seen a dramatic increase in competition for both consumers and advertisers. Rapid technological developments have created a completely new kind of competitive environment. Digitizing audio and video files, as well as the subsequent development of codecs and protocols for copying files, have made storage and loss-less replication of entertainment content possible, and the Internet has made sharing—either through legitimate or illegitimate means—of those files commonplace. iPods, Wi-Fi, iTunes, MP3s, broadband, and interactivity are among the “buzz words” of the first decade of the twenty-first century. More than “buzz words,” however, they are powerful new challenges for radio in the battle for consumers’ time and attention and, subsequently, for advertisers’ dollars.

The radio industry is not oblivious to these challenges. Considerable attention has been given to the “question of survival” in the contemporary media environment. A popular (and excellent) weblog has addressed the situation on numerous occasions—two of which follow. On May 15, 2006, Fred Jacobs, the founder of Jacobs Media—one of the largest radio consulting firms in the United States—made the following post in his popular “JacoBlog”:

What an incredible disconnect we have when it comes to youth radio.

Several years ago, Steve Goldstein hijacked me into participating on the NAB’s programming committee. The task? Create compelling panels for

programmers and managers. As most of you know, that's tantamount to making baseball games move faster. Not easy. But we put together some good stuff, and I created a panel called "My 14-Year-Old Thinks Radio Sucks." The title said it all, and we had a solid group of participants. The idea, of course, was to stimulate radio's managers and owners to think about how the industry is missing the boat—and lots of revenue—because of our 25-54 myopia. That was in 2001. Five years later, it's the same old-same old. And the craziness is that when you speak to radio managers, corporate executives, and CEOs about this dilemma, they are always in agreement. Intellectually, it's obvious that if radio doesn't start creating programming aimed at teens (or even pre-teens), our future is bleak. We have already lost the current generation of teenagers to the Internet and iPods. (1)

Jacob's hopeful solution for survival was radio's latest technological gadget: HD Radio. Perhaps this should come as no surprise. It seems consistent with historical patterns that suggest the radio industry looks to advancements in technology to ward off threats to its existence. Developments such as FM Quad and AM Stereo come to mind.

In an April 2007 weblog entry, Jacob expressed optimism about emerging methods and practices in audience measurement that he expected to be the answer to radio's survival: "At this crossroads for our radio, everyone needs a chance to participate—especially young listeners who continue to move away from our medium with each passing year. Broadcasters need the assurance these listeners will be counted. If not, radio's long-term future is on shaky ground" (1). Certainly, accurate radio audience

measurement methods are crucial, and any technological and/or methodological advancement that can improve the ratings process should be welcomed. The fact remains that these improvements alone will not likely solve the survival dilemma for the aural medium.

Today's threats are further complicated by the reality that it is not only consumers who have options. Advertisers also have many more options available to them than ever before—so many more that a growing number of critics fear that American culture is quickly moving toward ad saturation, while a growing number of consumers are quickly moving toward ad avoidance. This leads to a curious twist of irony, as illustrated by the January 8, 2007, issue of the advertising industry trade periodical Adweek, in which writer Brian Morrissey noted, “Consumer ad avoidance is leading to a mini-boom in new services offering to pay people to watch ads” (9).

At first glance, it seems that media other than radio are working to develop strategies with which to respond to these new challenges. For example, because TiVo, zipping, zapping, and new competition have posed a threat to television as an advertising medium, that industry has explored new advertising strategies, including virtual signage and product placement. Virtual signage uses digital technology to superimpose an advertiser's logo or billboard-style message in the line of sight of television cameras, usually at live sporting events. Product placement incorporates the use and visible positioning of brand products within entertainment programming. As another example, the low response rate of click-through ads and the high annoyance of pop-up ads have posed a threat to the Internet as an advertising medium. However, those promoting this medium have countered this threat by exploring new advertising strategies, including

sponsored links, which appear as “results” to user searches. In contrast, as the previously mentioned factors have posed a threat to radio as an advertising medium, the industry has responded primarily with new technologies for multicasting, metered audience measurement, and faster client billing. It seems that there is nothing new being developed in terms of strategies for improving radio advertising. So, while this generation’s media buzz words include iPods, Wi-Fi, iTunes, MP3s, broadband, and interactivity, the radio industry is preoccupied with its own buzz words—such as HD Radio and PPMs. However, this industry appears to be paying less attention to the substantial matter of improving programming and advertising content.

It should be noted that threats to radio’s survival as an advertising medium are nothing new. At the time of its beginnings, many critics did not believe that radio was intended to be a medium used for advertising at all. Even advertising icon Raymond Rubicam, cofounder of Young & Rubicam Advertising, questioned the concept. David Ogilvy wrote of Rubicam, “In the early days of radio, he proposed that the programs should be paid for by the government and carry no advertising” (197). Still today, after all these years, the aural medium finds itself doing battle for its share of consumer attention and advertising revenue—and perhaps even for survival.

Factors Prompting the Study

It is recognition of this rapidly changing media environment and the challenges the current and future radio industry faces in generating advertising revenue that has prompted this study. The study examines radio commercials and the people who create them, in an effort to determine if—and how—the radio industry is responding to the new challenges it faces in the competitive advertising arena. The first point of inquiry is a

content analysis of a sample of radio commercials, utilizing Burkean Cluster Analysis methodology that will be described in Chapter 3. It was thought that a systematic analysis of radio commercials would reveal certain writing tendencies that are commonly employed by commercial creators at local radio stations and provide insights as to why that is. The second point of inquiry is a type of ethnographic analysis. It was also thought that through careful observation and in-depth interviews, a variety of factors that influence the creation of commercials could be identified, and the impact that those antecedent factors have on the local radio commercial development process could be addressed. Particular consideration was given to work environments and other organizational factors within the radio station workplace that influenced those who are most directly involved in the creation of commercials at the local radio station level.

The theoretical foundation upon which the study is based is clearly expressed by Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese in Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content. “Content is the common element to two main bodies of research: the *influences* on mass media content and the *effects of* content on people and society” (253). While many studies attempt to measure the effects of advertising content, this study focuses on the antecedent influences that affect advertising content. Shoemaker and Reese point to the need for “...media sociology studies that look at how media content is shaped by the characteristics of the media, media workers, and the environment in which the media exist” (253). While the emphasis throughout their book is on program and news content—content that mass media utilize to “shape social reality” (258)—it seems logical that the same or similar types of antecedent factors are capable of influencing the content of radio advertising messages, produced in this instance at the

local station level. Shoemaker and Reese consider these factors a “network of influences, ranging from communication workers’ personal attitudes and role conceptions, routines of media work, [and] media organizational structure and culture” (258).

The study also builds on the work of John Ryan and Richard Peterson. In their exploration of country music as a media art form, Ryan and Peterson articulated several different organizational models in which “media art” is created. Two of these models are *convention and formula*, in which there is essentially an agreed-upon “correct way” to produce media art, and *product image*, in which the prevailing motivation on the creator of media art is approval from those next up the organization’s hierarchy of approval.

In reality, radio commercials come from a variety of sources. Some are written and produced by advertising agencies. Some are simply the audio portion of a television commercial. Some are delivered live by radio station personnel appearing at the advertiser’s location—the remote broadcast. But many radio commercials are written and produced by personnel in local radio stations. These are referred to as *local direct* commercials. (The term “direct” refers to the absence of an advertising agency in the selling process. The radio station deals directly with the advertiser.) Since no advertising agency commissions are paid by the radio station on the sale of local direct commercials, they are often the most profitable category of commercials that a radio station sells and are, therefore, much desired by station management. Their significance cannot be overstated. These local direct commercials are also the ones most impacted by organizational factors within the radio station. For these reasons, local direct radio commercials alone are the focus of this study.

Certainly, concerns exist about radio commercials that have been written and produced by advertising agencies. In a speech delivered to the National Advertisers and Radio Advertising Bureau Radio Workshop, Edward McCabe, President of New York advertising agency Scali/McCabe/Sloves, made the following provocative remarks to an audience of national advertisers who routinely utilize the services of major advertising agencies:

Creative directors, *by their own admission* aren't paying much attention to radio...Many account management people and brand managers aren't interested in wasting any time fiddling with your radio commercial either. Because they're more interested in preserving the high level of mediocrity in what they believe to be more important media. (630-631)

Concerns also exist about radio commercials that have been written and produced for another medium (television) entirely, making them not only less appropriate for the radio medium, but seemingly less effective in communicating to listeners.

Although examining factors currently influencing radio commercials produced by advertising agencies and the use (on radio) of commercials that were written and produced for television are in need of scholarly study, again this study focused on those that were the product of local radio stations. Despite the fact that radio has been a prominent communication vehicle for many decades, and despite the fact that, with the limited exceptions of listener support and government funding, advertising has been the predominant method of funding this aural medium for all of its history, surprisingly few scholarly studies have examined the nature of radio advertising and the contexts,

organizational processes, and other factors that influence its development. This study is intended to help fill this void.

Radio—The Media Advertising Underdog

Radio seems to be a less popular medium for advertising than other media.

Advertisers, consumers, and even researchers seem to demonstrate negative perceptions about radio advertising compared with other advertising media.

Advertisers' Perceptions

Two studies explored local advertisers' use of and attitudes toward radio. The first—a 1993 study by Glen Nowak, Glen Cameron, and Dean Krugman—surveyed 190 decision-makers in two markets (Athens, GA, and Madison, WI) and reported that "...77 percent of the local advertisers in these two markets used daily newspapers" (43), while 57% used radio. Notably, an average of "43 percent of their advertising budget" was spent on newspapers, while "...radio...accounted for about 26 percent of local advertising budgets" (43). Further, "...when asked which media they have used in the past three years, but are no longer using, 24 percent mentioned radio" (44). The second study—a 2005 study by Leonard Reid, Karen Whitehill King, Hugh Martin, and Hyeonjin Soh—surveyed 130 advertising decision-makers, finding that "...daily newspapers and radio are perceived as the most effective media for local advertising" (35).

Beyond these surveys, however, actual advertising expenditures seem to reflect different advertiser perceptions and preferences about radio as an advertising medium. Media consultant Ed Shane has reported that radio's share of advertising revenue in the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century was about 7%, compared with

television's 24% and newspaper's 23% (21), a ratio of more than three-to-one in each case.

In The Business of Media, David Croteau and William Hoynes have also articulated a strong advertiser preference for television, but they have done so in terms of the *growth* of the advertising industry over the last half century:

Between 1950 and 1995, the total amount spent on advertising in the United States—in constant 2000 dollars—increased from \$40.3 billion to more than \$178.7 billion. Advertising revenue increased substantially in all of the four largest ad-supported media—newspapers, radio, television, and magazines. By far, the largest increases were in the television industry... (46)

More telling, perhaps, for our purposes was their comparison of the *rate* of advertising revenue growth for radio and television during that time. In constant 2000 dollars, radio advertising revenue increased from approximately \$4.5 billion in 1950 to almost \$13 billion in 1995, an increase of about 280%. Television advertising revenue increased from approximately \$1 billion in 1950 to more than \$40 billion in 1995, an increase of 4000% (47)!

In the face of increased competition from emerging interactive media, radio's share of media revenue is barely holding its own. On November 29, 2004, Business Wire published its report on advertising expenditures for the first three quarters of the year. Respected radio writer/producer Ken Dardis summarized the report on his advertising resource Web site:

Year-to-year comparison of advertising spending for the first nine months of 2004—across a number of categories—shows radio as being the biggest loser. Network TV, Consumer Magazines, Cable TV, Outdoor, and the Internet all have double-digit increases from figures reported at this time in 2003. Local Radio and Network Radio show a lowly 1.9% and 2.6% increase, respectively. (Audiographics.com)

In more recent personal correspondence with the author, Dardis indicated that the trend is continuing. “Revenue in 2005 was flat over 2004; 2006 is promising no better” (Dardis). Even more pointedly, publisher B. Eric Rhoads made a telling observation about advertiser attitudes toward radio as an advertising medium. The editorial for the December 8, 2003, edition of Radio Ink was titled “Anyone Else Would Have Been Fired!” (6). That headline and its accompanying opinion piece decried the fact that the radio industry seemed content with its 7% share of advertising revenue in the United States. Further, Rhoads’s editorial reminded the reader of the likely reason why radio’s share of advertising revenue is so low: advertisers have a low level of confidence in radio’s ability to deliver results. “Those of us in Radio know that well-executed Radio strategies get incredible results. The problem is that advertisers don’t believe us” (6). In personal electronic correspondence with the author, Rhoads maintained that radio’s reputation with advertisers is based on the perception that most radio commercials are “dreck” (Rhoads). The evidence suggests that advertisers have shown a strong preference for other media over radio as an advertising medium.

Consumers' Perceptions

The indications are that consumers have also developed a preference for television advertising over radio advertising. Consumers, when asked to discuss their favorite or least favorite commercials, almost always identify television commercials, and even with prompting can rarely recall a single radio commercial. In their 2004 textbook, Modern Radio Production, Carl Hausman, Philip Benoit, Fritz Messere, and Lewis O'Donnell actually use television commercials to illustrate the different emotional appeals that radio advertising can make, because the television commercials were more likely to be familiar to their readers (242).

A personal anecdote further illustrates the point. In undergraduate courses that I teach, I frequently conduct an informal survey of students' favorite and least favorite commercials. In virtually every case, the commercials the students mention are television commercials. Even when prompted, students can rarely remember a radio commercial. Yet, their media use habits reveal that they listen to the radio for very long periods of time, although they may avoid commercials by changing stations.

Interestingly, a basic understanding of radio station hot clock design¹ seems to confirm that radio station programmers are cognizant of this reality. Programmers devote a significant amount of time and effort to minimize the perceived negative impact that commercials have on audience levels. Consider these factors:

- Radio stations carefully consider the *placement* of commercial clusters in order to minimize negative impact on ratings.² Most often, a commercial cluster is placed five minutes or more into a quarter hour. Radio ratings service Arbitron gives credit for a full quarter hour of listening when a

survey respondent reports at least five minutes of listening in a quarter hour. Therefore, this strategy is implemented under the assumption that listeners tune out when the commercial cluster begins.

- Many radio stations also minimize the *number* of commercial clusters, overtly promoting that they only interrupt the music “once or twice an hour,” clearly implying that *they* realize that listeners do not like commercials.

The unfortunate result of limiting the number of commercial clusters, of course, is that those clusters that remain inevitably consist of a greater number of commercials. David Dess, the Vice President of Brand Development and Communications for Sprint PCS, responded to the practice in an interview for the November 6, 2000, issue of MediaWeek. His comments were summarized by interviewer Katy Bachman:

Dess credited radio with helping to build Sprint’s fledgling PCS brand.

But he said he has doubts about radio’s future utility for Sprint. He noted that a spot audit of stations uncovered a single pod with 18 spots and far too many stations running 8 or 9 spots per break. “A vast majority of the industry is heading that direction,” he said. (7)

Dess recognized the irony. Radio programmers have developed a strategy that acknowledges consumer dislike of radio commercials. They limit the number of commercial “pods,” thereby limiting the number of times per hour that listeners tune away from the station. In so doing, however, they ensure that listeners miss Sprint radio commercials entirely.

Researchers' Perceptions

An investigation of mass media research reveals that media effects researchers have also preferred studying media other than radio. Little scholarly research at all has concentrated on the effects of radio advertising, particularly local radio advertising. The majority of studies have been television-oriented, and many studies that purport to be “inter-media” studies have in fact ignored radio. The following sampling of some popular works in this area of study illustrates the problem.

O’Sullivan addressed the situation in the first paragraph of the Series Editor’s Preface to Stephen Barnard’s Studying Radio:

Although radio was the first truly *broadcast* medium to emerge and to make its mark in the homes of the twentieth century, it has received relatively little attention by comparison with cinema and television. In modern cultures and modern times, with the premium placed on sound *and* vision, if not interactivity, radio has tended to be regarded as an increasingly obsolete or anachronistic medium—the “secondary,” the “blind” or “background” medium; the “Cinderella” of Media Studies.

(preface)

Leo Jeffres’s widely used survey of mass media research, Mass Media Effects, acknowledged radio’s underdog status when he wrote, “Most media comparisons involve newspapers and television” (27). More to the point, almost every study cited in Jeffres’s chapter on advertising effects was a study that explored print, or television, or both print and television, but not radio.

Ogilvy on Advertising is widely regarded as “must reading” for anyone interested in the field of advertising. Out of 217 pages of content, only nine include any mention of radio at all. Ogilvy’s writing is mostly critical of the aural medium. Gerard J. Tellis’s Effective Advertising: Understanding When, How, and Why Advertising Works is an undergraduate primer for students exploring the field. In delineating the importance of advertising, he wrote:

Advertising provides major support for the media in the United States and many other countries. Several media, including broadcast TV, much of cable TV, newspapers, magazines, and much of the Internet, reach consumers either free or much below cost. The reason is that advertisers pay media owners for displaying their ads...advertising subsidizes these media. (4)

Remarkably, radio is absent from the list of media!

Alan D. Fletcher and Thomas A. Bowers included a chapter titled “Message Research—Broadcast” in their survey volume Fundamentals of Advertising Research. Surprisingly—or perhaps not—every example given of broadcast message research was an example of television message research.

Media research dealing with writing, creativity, or commercial production has almost always assumed a television orientation. Studies have measured the impact of different variables on advertising effectiveness—variables such as commercial clutter, the scheduling of commercials, humor in advertising, and whether or not consumers like a commercial. As previously noted, most of these projects were characterized as inter-media studies, but in reality, many either ignored radio or minimized its significance.

Clearly, media scholars have also demonstrated a preference for television and print advertising over radio.

The Question of Content

As we have seen, in a variety of ways, advertisers, consumers, and researchers express less enthusiasm for radio as an advertising medium than other media. Arguably the world's most respected authority on advertising, David Ogilvy, believes that radio is actually a less effective advertising medium, and he has suggested that radio's "problem" is a content problem that may be rooted in production processes in the radio industry.

Consider the following observation in his canonical work from the early 1980s:

Radio has become the Cinderella of advertising media, representing only 6 per cent of total advertising in the United States. There is no research to measure the efficacy of the commercials, so nobody knows what works. A pilot study I commissioned suggests four positive factors...Ninety commercials out of a hundred do none of these things. (113)

In truth, twenty-plus years after the fact, Ogilvy's "four factors" might seem to be overly simplistic. They are 1) "identify your brand early in the commercial," 2) "identify it often," 3) "promise the listener a benefit early in the commercial," and 4) "repeat it often" (113). The point made here is that even in the early eighties, Ogilvy hinted that radio commercial creators paid little or no attention to the limited existent research about radio's effectiveness. Professors Murphy Sewall and Dan Sarel agree. Their landmark study of radio commercial characteristics in 1986 found that "advertisers have been reluctant to apply either laboratory or field findings about characteristics that affect consumer responses to commercial messages" (58). This concern is corroborated more

recently by Roger Wimmer and Joseph Dominick in their 2006 undergraduate textbook, Media Research Methods, who observe that “advertising experts do not incorporate ‘cutting edge’ research into the development of commercials” (376). Instead, according to Wimmer and Dominick, they create commercials for other reasons, including the potential for winning awards or peer approval. This potential represents another factor that may influence the creation of radio commercials, one that is explored further in a later discussion of ethnographic analysis.

Essentially, while it will be more thoroughly detailed in the next chapter, which reviews literature relevant to this study, it is noted here that very few radio studies actually speak to content. Further, an awareness of the antecedent factors that influence the creation of advertising content is absent from the current research. In fact, Tellis—speaking about advertising in general—observes the following:

Extensive review of more than 50 years of rigorous research on advertising suggests some important conclusions about its effects on sales. These conclusions can be grouped into four classes: effects of advertising intensity, advertising dynamics, advertising strategy, and advertising contingencies. (15)

While the “advertising strategy” class includes creative aspects of commercials (including novelty and emotional appeals), there is no mention whatsoever of the impact of content or the impact that antecedent factors (such as organizational processes) may have on the creation of radio commercials. And yet, there is a significant amount of attention in media effects theory given to “the media organization” and its impact on types of media content *other* than advertising.

The Media Organization and Production Processes

In addition to the writing of Shoemaker and Reese mentioned previously, Dennis McQuail's Mass Communication Theory includes an entire chapter on the impact of "the media organization" on media content, attempting to "identify and assess the potential influence of various organizational and communicator factors on what is actually produced" (276). Like Shoemaker and Reese, most of McQuail's focus—and most of the focus of the research he describes—is on news content. He notes, "Less attention has been paid to the production of non-journalistic content, especially drama, music and entertainment, but similar forces are at work" (276). Advertising—although it is a form of media content—is missing not only from the extant research, but even from McQuail's inventory of nonjournalistic content forms.

Within the context of news content, one example of the impact of "the media organization"—introduced briefly earlier in this chapter—is related to the various ways that media units operate. McQuail reviews five "frameworks" or models within which mass media organizations tend to function, first articulated by John Ryan and Richard Peterson in relation to the creation of media art—specifically country music. One of the models is known as "*convention and formula*, in which members of a relevant 'art world' agree on a 'recipe,' a set of widely held principles which tell workers how to combine elements to produce works in the particular genre" (333). This seems to suggest the question, has the radio industry determined that there is a "correct" way to create a commercial?

Another related framework or model is known as *product image*. McQuail quotes Ryan and Peterson as follows:

Having a product image is to shape a piece of work so that it is most likely to be accepted by decision makers at the next link in the chain. The most common way of doing this is to produce works that are much like the products that have most recently passed through all the links in the decision chain to become successful. (333)

Is it possible that radio commercial creators are by necessity more concerned with the acceptance of some decision makers—such as an employer, supervisor, or even the client—than they are about whether the commercial effectively communicates an advertising message to the intended audience?

At the heart of each of these models is the question of producing what McQuail referred to as a “good piece of media work” (333). His account concludes with the following summary:

Most studies of media production seem to confirm the strong feeling held by established professionals that they know how best to combine all the available factors of production within the inevitable constraints. This may be achieved at the cost of not actually communicating with the audience, but it does secure the integrity of the product. (333)

It is again noted that the “good piece of media work” to which McQuail alludes generally refers to news or entertainment production and not to advertising commercial production. This study, however, presupposes that radio commercials are a form of media production (content) and that the same principles apply.

The Purpose of the Study

The problem, then, as has been argued up to this point, is that radio—as a medium for advertising—has often been perceived to be the “Cinderella.” Yet little research exists to either verify or dispute that perception. As we have seen, several noted advertising theorists, including Ogilvy, Sewall and Sarel, and Wimmer and Dominick have pointed to what they believe are deficiencies in radio commercial content, but again systematic content analysis is absent from the existent radio research. Additionally, organizational theorists, including Shoemaker and Reese and McQuail have detailed the impact of organizational processes on media production, but their work has not included commercial production or radio commercial production, in particular.

Therefore, as previously stated, this study systematically explored both the content of a group of radio commercials that were produced by local radio stations and, subsequently, a variety of influencing factors, including organizational processes in the radio stations antecedent to the creation of that content, using methodological approaches that will be explained in detail in Chapter 3.

This twofold approach was guided by a number of exploratory questions. In the realm of content, for example, the following exploratory questions were considered:

- To what extent do local direct radio commercials reveal writing tendencies that led to the use of similar copy expressions?
- To what extent do local direct radio commercials make similar—yet mutually exclusive—claims?

Personal experience and anecdotal evidence indicate that many radio commercials tend to address similar themes and use the same or similar terms to depict those themes—almost

to the point of becoming clichés—and that many radio commercials tend to make the same or similar claims as those made by other products—even competing products. These exploratory questions were designed to systematically examine a group of local direct radio commercials in an attempt to identify those tendencies.

In the realm of organizational processes, the following exploratory questions were addressed:

- What are the primary factors that influence the creation of local direct radio commercials?
- What kinds of backgrounds do radio stations look for in selecting the creators and producers of local direct radio commercials?
- What kinds of resources and training are provided for the creators of local direct radio commercials?
- What are the processes in place for the creation of local direct radio commercials?
- In what kind of work environment do creators of local direct radio commercials work?

Based on the models posited by Shoemaker and Reese and Ryan and Peterson, it was expected that antecedent factors were in place within the media organizations (the radio stations) that influenced their production of local direct radio commercials. These antecedent factors could have been organizational expectations concerning employee qualifications. They could have been organizational commitment of resources for production personnel and processes. They could have been formal organizational procedures that production personnel were expected to follow. They could have been that which Shoemaker and Reese refer to as “...routines of media work” (258). These

exploratory questions guided the interviews of radio station personnel, presupposing that many, if not most, of the organizational factors were put in place by design and that a better understanding of them would provide significant insight into the strategies that these radio stations are implementing in response to the new challenges they face.

Relevance of the Study

The study is important for several reasons. First, despite its “Cinderella” reputation, radio is an important part of popular culture—as both an information and entertainment medium. Radio is pervasive. According to Arbitron, the primary radio audience measuring service, “Radio reaches more than 94 per cent of the U. S. 12+ population each week. On average, Americans spend about 20 hours per week listening to their favorite stations” (RAB, 3). Second, radio is an important part of the advertising world. The \$10 billion annually spent on radio advertising may not be as much as television, but it is still a hugely significant amount of money. Third, the media landscape is changing at a dizzying pace, and the competition for advertising dollars is rapidly escalating. Radio as an advertising medium will continue to come under ever-increasing scrutiny, and its survival may even be threatened. Fourth, as has been shown, radio receives little or no attention from the academic community. Even “studies about studies” tend to overlook the aural medium. This study begins to fill the void in research—especially research that explores commercial content and the impact of antecedent factors, including organizational processes, on radio commercial creation at the local station level. In the next chapter, literature that is relevant to this study will be discussed.

End Notes

¹ “Hot clock design” refers to the practice of scheduling the times at which various radio program elements occur during a given hour.

² A commercial cluster is often referred to as a “stop set.” It is a group of commercials played one after the other in between blocks of music, news, or other content-related programming. Commercial clusters should not be confused with cluster analysis.

Chapter 2—Review of the Literature

It has already been suggested that researchers tend to prefer other advertising media such as television over radio as a subject for academic study. As a result, a relatively small amount of research exists that is specifically oriented to radio. There is, however, an abundance of research in the broader fields of media effects and advertising that can suitably be applied to radio. Consequently, this review of the literature includes an overview of the broader domains of media effects and advertising, and where it is appropriate, its focus will narrow to the relatively small amount of radio research existent. Additionally, because part of this study explores the media organization, a brief summary of literature related to various philosophies of media personnel management is included.

Media Effects and Advertising: Diversity of Models

It should be noted that although they are the focus of abundant research, media effects and advertising are subjects about which there is significant disparity in thought. Media researchers have traditionally broken down advertising effects into three categories: cognitive, affective, and conative (or behavioral). In Mass Media Effects, Leo Jeffres explained,

We are most concerned with what people learn from the media (cognitions), how they feel (both emotions and evaluations) as a result of media use, and the behaviors that stem from exposure to media messages (conative variables—intentions to act, or overt behaviors). (20)

The progression outlined in that quotation represents the logic that leads many researchers to theorize that advertising effects generally occur in that order. Cognitive

effects lead to affective effects, which then lead to conative effects. Jeffres added, “Both affect and cognition are viewed with interest because they are seen as precursors to the desired behavioral change—product purchasing” (250).

As might be expected, many theories about advertising effectiveness are rooted in the AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) model that can be traced to the late nineteenth century (Strong, 76). Although the AIDA model is widely accepted and employed, critics question its emphasis on the cognitive dimension. Bruce Hall’s comments illustrate the point:

Consumers “change their minds” about a product, then they change their attitude, and then they act. In other words, the process begins with cognition, which translates to affect, which then translates to behavior. The purpose of advertising in that model is primarily to drive trial by inserting the brand into the consumer’s head and keeping it there. (23)

Hall, as well as Morris Holbrook and Raieev Batra, point to the absence of the emotional dimension in the process.

Demetrios Vakratsas and Tim Ambler conducted a study of 250 journal articles and books that suggested seven different categories by which scholars classify advertising effects. Vakratsas and Ambler regard cognitive and affective effects as *intermediate* effects and behavioral effects (which include product trial and previous usage, referred to as “experience”) as *consequential* effects, but not necessarily a consequence of intermediate effects (26). They summarized the identified categories as follows:

Our taxonomy...describes the various models and theories of how advertising works. It builds progressively from models that assume no intermediate effects...to models that assume only one type of intermediate effect [cognitive or affective]. Then it describes models that assume more than one type of intermediate effect in a certain hierarchy...followed by models with varying hierarchies of effects...and finally models that assume no hierarchy of effects at all. (27)

Pamela Homer took the diversity of opinion between the relative importance of cognitive and affective effects a step further when she explored the impact of “affectively driven” (35) television commercials or “television commercials void of product-relevant information cues” (35). Her study demonstrated “that the relative role of cognition as a mediator of the affect-attitude relationship is influenced by brand familiarity and varies for positive versus negative forms of affect” (47).

Other scholars contend that many media effects and advertising theories tend to oversimplify extraordinarily complex processes. Further, there is fundamental inconsistency in the understanding, definition, and use of terms. Exactly what is meant by “advertising effectiveness”? How is “effectiveness” actually measured? What are “results”? The answers to these questions vary widely, even among respected scholars. Still, a substantial amount of research that can inform the present study exists and merits review.

Cognitive Media Effects

A common measure of cognitive media effects is brand and/or message recall. As Jeffres has pointed out, “Recall of advertisements is widely used as a measure of

advertising effectiveness, because recall is seen as a necessary condition for a change in attitude (affect) and behavior” (248).

In 1985, James MacLachlan and Pradeep Jalan tested psychological theory in an advertising environment and demonstrated that preceding a television commercial with a question improved recall. “For 27 of the 32 advertisements seen, recall was higher when the advertisement was preceded by a question...On the average, brand recall was 92 percent greater for advertisements preceded by questions” (22).

Murphy Sewall and Dan Sarel explored a variety of radio message characteristics in an attempt to identify those that impact recall. Their study of 832 commercials indicated that the slice-of-life presentation format may offer an advantage over the announcer-read format for many product categories and that in most cases “increasing the number of brand name mentions improves recall” (58).

Robin Higie and Murphy Sewall attempted to measure advertising effectiveness comparing recall (day after recall) and brand preference. Using a series of radio commercials from the mid-1980s, their study found that day after recall was a more reliable measure of advertising effectiveness than brand preference.

Timothy Perfect and Alex Edwards built on previous research in print advertising that had shown that prior exposure improved the likability of subsequent exposure to advertising messages. Perfect and Edwards tested the concept within the context of radio advertising and scrutinized further whether or not the extent of the effect was dependent on either message duration or frequency. Their findings demonstrated “clear evidence of a positive shift in attitudes towards previously exposed advertisements” (1091) but found no consistent correlation based on the length of the message or the number of exposures.

Kevin Keller, Susan Heckler, and Michael Houston investigated the effects of brand name on recall. Specifically, their laboratory experiment indicated that when a brand name suggests a product benefit, an advertising claim consistent with that benefit leads to higher recall when compared with a brand name that offers no such suggestion of a product benefit. Interestingly, the study also found that when a brand name suggests a product benefit, an advertising claim that is unrelated to that suggestive brand name leads to lower recall when compared with a “nonsuggestive” brand name.

In 2001, Paul Bolls, Annie Lang, and Robert Potter tested the validity of incorporating the use of facial electromyography (EMG) as a physiological method of measuring the emotional responses of consumers exposed to radio commercials, as well as the effects of message valence and listener arousal on attention and memory. Using commercials that had either a positive or negative emotional tone, the researchers measured facial EMG, heart rate, and skin conductance and then conducted tests of memory, including free recall and recognition.

Results demonstrated the validity of using facial EMG to assess the valence of emotional response to media messages. Heart rate data suggest that negative messages receive more attention than positive ones.

Furthermore, how arousing a message is appears to be a better predictor of memory than message valence. (627)

Other media effects studies have manipulated an assortment of variables in attempts to determine which of those variables may be positively related with recall. These will be summarized later in this review of the literature, but it is significant to point

our here that all of them begin with the assumption that recall is an important measure of advertising effectiveness.

Affective Media Effects

Daniel O'Keefe pointed out that "the mental state that has been seen (in theory and research) to be most centrally implicated in persuasion is that of attitude" (17).

Beyond the broad idea that an attitude is an evaluation of an object, there are three other points of apparent consensus concerning the concept of attitude. One is that, overwhelmingly, attitudes are learned...Second, attitudes are taken to be relatively enduring...different from a mood...Third, attitudes are taken to influence conduct...attitudes exert an influence on behavior. (18)

It should be noted that O'Keefe acknowledges researchers such as Jaccard, Larson and Sanders, and Miller who do not share this "preoccupation... with attitude" (16). That said, most scholars agree that attitude is a central characteristic of persuasion.

Media effects research that looks at consumer attitude covers a variety of subject areas, mostly related to consumer attitudes toward brands and commercials. Jeffres again notes, "Many studies have focused on how advertising affects attitudes because of the close relationship between attitude and behavior and a belief that advertising first must change attitudes to change behavior" (250).

In 2001, Seounmi Youn, Tao Sun, William D. Wells, and Xinshu Zhao published a study that examined the link between "liking" and commercial recall. Their article began with a summary of previous work on the subject:

Numerous studies have suggested that liking contributes to an advertisement's effectiveness. Walker and Dubitsky (1994) found that liking relates to other copy-testing measures such as related recall, brand preference, and persuasion. Du Plessis (1994) reported significant positive relationships between likability and recall. Gordon Brown of Millward Brown, Inc. reported a high correlation between likability and awareness and concluded that liking is a component of successful advertising (Hollis, 1995). The Ogilvy Center for Research and Development reported that likable advertisements were twice as persuasive as average advertisements for fast-moving consumer goods (Biel and Bridgwater, 1990). Greene (1992) found that liking is highly correlated with persuasion, particularly brand rating. (7)

Youn and her colleagues then focused their attention on product category, which they showed to be "an important moderator between commercial liking and memory" (7). Describing products as either "approach" (positive valence for consumers), "avoidance" (products that help a consumer avoid the unpleasant), or "utilitarian" (neither positive nor negative affect), their study of television commercials run during the Super Bowl over several years found that "positive and significant relationships between liking and memory held true for approach products only, not avoidance or utilitarian products" (7).

Radio studies on consumer attitudes toward commercials have routinely been more focused on commercials in general, as opposed to whether a specific brand or a specific commercial has "likability" or not, and overall the news has not been good for radio. As early as 1949, G. P. Laybourn and H. P. Longstaff reported in the Journal of

Marketing that “one out of every two listeners interviewed states that he (sic) dislikes advertising on the radio” (457). The study further disclosed that characteristics such as humor, brevity, and information content were associated with likability, while monotony and useless information were associated with listeners’ dislike of radio commercials. Perhaps most interesting was that jingles were identified “...by the largest proportion of the total sample both for liking their best-liked commercials (24 per cent) and for disliking their most disliked commercials (18 per cent)” (453).

Paul Speck and Michael Elliott offered a multimedia study on “ad avoidance,” and their findings included several factors that have been shown to lead to listener tune-out of radio commercials:

People are most likely to avoid radio commercials if they are young and unmarried, they listen to many stations or do not listen often, they consider radio commercials annoying, or radio commercials hinder their search for programming, seem disruptive, or seem distracting. (74)

It is also significant to note that Speck and Elliott “found that the annoyance effect is greater for television and radio than for print” (72).

Conative Media Effects

As might be expected, research that explores consumer behavior has been of great importance to product manufacturers and marketers. Most of the studies in this area have focused on consumer purchases (often measured in terms of sales increases or decreases) and purchase intentions. Many have their theoretical grounding in the Theory of Reasoned Action, first articulated by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen in Belief, Attitude, Intention, and Behavior. According to Jeffres:

In the theory of reasoned action, normative beliefs and cognitions each have an impact on affect, which leads to intentions—the best predictor of actual behavior...The theory states that the *intention* to engage in a specific behavior depends on a person's attitude toward that behavior, the person's perception of what others think about the behavior, plus the person's motivation to act in accordance with those norms. (277)

Media effects research in this area has consistently identified a link between advertising and purchases or purchase intentions. Peter Peretti and Chris Lucas explored the effects of newspaper advertising on customers of different socio-economic backgrounds, finding a consistent link between reading advertising and increased purchases. In 1987, Phil Gullen and Hugh Johnson reported on a 12-week study in the grocery industry that found that television advertising brought new buyers to a brand. A study by Peter Kim demonstrated that companies that commit a higher percentage of sales revenue to advertising than their competitors are generally more profitable and command a higher share of market.

Media Effects and Advertising: Diversity of Variables

Within this framework of media effects and advertising that has been outlined (the broad areas of cognitive, affective, and conative effects), several variables have been the subject of much attention. For this review of the literature, these variables are arranged using the following commonly used nomenclature: source factors, recipient factors, context factors, and message factors.

Source Factors

Traditionally, media effects and advertising researchers have explored a variety of source factors, including the impact of celebrity endorsements and the importance of source credibility.

Celebrity endorsements. Contrary to popular perception—based perhaps on the pervasive use of celebrity endorsements in contemporary advertising—the conclusions at which these studies arrive are mixed. An early look at the impact of celebrity endorsements on advertising effectiveness by Hershey Friedman and Linda Friedman indicated that brand-name recall was maintained for several different products. On the other hand, David Ogilvy and Joel Raphaelson analyzed a collection of research on the subject and found that while celebrity endorsements did indeed enhance recall, they were not particularly successful in compelling change in brand preference.

In a 1989 project that had potentially dramatic social implications, S. T. McDermott and a group of scholars conducted surveys of teenage boys in order to gauge their attitudes about smokeless tobacco. The more the boys liked the sports figures endorsing the products, the less harmful they perceived smokeless tobacco to be. A 1990 experiment by Abhilasha Mehta and Clive Davis involving 18-25-year-old women indicated that they found the celebrity endorsers more trustworthy and their claims more credible.

In 1996, Michael Basil reported the results of a study that considered the concept of “identification” as a mediator of celebrity effects, indicating that “these effects depend on the receiver’s identification with the spokesperson. The practical implication of mediation is that it is important to find celebrities with whom the audience identifies”

(488). Zafer Erdogan published a literature review of research into the use of celebrity endorsements in the May 1999 issue of the Journal of Marketing Management. His survey indicated “that the effectiveness of celebrity endorsers is moderated by a number of factors, including product-celebrity alignment and target receiver characteristics” (291). The primary issue, according to Erdogan, is the choice of the celebrity.

Source credibility. Another frequently considered source factor is the influence of source credibility. First articulated by Carl Hovland and Walter Weiss in the early 1950s, media researchers have consistently found that a credible source has a positive impact on the effectiveness of advertising messages. In Media Effects Research, Glenn Sparks noted,

Two of the chief components of source credibility are expertise and trustworthiness. Expertise has to do with the extent to which people perceive that the source of the message is a real expert on the topic that he or she is talking about. Trustworthiness has to do with the extent to which people find the source of the message to be reliable or truthful. (142)

In 1991, Jerry Gotlieb and Dan Sarel conducted an experimental study of comparative advertising, finding that when “a source of higher credibility is included in the advertisements, comparative advertising for a new brand has a more positive effect on purchase intentions than non-comparative advertising” (38).

Barbara Stern proposed a nontraditional model for considering the influence of the “source.” Rather than viewing advertising using the traditional and simple source/message/recipient pattern, Stern posited that each of the components were actually composed of multiple dimensions. For example, the “source of an advertisement is dual,

for whereas it is the sponsor who bears financial and legal responsibility for the message, it is not usually the sponsor who bears creative responsibility for devising it” (8). The question of source credibility, then, may be dependent on the credibility of *either* the sponsor *or* the commercial, including the “talent” or spokesperson. Stern pointed out that in this model it is important that researchers “differentiate between the presenter and the company s/he presents” (12).

A 1996 study by Claire Gelinas-Chebat, Jean-Charles Chebat, and Alexander Vaninsky investigated the effects of voice intonation and intensity on source credibility, attitudes, and intent to buy. The results of the study are summarized as follows:

Intensity of voice affects credibility of the source significantly more under low than high involvement; intonation of voice affects credibility more under high than low involvement. Unexpectedly, characteristics of voice affect attitudes toward the advertised service and intent to buy. (243)

Another late-twentieth-century study looked at the impact of three dimensions of source credibility (expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) on attitudes and purchase intentions. In an experiment comparing American and Korean consumers, Kak Yoon, Choong Hyun Kim, and Min-Sun Kim found that with both American and Korean consumers, all three of the dimensions equally influenced buying intention, and perceived attractiveness of the source was more influential on consumer attitude.

Recipient Factors

Media studies that explore recipient factors include demographic and psychographic audience research, as well as a more recent focus on how consumers process advertising messages.

Audience research. Audience research has long been dominated by demographic data gathering and analysis of the ubiquitous station ratings variety. Roger Wimmer and Joseph Dominick explained, “Advertisers, not broadcasters, were the initiators of broadcast research. When commercials began airing on radio stations, advertisers naturally wondered how many listeners were exposed to their messages and how effective the messages were” (328).

Evolving from the primitive demographic approach of listener/viewer counts, the ratings services moved toward inclusion of age, gender, ethnicity, income level, and education. Ultimately, increased emphasis has been put on psychographic data, such as lifestyle trends in their gathering, analysis, and dissemination of audience data. As Wimmer and Dominick continued,

In addition to information about audience size, advertisers became interested in *why* people behave the way they do. This led to the development of the research area known as psychographics...Research procedures were then designed to study lifestyle patterns and how they affect media use and buying behavior. (328-329)

A study conducted by Stephen Dick and Walter McDowell tested with positive results a method by which a series of radio ratings estimates can be used to predict audience loyalty. “Although not a direct measure of audience behavior, the combined indexes of a station’s overall performance (a) exclusive cume, (b) cume duplication, (c) turnover ratio, and (d) listening location does offer persuasive circumstantial evidence of loyalty that can be applied to media buying strategies” (26).

Consumers' processing of advertising messages. In recent years, another category of recipient-oriented study has emerged, which explores how consumers process advertising messages. Laura Buchholz and Robert Smith indicated a correlation between “consumer involvement” and cognitive response to advertising, observing that “the level of consumer involvement played a significant role in determining the...recognition of brand and copy points” (16).

Other persuasion theorists have studied the concept further, and some degree of consensus holds that when persuasion “happens,” one of two diverse “persuasion perspectives” is at work. This model has come to be referred to as the dual-process model. According to Joan Meyers-Levy and Prashant Malaviya, the dual-process model “...assumes that, when exposed to an advertisement, people use either a fairly effortful and deliberative systematic approach to judgment formation or a far less demanding and less rigorous heuristic approach” (46). This assumption seems to be shared by most contemporary persuasion scholars. Richard Perloff has summarized the dual-process model further:

The central route refers to a family of persuasion theories that emphasizes that attitude change results from the diligent processing of issue-relevant information. These theories include the Yale theories of Attitude Change (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; McGuire, 1969), the cognitive response approach, information integration theory (Anderson, 1971), and the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Azjen, 1975). The peripheral route refers to a group of persuasion theories that emphasizes that attitude change can occur in the absence of message-relevant thinking. These theories include

classical conditioning, script theory, and other theories that suggest that people go along with messages to comply with a powerful source or to obtain social approval from others. (343)

Meyers-Levy and Malaviya asserted that “dual-process theories such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model...have been most widely embraced” (47). The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) has received substantial attention since its introduction during the mid-1980s by Petty and Cacioppo. One material point of significance concerning ELM is that it incorporates the concept of “resource allocation” by message recipients. In essence, previous studies “failed to consider the enormous variability in the extent to which people engage in message-relevant thinking” (Perloff, 118). Petty and Cacioppo countered,

Elaboration can be viewed as falling along a continuum. At one end of the continuum, there is virtually no thinking about the issues discussed in the message, whereas at the other end there is an enormous amount of mental activity, as the individual mulls over and cognitively elaborates on message arguments. (Perloff, 118-9)

At the end of the continuum where little thinking occurs, we observe that which has been called the peripheral route or heuristic approach to persuasion. At the end of the continuum where an enormous amount of thinking occurs, we observe that which has been called the central route or systematic approach to persuasion. Said differently, the central or systematic approach is highly cognitive, while the peripheral or heuristic approach relies more on “positive values or pleasant images,” using “simple decision rules” (Perloff, 119). Such “decision rules” might include factors as basic as the gender of

the source (a message recipient might have a heuristic belief that mature male news anchors are more credible than young, attractive female news anchors, for example) or whether a persuasive message is entertaining.

While this dual-process model seems to dominate the current thinking in persuasion theory, Meyers-Levy and Malaviya proposed a third possible approach, which they call an “experiential processing strategy” (46). In addition to the central (or systematic) and peripheral (or heuristic) approaches to decision-making, they posited that “judgments may be mediated ...by sensations or feelings that are triggered by the very act of engaging in processing” (50). Meyers-Levy and Malaviya connect this hypothesis with the outcomes of previous studies that they reference as potential examples of experiential processing strategy:

People are likely to attend to serendipitous sensations or feelings that might be generated from the process of processing the advertisement. These might include a vague sensation of familiarity caused by prior exposure to an item (Hawkins and Hoch, 1992; Jacoby et al. 1989) or a sensation of competence generated by the apparent ease with which obviously degraded items are noticed (Witherspoon and Allan 1985). (55)

Related to all three proposed approaches to persuasion is the concept of resource matching. These different “routes” to judgment formation are based on the premise that consumers offer varying levels of cognitive resources for processing persuasive messages. Similarly, persuasive messages demand varying levels of cognitive resources from message recipients. Articulated by Anand and Sternthal, Resource Matching Theory asserts that “persuasion is a function of the commensurability between the supply of and

demand for cognitive resources, with greater persuasion emerging if the levels of cognitive resources are comparable” (Meyers-Levy and Malaviya, 49). It should be noted that the level of resources that a message recipient offers is generally dependent on the recipient’s motivation and ability to devote resources. The level of motivation extant in a message recipient may also be associated with a frequently explored research variable: ego-involvement, described as either high- or low-involvement (Wilmot).

To summarize the association of these concepts, then, several inferences can be made. First, a message recipient who is highly motivated and able to make highly informed judgments about persuasive messages is likely to adopt the central (or systematic) approach, offering significant cognitive resources. Second, a message recipient who is less willing or less able to process elaborate persuasive messages is likely to adopt the peripheral (or heuristic) approach, offering only moderate cognitive resources. Further, the judgments made by message recipients adopting the systematic approach—positive or negative—are dependent on the strength of the message’s argument. As a result, they tend to be more enduring judgments. On the other hand, judgments made by message recipients adopting the heuristic approach are dependent on message cues that are more easily processed. Therefore, those judgments tend to be less enduring. Finally, those who adopt an experiential processing strategy do so in contexts in which “the amount of cognitive resources that people are willing or able to devote to processing is so meager that only the most fleeting and scant message processing occurs” (Meyers-Levy and Malaviya, 54).

Of course, an underlying factor in any media research that includes an assessment of the consumer’s level of involvement is the distinction between active listening or

viewing and background listening or viewing. Consumer involvement is frequently paired with other variables to measure advertising effect, and the resulting multivariate research will be summarized in the pages that follow.

Context Factors

Contextual factors in media effects research include such variables as commercial scheduling, the programming environment in which commercials exist, and advertisers' medium selection.

Commercial scheduling. Commercial scheduling studies have explored the impact of commercial clutter on advertising effects, as well as the significance of a commercial's position within a cluster of commercials, a concept referred to as serial rotation.

Research has consistently found evidence of the detrimental impact of ad clutter, but Xinshu Zhao theorized that the effects are "better defined in terms of two components, i.e., *proaction* from preceding ads and *retroaction* from succeeding ads" (57). His study of Super Bowl ads over three years not only confirmed the "negative correlation between clutter and recall" (70), but also offered "evidence that proactive effects may be stronger than the retroactive effects on memory. Further, the proactive clutter effect may go beyond memory and extend to advertisement liking" (70).

Louisa Ha and Barry Litman reported that ad clutter in magazines led to decreases in circulation, and—over time—to diminishing advertising revenue. Their study found that "entertainment-oriented magazines appear to be more susceptible to the negative impact of clutter than news-oriented magazines" (31).

Michael Elliott and Paul Speck conducted a cross-media study, which indicated that radio is perceived to be less cluttered than television and direct mail, but more

cluttered than newspaper and the Yellow Pages. “Perceived ad clutter is positively related to ad attitude and ad avoidance” (37). The implication of this phenomenon for radio is that “when the amount of radio advertising seems excessive, listeners are more likely to dislike and avoid radio commercials” (37).

An industry-sponsored research project conducted by Edison Media Research attempted to “probe listeners’ perceptions toward radio advertising, determine the degree to which listeners perceive the increase in the number of radio commercials, and ascertain how listeners would like programming and advertising to be presented” (2). Among 21 “key findings,” the study reported a widespread perception of radio ad clutter. “Nineteen per cent of Americans say radio stations are playing ‘a lot more commercials,’ [and] 23% say stations are playing ‘somewhat more commercials’” (4). It is interesting to note that the study also found that “listeners are as concerned about the quality of commercials as they are about the quantity of commercials” (3).

It was pointed out earlier that some radio stations—in an apparent attempt to limit clutter—have chosen to reduce the number of commercial *clusters* they run each hour. The unfortunate result of limiting the number of commercial clusters, of course, is that those clusters that remain inevitably consist of a greater number of commercials. It seems appropriate to include again the response from David Dess, Vice President of Brand Development and Communications for Sprint PCS, as reported in the November 6, 2000, issue of MediaWeek. His comments were summarized by interviewer Katy Bachman:

Dess credited radio with helping to build Sprint’s fledgling PCS brand.

But he said he has doubts about radio’s future utility for Sprint. He noted that a spot audit of stations uncovered a single pod with 18 spots and far

too many stations running 8 or 9 spots per break. “A vast majority of the industry is heading that direction,” he said. (7)

In contrast, a paper presented at the April 2003 convention of the Broadcast Education Association provided results of an experiment in which two groups of radio listeners were exposed to an identical number of commercials, with one group hearing the commercials in a single pod, and the other group hearing them “spread out” over three pods. The participants who heard the commercials over three pods “were more irritated by the commercials, thought that more units were played, and remembered them better than those exposed to the ads in a single pod” (2). Recall was better, but attitude measures were more negative. Commercial scheduling studies have also explored the significance of a commercial’s position within a cluster of commercials, a concept referred to as serial rotation.

In addition to looking at the effects of ad clutter, Xinshu Zhao’s 1997 study of Super Bowl commercials also measured the impact of commercial placement within a cluster. Again incorporating the *proactive* versus *retroactive* model, Zhao noted that “earlier positions appear to be more effective in generating higher brand memory” (71). While this preference for the position of *primacy* appears to contradict some older studies (Blankenship and Whitely; McKinney), which favored the last position in a commercial cluster (*recency*), it is based on the finding that “the negative impact of preceding ads tends to be larger than that of succeeding ads” (71).

Programming environment. A second contextual factor in media research is the significance of the programming environment in which commercials are scheduled. Gary Sullivan conducted an analysis comprised of two music radio formats (Adult

Contemporary and Easy Listening) and two “low involvement product” advertisements. Presupposing that Adult Contemporary is a higher involvement format than Easy Listening, Sullivan noted the following: “Across a wide range of customary advertising performance indicators (claims recall, attitude toward the advertised product, attitude toward the advertisement, intention to purchase the advertised product), the Adult Contemporary format produced the most favorable results” (107). The premise of the research was that higher involvement music formats would produce stronger effects for advertised products than lower involvement formats. It seems peculiar, then, that the formats selected for the study are often considered background music (low involvement) and that the format widely regarded as highest in listener involvement (News/Talk) was not included—an oversight noted by Sullivan himself.

When considering academic research that explores advertising effectiveness from the perspectives of commercial scheduling and the programming environment, a popular radio phenomenon—the remote broadcast—merits attention, because it relates to both. The remote is typically a two- or three-hour broadcast event that originates from the advertiser’s location, creating its own programming environment in which “live” commercial announcements are scheduled. Jeffrey Wilkinson, Benjamin Bates, Todd Chambers, and Steven McClung noted, “Retailers and media buyers often request radio stations to include a ‘remote’ broadcast as part of an advertising schedule” (717), because of its ability to generate tangible customer traffic, which presumably produces revenue for the advertiser. Their study, prompted by the notion that a radio remote “...is perhaps the only activity where the audience, the radio station staff, and the business client are all physically together, in one place, at one time” (718), attempted to “identify those factors

that were most important to stations, businesses, and audience members regarding the radio remote” (727). Based on the responses of each, the implication was that a “successful” remote was one that generated an increase in “traffic and/or sales for the client” by virtue of the radio station creating a “festive atmosphere...at the client site.” In the end, “The goal [was] to change the perception of consumers—rather than attending a sales pitch, they’re going to a party” (728).

Medium selection. A third—and crucial—contextual factor in media research is the significance of medium selection. Medium (channel) selection research has evolved from communication modality research, which compared the relative effectiveness of visual, aural, and combined (visual and aural) messages. These modalities have been applied to the various media—radio (aural), print (visual), and television (audio-visual). This area of research has proven to be of particular interest and will be described with some detail herein, but the findings of various studies have—once again—been inconsistent.

James Leigh pointed out that “the results of these studies lack congruency” (71), but most arrive at the conclusion that television is more effective than radio, based on its sensory combination of sight, sound, and motion. Charles Warner called television “the most persuasive of all media.” The attributes of “sight plus sound plus motion plus color” combine to offer the most powerful “blend of persuasive communications elements” (197). Laura Buchholz and Robert Smith added,

At first glance, it seems that TV is destined to be a more effective advertising medium than radio. This conclusion is based on several facts. First, TV has two sensory-input modes, compared to only one for radio,

allowing TV to disseminate more information in the same amount of time. Second, TV makes use of the powerful visual mode and...researchers often find a picture-superiority effect over verbal-only stimuli. Third, TV can create verbal/visual synergy by coordinating both stimuli. Finally, TV viewers seem less likely to be engaged in a distracting secondary task like driving, talking to a friend, studying, or reading the paper. (6-7)

On the other hand, Buchholz and Smith also referenced an earlier study by Julie Edell and Kevin Keller that raised a potentially negative aspect of television's multisensory mode of communication. Edell and Keller demonstrated that the possibility exists for the introduction of an interference effect when the two modes (visual and verbal) are inconsistent (7).

Additionally, Leigh noted that "several studies identified radio as generating superior memory performance to television (Klein 1981, Warshaw 1978)," while still others "found no difference (Jacoby, Hoyer, and Zimmer 1983)" (71). Jeffres further summarized the results of other studies in communication modality:

Television utilizes both vision and hearing. In television viewing contexts, auditory messages are delivered through voice or sound while visual messages are delivered via pictures or characters. When the same message is delivered concurrently via two channels, we have sensory redundancy (Hsia, 1977). In an experiment, Kim (1994) found comprehension higher for messages with audiovisual redundancy than for those delivered via auditory or visual channels alone. (253)

However, Jeffres reported yet another study that offers an apparently conflicting point of view:

Furnham and Williams (1987) looked at such modality effects on advertising recall. In an experiment, advertisements were presented in three formats, print, audio-only, and audiovisual. Results showed that overall memory for material was best for print and worst for the audiovisual format, with the audio-only format between the two. Reading advertisements can produce more effective retention than watching them on television, they conclude. (253)

In essence, while a significant number of modality research projects have reported largely favorable results for television, much of the research in that arena has arrived at conflicting conclusions.

Rao Unnava, Robert Burnkrant, and Sunil Erevelles conducted a study that explored the combined effects of presentation order and communication modality. Their research "...demonstrated that the order of presentation of information affects recall and memory-based attitudes when people encounter information auditorily more than when they are exposed to it visually" (492).

Another combined effects study by Marla Royne Stafford and Ellen Day examined both medium selection and delivery style (message appeal). Comparing the relative effectiveness of rational and emotional message styles in both print and radio, they found that "...a rational message led to more positive levels of attitude toward the ad..." and that "...radio messages led to higher levels of patronage intention for both appeals..." (67).

Message Factors

Message factors in media include a number of variables, including the use of humor in commercial advertising and the comparative effectiveness of different form, content, styles, and/or delivery techniques.

Use of humor. The use of humor in radio advertising has received a significant amount of attention, with the studies on the subject having produced widely disparate results. Calvin Duncan and James Nelson emphasized the significance of “individual differences in perceived humorousness” (33), while finding that “humor appears to increase attention paid to the commercial, improve liking of the commercial, reduce irritation experienced from the commercial, and increase liking of the product” (38).

A year later, Betsy Gelb and George Zinkhan found “evidence that perceived humor decreases after repetition” (15) and tested Duncan and Nelson’s findings from that perspective. “After six exposures, humor is negatively related to recall and positively related to brand attitude. However, no consistent relationship to purchase probability or choice behavior is found” (19).

Marc Weinberger and Leland Campbell estimated that humor was used in a sizeable 30.6% of radio advertising. Predicting that product type was a contributing factor to the effectiveness of humorous advertising, they incorporated the Foote, Cone, and Belding Matrix to classify product decision-making by “high/low involvement and...thinking/feeling” (45). Their findings indicated that “there is mixed support for the strategy of *no humor* for high involvement and *humor* for low involvement,...that humor is not a magic bullet with universal effect [and] when used humor should be related to the product” (49-50).

Weinberger and Campbell conducted further research (with Harlan Spotts and Amy Parsons) in 1995, which compared the use of humor across different media (radio, television, and magazines) and for several different product categories. The products were categorized according to the level of risk involved in the purchase (usually related to price) and whether or not the purchase was considered routine (such as consumable products). They found 1) for most products, “related humor had a positive effect on...recall” (56); 2) “unrelated radio humor is a risky strategy” (56); and 3) “related humor did not interfere with comprehension” (56) for most products.

Eron Berg and Louis Lippman pursued a slightly different path in testing the effectiveness of humor in radio advertising. Their study was based from the premise that buying decisions are made more often on brand name recognition than on recall. Their application of humor to advertisements for nonexistent products with nonsensical names suggested that “humor did not affect the strength of recognition memory for brand names” (194), and “there were no differences in level of liking for brand names presented with humorous material versus brand names presented with non-humorous material” (204).

Marc Weinberger added to his previous research, conducting another experiment with Karen Flaherty and Charles Gulas. This time, the team tested different types of humor (incongruity or incongruity-resolution) with higher and lower risk products. The results suggested that the perception of humor itself was significantly more influential on dependent measures, including attitude toward the ad and the brand, than the type of humor or product risk.

Content types. Another message factor that gets notable attention in radio research is the type of content included in advertising messages. Several studies have looked at the information content of commercials. Yorgo Pasadeos, Barbara Shoemake, and Suzanne Campbell found that radio does in fact mediate informative messages—in spite of other studies that indicate that consumers do not *perceive* that radio commercials are as informative as other media, such as newspaper and magazines. In their study, 88% of the radio commercials examined contained at least two information cues. Over half contained at least three cues. Interestingly, “local (radio) advertisements were found to have a significantly larger mean number of information cues (2.86) than did national, regional, and other advertisements” (337-43).

Although these data are presented in a positive light, a well-known—but often ignored—tenet of radio advertising holds that only *one* idea should be presented in a radio commercial. Noted radio consultant Dan O’Day emphatically stated that Rule #1 for radio copywriting is to “identify one (and ONLY one) core message for your ad.” Carl Hausman, Philip Benoit, and Lewis O’Donnell concurred in Modern Radio Production. “Too many ideas in one commercial...can muddy the whole concept of the spot” (250). Conversely, they have noted that the best strategies for creating radio commercials are those that unlock “the theatre of the mind” (253) in contrast to those that list prices, items, and features.

An analysis of Carbone’s Theory of Stylistic Variables has further substantiated these inferences. In the mid-1970s, Carbone explored what Alexis Tan refers to as “five stylistic variables which previous research had shown to be related to easy comprehension” (147). The variables were listen-ability, level of human interest,

vocabulary diversity, realism, and verifiability. Tan reported Carbone's findings in the following statement: "Although Carbone's study did not manipulate style directly, it provides evidence that messages high in listen-ability, human interest, vocabulary diversity, and realism are evaluated more favorably than messages low in these style dimensions" (148). By contrast, we intuitively expect that radio commercials containing multiple information cues (demonstrated by Pasadeos, Shoemake, and Campbell) would certainly measure low in listen-ability and human interest, if not in realism.

In another content-oriented study, Malcolm Smith and Mark Phillips, Jr. explored the use of mnemonics in a series of radio advertisements, finding that "use of simple mnemonic devices in ads enhanced recall across all age groups studied" (103).

Form, style, and delivery. Still other message factors have been explored, such as form, style, and delivery. As noted earlier, Murphy Sewall and Dan Sarel explored several of these characteristics in an attempt to identify those that impact recall. Their study of 832 commercials indicated that the slice-of-life presentation format may offer an advantage over the announcer-read format for many product categories, and that in most cases "increasing the number of brand name mentions improves recall" (58).

Darryl Miller and Lawrence Marks (1992) studied the role of sound effects ["a non-visual sensory stimulus" (83)] in evoking mental imagery and the impact thereof on radio advertising effectiveness. Using a between-subjects design, with one group listening to straight-voice verbal commercials and the other group listening to a sound effect followed by the same verbal messages, Miller and Marks's experiment indicated that "the inclusion of sound effects did produce greater mental imagery compared to message-only commercials" (88), and in some cases "increased imagery processing can

result in stronger emotional reactions, more favorable attitude toward the commercial, and improved learning of message-related information” (88).

Avery Abernethy, James Gray, and Herbert Rotfeld attempted to develop an exhaustive catalog of creative elements used in radio advertising and audit the “current industry practice” (87) regarding the actual use of each creative element, as well as combinations of elements. While the study offered no conclusions about the effectiveness of individual elements or combinations of elements, it found that “...most radio advertisements mix creative elements such as announcers and background music” (97), while “...most information processing research deals with the effectiveness of various message elements in isolation” (97). The value of the project was summarized as follows: “Since this study identifies usage rates of both individual and combinations of creative elements, future researchers can examine which of these executions communicate best to different target audiences” (97). Unfortunately, the study overlooked many creative elements, including the use of sound effects and other high imagery strategies, as well as the use of silence to increase attention.

Douglas Olsen explored that very issue—the impact of silence (and background music) on recall. His experiment demonstrated “...the ability of background silence to enhance retention of information.” Olsen also found that “...a sharp increase in recall is found for information highlighted by background silence (i.e., when the background music is cut to silence just before the information is presented and resumed after the information is presented)” (41).

Miller and Marks followed up their earlier study by examining “three imagery-evoking strategies commonly used in radio advertising—sound effects, vivid verbal

messages, and instructions to imagine—in influencing mental imagery, ad-evoked feelings, and attitude toward the ad” (337). Their findings suggested the following:

Of the three imagery-evoking strategies tested, sound effects was most effective in generating imagery and influencing the strength of positive feelings and the favorableness of A_{ad} ...the vivid verbal message had the second greatest impact among the strategies. However, the difference between the strength of the sound effects and the vivid verbal message was small. The instructions to imagine had a very weak influence. (353)

Paul Bolls took the study of high-imagery radio commercials one step further by adding unrelated visual stimuli to commercials in an effort to test whether the “actual” visual stimuli created interference, which negatively impacted the “imagined” visual imagery.

Dual-task interference between the cognitive tasks of listening to the radio advertisements and viewing the unrelated pictures was found in recognition data for high-imagery ads but not low-imagery ads. This pattern of results indicates listening to high-imagery radio ads competes with visual tasks for cognitive resources. (537)

Bolls’s conclusion, therefore, was that “listening to high-imagery radio advertisements engages visual cognitive resources despite the fact these advertisements are auditory messages” (537), lending credence to the long-held notion of radio as theater of the mind.

In a paper presented at the Broadcast Education Association Convention in April 2002, Robert Potter, Francesca Carpentier, Jinhee Kim, and Hong sik Yu continued their innovative radio advertising research utilizing physiological experimentation. Drawing

on the work of cognitive psychologists, which links physiological arousal levels with memory (recall), their experiment demonstrated that “increasing the pacing of the music...causes attentive listeners to have higher overall skin conductance levels, along with more and larger skin conductance responses” (16). These conductance levels indicate higher levels of arousal, which in turn indicate better memory for information. Their conclusion was “that music, and particularly fast-paced music, may be a way to use structural features of audio messages to increase arousal levels” (17).

Thomas Whipple and Mary McManamon evaluated “the separate effects of male and female spokespersons and announcers in advertising messages” (80). A unique aspect of the study, however, was the inclusion of “product gender image” as part of the research design—“a product’s gender image is related to the sex of its most likely user” (80). “The results of the...study suggest[ed] that a spokesperson’s and an announcer’s sex can affect advertising evaluations for a gender-specific product but not for nongender-imaged products” (89). Further, “the results suggest[ed] that women are preferred to or accepted equally as men as spokespersons and announcers in advertising for personal care products” (90).

Carol Megehee, Kathryn Dobie, and James Grant conducted a two-part experiment that explored the pace of delivery of radio advertisements. The first part of the study examined the impact of speech rate on various audience responses, while the second part of the study examined the impact of different types of time compression and expansion on audience responses. The results of the first part—“consistent with the assumption expressed in the Elaboration Likelihood Model” (288)—indicated the following:

...slow speech, which provided a greater opportunity to elaborate, would evoke a greater number of responses and a greater proportion of product-based responses than would occur with faster speech. Conversely, faster speech, which provides less opportunity for cognitive elaboration, would produce a greater proportion of affective and message-related responses. (288)

In the second part, the researchers compressed or expanded the length of the advertisement in two ways—by compressing/expanding the complete advertisement and by compressing/expanding only the silent portions of the message (pauses). “Results indicated that young adult listeners did not respond differently to the two methods of speech manipulation,” except that “pause compressed speech was associated with a more favorable attitude toward the message” (289).

Adrian North, Liam MacKenzie, and Ruth Law applied another aspect of the Elaboration Likelihood Model to radio commercial production. “If music/voice “fits” the advertised brand, then it should enhance recall of the product, the brand, and any claims made regarding these, in addition to measures of liking for the advertisement and likelihood of purchasing the advertised brand” (1676). The elaboration likelihood model developed by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo in the early 1980s and later work by Deborah MacInnis and Whan Park suggested that “music might positively influence high-involvement consumers if it *fits* the advertisement” (1678). The results of their experiment involving mock radio advertisements include the following:

Participants’ recall of the advertised products, brands, and advertising claims was better when the advertisements featured music that fit those

brands than when advertisements featured either music that did not fit the brands or featured no music at all...musical fit promotes liking for the advertisement...[and] participants reported that they were more likely to purchase the advertised brand if the ad for it featured music that fit the brand. (1686)

North, MacKenzie, and Law also surmised that the same might prove true when the announcer's voice fit the advertisement. In this case, the results were mixed.

Voice fit was related to ability to recall specific information contained within the ad. Interestingly, there was no effect of voice fit on recall of the brand name or class of product...Voice fit also led to higher ratings of liking for the ad and likelihood of purchasing the advertised product than in the case of no-voice-fit ads. (1694-1695)

Management and the Media Organization

Because part of this study explored factors within the media organization that may influence the creation of radio commercials, it seemed appropriate to include in this review of literature a brief summary of various perspectives, both classical and contemporary, that are related to the management of media organizations.

The industrial revolution of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries ushered in what has come to be known as the Classical School of Management. In the United States, Frederick Taylor's approach to management, referred to as Scientific Management, provided for systematic processes that were intended to maximize productivity. Some of the more enduring aspects of his theory were the value of clearly defined production processes and formal job descriptions. Another memorable facet of

scientific management was its rather mechanistic view of labor and wages—workers would be more productive if given higher wages, but workers' other needs and motivations were not considered. Other versions of classical approaches were developed in other countries, including administrative management in France and bureaucratic management in Germany. Administrative management, articulated by Henri Fayol, introduced the concept of management as a process, and in Fayol's analysis, the process was quite complex. Bureaucratic management, the brainchild of Max Weber, focused on a clear-cut hierarchy of power and posited that the keys to optimum productivity were precise policies and processes, prodded by authoritative coercion.

Management theorists of the mid-twentieth century began to reorient their focus toward workers' other personal needs and motivations, and they began to recognize that workers very well might have a shared interest in the success of the organization. This led to the development of what became known as the Human Relations School of Management. From this era emerged theories as widely diverse, but well-known, as The Hawthorne Effect, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and Theories X, Y, and Z, in addition to Frederick Herzberg's work in the field of worker attitudes.

In a reprinted version of a classic Harvard Business Review article on employee motivation, Herzberg, a psychologist, noted:

The surest way of getting someone to do something is to deliver a kick in the pants (KITA). Because of the inelegance of a physical KITA and the danger that the manager might get kicked in return, companies usually resort to positive KITAs, ranging from fringe benefits to employee counseling. But while a KITA might produce some change in behavior, it

does not motivate. Achievement, recognition for achievement, the work itself, responsibility, and growth or advancement motivate people. (87)

Since the second half of the twentieth century, Modern Approaches to Management have continued to evolve. Peter Schoderbek, Asterios Kefalas, and Charles Schoderbek introduced the Systems Approach to Management, which appropriately placed organizations within the context of their environments, in which they interact with and are interdependent on other organizations, as well as a variety of external factors. Peter Drucker's Management by Objectives (MBO) emphasized multilevel goal-setting and the accompanying evaluation of timely progress toward goals. The Total Quality Management (TQM) movement garnered attention from numerous scholars, including W. Edwards Deming, Joseph Juran, and Charles Weaver, among others. The objective of TQM has been the continuous improvement of every aspect of an organization, which results in providing the very best products and services.

As competition intensified, managers and management theorists turned their attention toward the competition and strategic management. In fact, some of the more influential books on the subject, written by Michael Porter, are titled Competitive Strategy and Competitive Advantage. Using language generally well-suited for combat, strategic management seeks to identify competitive threats, expose and exploit competitors' weaknesses, and attack from the organization's strengths and competitive advantages.

Recalling that part of this study explores a selected group of workers within media organizations and their work and in light of the increased pressure the rapidly changing media environment places on organizational managers, these principles may be

more important than ever. In the first chapter of the popular undergraduate textbook Management of Electronic Media (3rd Edition), Alan Albarran noted the reality of today's complex media environment:

This book examines electronic media management in the 21st century—an era marked by rapid change, media convergence, industry consolidation, and a heavily competitive environment. There is nothing easy about being an electronic media manager in the contemporary market. A good manager must balance the needs of owners, employees, and the audiences they serve in a time of unprecedented challenge. (3)

Of particular interest to this study, Albarran wrote about the skills needed by media managers, which included “human, or people, skills” (13). “Employees see no other area as clearly as a manager’s people skills. Most managers identify this area as the single most important skill in the process of management...Successful managers in the electronic media exhibit strong interpersonal skills and are particularly adept at leading and motivating employees” (13).

Following up on the concept of motivating employees, Albarran made the following observation:

Motivating employees to a high level of performance directly helps any organization accomplish its goals. On the other hand, if motivation is low, productivity suffers. Certain positions in the electronic media need less management than others in this regard because the incentives are built in. For example, audience feedback, ratings, and public recognition drive talent positions, while commissions motivate account executives. For

other areas, such as production...motivation can be an important managerial function. (16)

These factors will be revisited in the discussion of results that are found in Chapter 6.

Summary of the Relevant Research

This review of the literature demonstrates a wide range of research conducted in the broad domains of media effects and advertising and summarizes the more limited radio-specific research that exists under those broader domains. On the whole, it seems clear that there is a consistent focus on consumers and the impact of advertising on them. Cognitive studies focus on what consumers think, know, or recall. Affective studies focus on how consumers feel and their attitudes toward media, brands, or commercials. Conative studies focus on consumer behavior. Even studies that examine source factors are framed from the perspective of how consumers respond to different source variables. Consumer ad processing, commercial clutter, advertising context factors, and even message factors, such as the use of humor in advertising, are generally focused on how the consumer is influenced by the particular variable. Clearly, these matters are of great importance to both scholars and practitioners. And they are of great importance to the present study. What seems to be missing, however, is research that is focused on the content itself and the antecedent influence of the media organization and other factors on the production of that content.

Perceived Voids in the Research

Though past research that has been reviewed in this chapter is pertinent to the study of radio advertising and particularly local direct radio advertising content and factors that shape it, no research has been found that systematically analyzes radio

commercial copy to discover tendencies that writers—those at the local level in this instance—may knowingly or unknowingly exhibit. No research has been found that examines the influence of antecedent factors, including the impact of the media organization (the radio station) and the workplace on the creation of radio commercials. This study begins to fill those voids. The two-part method of inquiry is detailed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3—Methodology

The introductory chapter and review of literature in the preceding chapter both revealed a wide-ranging void in the realm of media research about radio advertising and, more particularly, research that has explored radio commercial content, the processes employed in the creation of radio commercial content, and the impact of antecedent factors, including those in the media organization, on those processes. This study begins to fill the void using a two-step qualitative approach.

In the first step—utilizing Burkean Cluster Analysis—a group of 96 radio commercials was evaluated in an effort to identify any writing tendencies that confirmed the existence of that which Ryan and Peterson referred to as *convention and formula* and to address the guiding research questions that were posed in Chapter 1. Further, by identifying writing tendencies, and then exploring terms that clustered around certain selected themes, it was thought that inferences could be made about the world of the copywriter, including the workplace environment of the media organization. In the second step—utilizing Ethnographic methodology—a group of ten persons who bear primary responsibility for the creation and production of radio commercials at selected local radio stations (the media organization) were observed and interviewed in an effort to assess the impact of antecedent factors, including the work environment and the aspects of the media organization, on that process.

Step One: Burkean Cluster Analysis

Burkean Cluster Analysis seems to be an ideal approach for exploring the content of radio commercials for several reasons. First, while it may be self-evident, perhaps it should be stated clearly that rhetorical criticism—in general—is an appropriate way to

look at advertising commercial copy. Simply put, advertising is an excellent example of a contemporary rhetorical form. Second, several key themes—even terms—are frequently used in advertising. These themes include price, quality, service, selection, and a sense of urgency. The frequent use of these themes lends itself to cluster analysis. Third, a Burkean cluster analysis of local direct radio commercials allows researchers to compare the content of commercials for different—even competing—clients (since the key themes tend to be similar) and to determine if commercials for different clients make similar, but mutually exclusive, claims. If nothing else, this could indicate whether there is, in fact, the existence of a powerful pattern of *convention and formula* at work in the creation of radio commercials. Finally, a Burkean cluster analysis of radio commercial content provides the opportunity to make inferences about the world of the copywriter within the context of the local radio station—the media organization.

It is evident that media researchers have effectively used other forms of content analysis. Quantitative content analysis is perhaps the most common. In fact, many social scientific researchers believe that *all* content analysis must be quantitative. Glenn Sparks depicts content analysis as “a method that allows the researcher to describe messages in quantitative terms even though those messages are essentially verbal or non-quantitative in nature” (20). Predictably, he goes on to proclaim that the quantitative characteristic “is important because it permits the researcher to conduct various statistical tests on the results of the coding” (20). Sparks points to another important feature of quantitative content analysis:

[It] is concerned with manifest content rather than latent content. Manifest content refers to the material that actually appears, uninterpreted, in the

message. Latent content is content that might become apparent after a coder has interpreted or “read between the lines” of the message prior to coding. (21)

Other forms of content analysis, on the other hand, are qualitative in nature. A principal example is known as *semiotics* (or *semiology*), first developed by Charles Peirce, but with striking similarity to the linguistic work of Ferdinand de Saussure. Drawing on the linguistic notion of “signification,” by which a system of language gives meaning to things and ideas, semiological analysis explores meaning at that underlying, secondary level. Denis McQuail summarizes the concepts in the following paragraph:

A sign is the basic physical vehicle of meaning in a language; it is any “sound image” that we can hear or see and which usually refers to some object or aspect of reality about which we wish to communicate, which is known as the referent... The process of signification is accomplished by two elements of the sign. [de Saussure] called the physical element (word, image, sound) the signifier and used the term signified to refer to the mental concept invoked by a physical sign in a given language code. (346)

McQuail then points to differences that are often present between the “linguistic or sign-system code” (347) and positive or negative values “given by the rules of the culture” (347). “Semiology has sought to explore the nature of sign systems that go beyond the rules of grammar and syntax and regulate complex, latent and culturally dependent meanings of texts” (347). *Denotation* is the term generally used to describe the first level—or manifest—meaning, and *connotation* is the term generally used to describe

the secondary—or latent—meaning. In semiological analysis (unlike quantitative content analysis), the focus of scrutiny is this latent meaning rather than manifest meaning.

Burkean Cluster Analysis offers the opportunity to explore both manifest *and* latent content. The identification of key themes and the terms that cluster around those key themes provides an analysis of manifest content. If the key themes and terms that cluster around those key themes recur with a significant level of repetition—especially for competing advertisers—the researcher finds evidence of that which Shoemaker and Reese referred to as the hegemonic approach or that which Ryan and Peterson described as the model of *convention and formula*. In other words, the researcher finds evidence that there is an agreed-upon “correct” way to write a radio commercial. The inference, then, is that the antecedent factor influencing the creation of radio commercials—in this case, the hegemonic, formulaic approach—may be a more powerful influence than others, including the commercial’s effectiveness. McQuail’s statement again seems to be appropriately considered:

Most studies of media production seem to confirm the strong feeling held by established professionals that they know how best to combine all the available factors of production within the inevitable constraints. This may be achieved at the cost of not actually communicating with the audience, but it does secure the integrity of the product. (333)

While the present study makes no attempt to universally generalize its findings through the use of standard statistical tests, certain rudimentary descriptive statistics have been incorporated to provide a very basic quantifiable picture of the data that was analyzed.

At the same time, questions about the world of the writer are more appropriately explored within the context of latent content. It is at this juncture that the “why” and “how” questions emerge. If the key themes and terms that cluster around those key themes recur with a significant level of repetition, are there factors in the writer’s world that lead to these results? Do organizational factors contribute to this phenomenon? Do organizational factors, in fact, make it inevitable that the creation of radio commercials will be according to “*convention and formula?*” The inferences made in response to these questions entail a level of analysis and interpretation that goes beyond any simple and quantitative measure of manifest content.

Background

Sonja K. Foss gives an excellent synopsis of cluster criticism in Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice when she writes, “In this method, the meanings that key symbols have for the rhetor are discovered by charting the symbols that cluster around those key symbols in the rhetorical artifact” (63-4). Consistent with Burke’s own writing on the subject, she further points out that “a cluster analysis provides ...insights that may not even be known to or conscious for the rhetor” (64). In the end, the critic using a cluster analysis seeks to “discover a rhetor’s worldview” (63).

As early as 1937 in Attitudes Toward History, Kenneth Burke offered cluster analysis as a tool by which a critic might discover associations and relationships between symbols used by a rhetor—or for the purposes of this study, a copywriter. He describes cluster analysis as a way to discover “what subjects cluster about other subjects (what images *b, c, d* the poet [rhetor] introduces whenever he talks with engrossment of subject *a*)” (232).

A few years later, Burke expanded his thoughts on cluster analysis in The Philosophy of Literary Form:

Now, the work of every writer contains a set of implicit equations. He uses “associational clusters.” And you may, by examining his work, find “what goes with what” in these clusters—what kinds of images and personalities and situations go with his notions of heroism, villainy, consolation, despair, etc. And though he be perfectly conscious of the act of writing, conscious of selecting a certain kind of imagery to reinforce a certain kind of mood, etc., he cannot possibly be conscious of the interrelationships among all these equations. (20)

For the present study, cluster analysis offers the opportunity to find what terms radio commercial copywriters use when they write about certain key themes, such as price, quality, service, selection, and the sense of urgency, and then to consider why the writer chose those terms.

Peter Marston and Bambi Rockwell examined pioneer feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” as a rhetorical artifact, focusing “not upon the relationship between Gilman’s story and society, but rather on the relationship between the story and the attitudes it may induce in the reader” (Foss, 70). Their study looked at the terms that clustered around Gilman’s descriptions of the wallpaper, its color, its overall pattern, and a figure inside the pattern. Consistently, the terms carried negative connotation.

The associational clusters manifest in “The Yellow Wallpaper” suggest a series of three interrelated metaphors which are consistent with Gilman’s

ideological concerns. Each of these metaphors reveals how Gilman views the situation of women in society, and further invites and encourages the reader to share in this view, thereby giving rise to a rhetorical effect.

(Foss, 75)

Karen Strother-Jordan utilized Burkean Cluster Analysis in her critical study of Molefi Asante's philosophical texts Afrocentricity and The Afrocentric Idea. Three key terms were identified for analysis, primarily on the basis of their frequency of use, and the study's focus was "...on the clusters that revolve around the key terms of Afrocentricity, Afrology, and Ideology/Reality that are used throughout Asante's discourse" (194). Strother-Jordan explained the objective:

The objective of cluster analysis is to uncover the representative key terms which will reveal other terms clustered around them, based on the frequency, intensity, and representativeness of their usage in the text...Thus, cluster analysis should begin to reveal Asante's motives in his discourse. (194)

Gloria McMillan conducted a study of Stoker's Dracula, which was designed to "...identify and pinpoint the cultural attitudes at play among British Dracula hunters" (331). McMillan described her approach as follows:

To demonstrate the exogamy fears that I perceived in a traditional close reading of *Dracula*, I ran computer content analysis searches over various word clusters, mapping out how various characters defined "blood" and kinship. Several combinations of words associated with male bonding and

fear of exogamy served to highlight what an emotional charge these keywords held for the novel's major characters. (332)

Her analysis explored the associated terms and their connotations of good and evil to infer that the text not only contained gender-related ideology, but also cultural and racial ideology. The use of computer technology to search for the presence of the key terms allowed McMillan—like Strother-Jordan—to measure the frequency of their use and thus provide at least a rudimentary level of descriptive quantification.

Two important concepts emerge from these studies. First, the identification of key themes is generally based on the frequency and/or intensity of their presence in the rhetorical artifact. Second, key themes, or the terms that cluster around the key themes, often possess positive (good) or negative (evil) connotation. According to Foss, “Often, the terms selected as key terms are *god* and *devil* terms. God terms are ultimate terms that represent the ideal for the rhetor—the rhetor's view of what is best or perfect. Devil terms are the counterparts of god terms and represent the ultimate negative or evil for the rhetor” (65).

The present study gives attention to the frequency with which key themes (and the terms that cluster around them) are present, in order to measure the extent to which radio commercial scripts follow formula; the intensity with which key themes (and the terms that cluster around them) are presented, again in order to measure the extent to which radio commercial scripts follow formula; and the positive or negative connotations (*god* terms and *devil* terms) that accompany their presence, in order to make inferences about the power of hegemony in the script-writing process.

Procedure

Selection of the artifacts. For the first step of the study—the Burkean Cluster Analysis—a group of 96 local direct radio commercials was collected from various radio stations. As defined in Chapter 1, local direct radio commercials refer to those commercials that are produced at the local radio station by radio station personnel—no advertising agency is involved with the creative process. The original goal was to build the sample of commercials by collecting scripts of every local direct commercial that was active and running at the time of entry into each of the ten radio stations included in the ethnographic analysis. Unfortunately, this was not as simple as was expected. For one thing, the busyness of the workplace made it difficult to get definitive information from some of the radio station traffic personnel. They were simply too busy to compile a complete list of currently running local direct commercials and gather the scripts.

In one case, the traffic director worked out of her home in an adjacent state. One production director actually produced commercials without a script at all. (It should be noted that several local direct commercials from that station were recorded off the air and transcribed for inclusion in the analysis.) Another station declined the request for scripts, although the Production Director was more than willing to be interviewed. In the end, almost all of the persons interviewed provided whatever local direct commercial scripts they could conveniently identify and gather, and the resulting number of commercials available for analysis was 96. No distinction was made concerning the length of the commercial, and the sample included both thirty-second and sixty-second commercial scripts.

The sample was chosen purposefully to ensure diversity in terms of market size, radio station ownership type, radio station staff size, and format. As has been indicated, the commercials selected were produced by and aired on the radio stations that had been selected for the second part of the study—the ethnographic analysis. The stations are located in the Norfolk, Phoenix, Nashville, and Chattanooga Total Survey Areas (TSA), as determined by the radio ratings service, Arbitron, as well as in an unrated market in Tennessee. While it is acknowledged that some geographic stratification may be existent, introducing the potential for a modest level of regional bias to the data—bias that can be scrutinized with further research—it does provide the diversity that is sought, based on market size, radio station ownership type, radio station staff size, and format. The sample encompasses a wide range of market size designations, including Norfolk and Phoenix, which are considered major markets; Nashville, which is considered a large market; Chattanooga, which is considered a medium market; and Lebanon, a small, unrated market in Tennessee. Additionally, the sample includes different staff sizes from major market cluster operations with as many as one hundred employees to tiny “mom and pop” operations, in which the few staff members are expected to wear many hats. Finally, the sample includes representation from a variety of formats, both mainstream and niche. An overview of pertinent characteristics of the ten radio stations follows on Table 3-1.

Table 3-1**Participating Organizations**

Subject Name	Organization	Location	Description
Mike Anthony	WBDX/WLLJ	Chattanooga, TN	Standalone FM duopoly. Contemporary Christian music format. Sales staff size 6. Production staff size 1 part time, and Mike was also Program Director.
Kent Bailey	WGFX-FM	Nashville, TN	Part of Citadel's three entity Nashville cluster. Sports Talk format. Sales staff size 30. Production staff size 2 full time.
Dave Benzing	AM/FM	Nashville, TN	Five station Nashville cluster. Dominant mainstream formats. Sales staff size 40. Production staff size 3 full time.
Dan Buckley	WRLT-FM	Nashville, TN	Standalone FM with weak signal. AAA music format. Sales staff size 6. Production staff size 1 almost full time, but Dan also did a two-hour music program.
Paul Creasman	Q96	Phoenix, AZ	Standalone FM. Religious Talk format. Sales staff 2. Production staff 1 part time, and Paul was also Operations Manager.
Bill Goodman	WCOR/WANT	Lebanon, TN	Standalone AM/FM combo. Country music format. Only local station in market. Sales staff size 3. Production staff size 1 part time, and Bill was also News Director and Operations Manager.
Jeff Haislip	WJIM-AM/FM	Lewisburg, TN	Standalone AM/FM combo. Variety music format. Only local station in market. Sales staff size 2. Production staff size 1 part time, and Jeff is co-owner, morning show host.
Paul Hughes	WNSR-AM	Nashville, TN	Standalone AM. Sports Talk format. Sales staff size 4. Production staff size 1 full time.
Mike Koolidge	WRHL-AM	Rochelle, IL	Standalone AM in suburban Chicago. News-Talk format. Sales staff size 4. Production staff size 1 part time, and Mike also hosts afternoon talk show.
Jeff Schmidt	WAFX/WNOR	Norfolk, VA	Three-station Tidewater Communications cluster. Dominant mainstream formats. Sales staff 13. Production staff size 2 full time, who also do imaging for the stations.

Selecting the units of analysis. As the study progressed from the collection of artifacts, the “key terms” were identified. Foss summarizes this procedure in Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice: “The critic analyzes an artifact in three steps: (1) identification of key terms in the rhetorical artifact; (2) charting of terms that cluster around the key terms; and (3) discovery of patterns in the clusters around the key terms to determine meanings of the key terms for the rhetor” (64-5).

The themes of price, quality, service, selection, and a sense of urgency have already been identified as being seemingly ubiquitous in radio commercials. During the course of data analysis, another theme emerged. It was found that detailed contact information was present in a significant number of the scripts—enough to suggest that it might also be part of a pattern of *convention and formula*. Consideration was also given to adding another possible theme—localism—during the course of data analysis. It seemed to be an ideal *god* term for local direct radio commercials, since localism is widely regarded as one of terrestrial radio’s greatest strengths. Oddly, references to localism were not present in many of the scripts. In the end, therefore, the data analysis includes what was discovered regarding localism, but it is not a part of the descriptive statistics or summary. Once the key themes were selected, each script was coded, based on which, if any, of the themes were present. A simple encoding procedure was devised in which each of the 96 commercials was listed on a group of Excel spreadsheets. One spreadsheet was used for each of the themes, with one column being used to indicate whether or not the theme was present in each commercial. A “1” placed in the column indicated that the theme was present in the commercial listed on that row, and a “0”

placed in the column indicated that the theme was not present in the commercial listed on that row. This coding procedure was repeated for each of the themes.

Next, attention was given to the terms that “clustered” around each of the themes. The commercial scripts that were identified as having a theme present were examined to discover the terms that “clustered” around the theme, and the terms were entered into a second column of the appropriate spreadsheet. This procedure was also repeated for each of the themes.

A final spreadsheet was used to compile minimal descriptive statistical data about what was found in the 96 commercial scripts. It consisted of eight columns, one for each of the themes explored and one that would provide a sum of the incidence of the different theme(s) for each commercial. This spreadsheet also consisted of a row for each of the 96 commercial scripts, plus two summing rows that indicated the number and proportion of incidences of each theme in the sample of 96 commercials. This final spreadsheet also provided an overall average of the incidence of themes per commercial. These spreadsheets appear in the next chapter of this study as Tables 4-1 through 4-8.

Analyzing the data. Beyond the minimal descriptive data provided by the coding and charting of themes and terms that surround the themes, the Burkean Cluster Analysis identifies existent patterns including the following:

- The frequency with which comparable key terms cluster around each theme in the sample;
- The level of intensity of the key terms that cluster around each theme; and
- Identification and analysis of the “god” terms and “devil” terms that are used in the sample.

This analysis documents the “patterns in the clusters around the key terms” (Foss, 65), the meanings of which may inform us about the “worldview” of the “rhetor” as it relates to the creation of radio commercials, the workplace environment, and the media organization itself. For example, when the analysis uncovers the repetitious use of certain key terms, the excessive use of hyperbole, and/or the propensity to make duplicate claims for different—even competing—products, it raises “how” and “why” questions about influential antecedent factors that are explored further during the second step of the study.

Step Two: Ethnographic Analysis

While Burkean Cluster Analysis offers insight from the perspective of the radio commercial, it seems that even greater value is derived from gaining insight from the perspective of the *creator* of the radio commercial through the use of ethnographic analysis. In order to discover what David Fetterman calls the “insider’s perception of reality” (2), or the *emic* perspective, the second step of this study went inside the media organizations themselves to examine the creative production processes utilized by radio commercial creators at a selected group of local radio stations—the same group of radio stations, in fact, from which the sample of commercials was collected for the first step of the study, the Burkean Cluster Analysis. By examining the work life of the persons whose job responsibilities include the creation and production of radio commercials (the subjects), the study explored not only the organizational methods and practices they follow in local direct radio commercial creation, but also their perceptions about their work and antecedent work-related factors that influence it, including factors within and without the organization. This was accomplished through a rigorous regimen of fieldwork, including on-site observations and in-depth interviews.

Background

With roots in the field of anthropology, ethnography is described by David Fetterman as “the art and science of describing a group or culture” (1). Although it is generally thought of as a study of racial or cultural communities, Fetterman cites numerous examples of different kinds of communities that have been the subject of ethnographic methodology, including “a classroom in middle suburbia” (1), “a university library” (41), “gifted children” (36), and—most significantly for this study—“corporate culture” (25).

Certainly, the use of ethnographic analysis methodology is not unprecedented in the field of media studies. McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory includes a section that summarizes a variety of issues and research related to the impact of the media organization in which he states, “The predominant method of research has been participant observation of media people at work or in-depth interviewing of involved informants” (277). This study includes both. McQuail further notes the following: “...the theory that has been formulated on the basis of research into media organizations, while fragmentary, has been fairly consistent. It supports the view that content is systematically more influenced by organizational routines, practices and goals than by personal or ideological factors” (277).

Kevin Williams’s Understanding Media Theory also includes a chapter that reviews the impact of the media organization on content and the role of ethnography in the research.

Ethnography as a research method plays an important role in media research. Although it can take a number of forms it is usually associated

with participant observation. Researchers spend time in “real” situations with the group of people they are studying, observing and sometimes sharing their experiences. Production studies have seen researchers observing the activities of media workers in their places of work—for example, Schlesinger’s study of the BBC TV newsroom. (193)

Again, these observations are made within the context of research of news and entertainment content (mostly news), but the present study assumes that it is also accurate within the context of advertising content. As Williams rightly reminds his readers,

Attempting to analyse (sic) media production, social science research has primarily focused on one kind of media organization, the newsroom, and one kind of media practitioner, the journalist. Most of the early work into media production concentrated on news. Only much later were other kinds of media subjected to scrutiny, and they still remain an underdeveloped component of organizational research and analysis. (98)

It seems reasonable, therefore, to suppose that similar factors, including media organizations, might have similar types of influence over the work of creators of commercial content, especially when the focus of that influence is in the realm of work routines and practices, as opposed to ideological influence. Within the corporate structure of a local radio station, those men and women who are responsible for creating radio commercials are influenced by the processes and practices mandated by the media organization—the radio station and its management. For this study, they were regarded as a kind of “professional” ethnographic group, and they were observed and listened to, much like an ethnographer might observe and listen to a social or cultural group. This

ethnographic analysis was an attempt to better understand what they do, how they do it, and under what kinds of organizational circumstances they operate.

At most radio stations, that person typically most responsible for radio commercial development is known as the Production Director or Manager. At larger radio stations and market clusters, that person might hold the title of Creative Services Director and have a small staff of production people who share the workload. At smaller radio stations, the responsibility of commercial production might be managed by the Program Director, who is also responsible for all other aspects of the station's on-air product. In some tiny radio stations, the responsibility for writing and producing commercials may even fall on the shoulders of the station's advertising sales staff. Whatever they are called, these are the radio station staff persons who are charged with the day-to-day responsibility of commercial creation and production, and they are the focus of the ethnographic portion of the present study.

Procedure

Selecting the subjects. The subjects chosen for this study were selected on the basis of a combination of judgmental, purposive, and convenience sampling. Several factors were considered in the creation of the proposed sample. First, the selection of the person with primary responsibility for commercial production follows Fetterman's description of judgmental sampling in that "the most appropriate member of the unit" (33) is the specific person chosen from the unit for observation. Second, the selection of the particular radio stations from which the commercials were collected was preserved for the second step of the study. This maintained the desired purposive level of diversity in market size, formats, and staff size. It also formed a valid connection between the

content analyzed in the Burkean Cluster Analysis and the media organizations from which that content was collected. Third, as is so often the case, time and expense (convenience) prescribed that radio stations within a reasonable distance would be included in the subject group. The exceptions (Norfolk and Phoenix) were made based on extraordinary circumstances, which placed the researcher in proximity with those subjects for other purposes:

As a result, the subjects for the ethnographic analysis portion of the project were those persons who bear primary responsibility for commercial creation at the same radio stations from which the sample of radio commercials was collected for the Burkean Cluster Analysis portion of the project. Of particular significance was the determination that there is value in observing the same media organizations about which speculative assessments may have been made during the first step of the study—the Burkean Cluster Analysis.

Some of the subjects selected, observed, and interviewed were persons who are employed full time in the creative production process, and some were persons who have responsibility for commercial production as part of a larger overall job description. Some of the subjects were employed by multistation, multiformat market clusters, and some were employed by standalone, single-format operations. The subjects were selected from a variety of markets ranging from a burgeoning Top 20 city to a small, unrated rural town with a population of less than 15,000 people. Finally, some were employed by stations that offer mass appeal formats, which generate ratings that put their stations in a position of market leadership, and some were employed by stations that offer niche formats, which generate miniscule ratings, putting them in a scramble for advertising revenue.

A total of ten subjects were selected for observations and interviews. It is difficult to assess what the precise optimal number of subjects for a valid ethnographic analysis is. Fetterman, however, offers some guidance with the following counsel:

...the law of diminishing returns can determine that it is time for the ethnographer to leave the field. When the same specific pattern of behavior emerges over and over again, the fieldworker should move on to a new topic for detailed exploration. Similarly, when the general picture reaffirms itself over and over again, it is probably time to wrap things up and return home. (10)

The results and discussion chapters of this study will verify that similar patterns did indeed emerge and that the data gathered tell an interesting and instructive story. A brief description of each of the subject participants follows.

Describing the participants. Mike Anthony was the Program Director for WBDX-FM and WLLJ-FM, which simulcast as “J103” in Chattanooga, Tennessee. J103 programmed Contemporary Christian music, deriving its support from both commercial advertising and listener contributions. In addition to the responsibility for commercial production, Mike also had oversight of music selection, quality control of J103’s on-air staff, and station promotions. He was also on the air himself during the key afternoon drivetime daypart.

Kent Bailey was the Program Director for WGFX-FM in Nashville, Tennessee. WGFX-FM (The Zone) was one of three media entities that made up Citadel Broadcasting’s Nashville market cluster. The other two were WKDF-FM, a country music radio station, and Titans Radio, the audio rights-holding network for Tennessee

Titans (NFL) football. WGFX-FM programs a Sports-Talk format with two of Nashville's leading local programs—the Morning Zone, which airs from 6:00 AM until 10:00 AM, and the Sports Zone, featuring George Plaster, which airs from 3:00 PM until 7:00 PM. Kent Bailey was responsible for all on-air content on The Zone, including commercial content. The Citadel Nashville cluster's three entities shared one Production Department, which had two full-time employees.

David Benzing was the Director of Creative Services for AM/FM Radio's Nashville cluster (now Clear Channel), which included legendary country music station WSIX-FM, News/Talk WLAC-AM, 105.9 FM—The Rock, Contemporary Hit Radio WRVR-FM—The River, and Contemporary Christian 101.1, The One. This cluster has consistently maintained a dominant share of Nashville radio ratings and revenue. Dave had a staff of three production professionals to assist with the workload of the five stations.

Dan Buckley was the Production Director at Nashville's WRLT (Lightning 100), an Adult Alternative music station. Lightning 100 was a standalone, independently (and locally) owned station in a market dominated by clusters. It has long been commonly regarded as the weakest FM signal in the Nashville area, which put it at a significant competitive disadvantage. Dan was an air personality, responsible for a two-hour music program in the middle of each day in addition to his duties in production.

Paul Creasman was formerly the Operations Manager for Q96, a start-up religious talk station in Phoenix, Arizona. While much of the station's revenue was derived from preaching and teaching ministries that bought air time, Q96 also sold advertising. Part of Paul's responsibility included creating and producing commercials.

Bill Goodman held the titles of News Director and Operations Manager for independently owned WANT-FM in Lebanon, Tennessee, a suburb approximately thirty miles east of Nashville. Although Lebanon is a suburb of Nashville, the WANT-FM signal did not provide significant coverage within Nashville, so both its listeners and advertisers were primarily local to the station's home county. Bill anchored the morning news and had oversight of on-air content, technical operations, and personnel, in addition to his responsibilities in production.

Jeff Haislip was the co-owner (with his wife) and Program Director of WJJM AM and FM in Lewisburg, Tennessee, a small market approximately sixty miles south of Nashville. The AM station was automated with a country music format, and the FM played a variety of music, dependent on the tastes of the air personality. A significant emphasis was placed on local news, including high school sports and obituaries, on both stations. Jeff did the morning show (6:00 AM until 10:00 AM) on-air, and then programmed an automation system for the AM station before undertaking his production work.

Paul Hughes was the Production Director at Nashville Sports Radio WNSR-AM. WNSR-AM was another independently and locally owned radio station that struggled with an inferior signal, while it competed against at least two bigger, stronger FM stations that also feature sports programming. Paul, who was acquainted with WNSR-AM's owners before he came to work for them, devoted his entire work day to commercial production and station imaging.

Mike Koolidge was the Production Director for WRHL-AM in Rochelle, Illinois, an independently owned News-Talk radio station. WRHL-AM is located near Chicago,

but is licensed to broadcast with a directional signal *away* from Chicago. As a result, many people who live in Rochelle listen to Chicago radio stations, but WRHL-AM does not reach Chicago. In addition to his production duties, Mike did a live talk show each afternoon. In fact, the live talk show is the reason he came to work for the radio station. His Production Director role is not what he considers his primary role, but one he accepts in order to be able to do the live talk show.

Jeff Schmidt was the Production Director for WAFX-FM and WNOR AM & FM in Norfolk/Virginia Beach, Virginia, a group of stations owned by Tidewater Communications. WAFX-FM programmed Classic Hits, WNOR AM offered News/Talk, and WNOR-FM (“Ninety-nine”) played Modern Rock. This group was a ratings and revenue market leader as well.

For convenience and ease of reference, Table 3-1, which provides an overview of pertinent characteristics of the ten radio stations, is repeated here as Table 3-2.

Table 3-2

Participating Organizations

Subject Name	Organization	Location	Description
Mike Anthony	WBDX/WLLJ	Chattanooga, TN	Standalone FM duopoly. Contemporary Christian music format. Sales staff size 6. Production staff size 1 part time, and Mike was also Program Director.
Kent Bailey	WGFX-FM	Nashville, TN	Part of Citadel's three entity Nashville cluster. Sports Talk format. Sales staff size 30. Production staff size 2 full time.
Dave Benzing	AM/FM	Nashville, TN	Five station Nashville cluster. Dominant mainstream formats. Sales staff size 40. Production staff size 3 full time.
Dan Buckley	WRLT-FM	Nashville, TN	Standalone FM with weak signal. AAA music format. Sales staff size 6. Production staff size 1 almost full time, but Dan also did a two-hour music program.
Paul Creasman	Q96	Phoenix, AZ	Standalone FM. Religious Talk format. Sales staff 2. Production staff 1 part time, and Paul was also Operations Manager.
Bill Goodman	WCOR/WANT	Lebanon, TN	Standalone AM/FM combo. Country music format. Only local station in market. Sales staff size 3. Production staff size 1 part time, and Bill was also News Director and Operations Manager.
Jeff Haislip	WJMM-AM/FM	Lewisburg, TN	Standalone AM/FM combo. Variety music format. Only local station in market. Sales staff size 2. Production staff size 1 part time, and Jeff is co-owner, morning show host.
Paul Hughes	WNSR-AM	Nashville, TN	Standalone AM. Sports Talk format. Sales staff size 4. Production staff size 1 full time.
Mike Koolidge	WRHL-AM	Rochelle, IL	Standalone AM in suburban Chicago. News-Talk format. Sales staff size 4. Production staff size 1 part time, and Mike also hosts afternoon talk show.
Jeff Schmidt	WAFX/WNOR	Norfolk, VA	Three-station Tidewater Communications cluster. Dominant mainstream formats. Sales staff 13. Production staff size 2 full time, who also do imaging for the stations.

Conducting the fieldwork. Eight of the ten subjects were observed and interviewed in the work place. One (Paul Creasman) was no longer employed at the subject radio station, so he was interviewed in person. Another (Mike Koolidge) was geographically distant, so he was interviewed by telephone. It should be noted that both of these subjects did provide commercial scripts for the Burkean Cluster Analysis. On average, the observations and interviews lasted between four and ten hours each.

The observation portion of the field work was designed to explore what each subject's work life is like—the pace of the day, interaction with coworkers, workload, and perceived stress and pressure. Significant effort was expended to observe from an “out of the way” perspective, without distracting or interfering with the usual work processes, and without drawing attention to the observation. The interview portion of the field work explored the perceptions of the subject about the workday, production processes, and the media organization's routines. An informal interview style was utilized, incorporating a predesigned range of questions for each subject, but doing so within the context of what “seem[ed] to be casual conversations” (Fetterman 38) and with the flexibility to modify the line of questioning. Most of the questions were open-ended, designed to elicit responses that could be compared with those of the other subjects in order to discover whether any patterns or themes were developing. As topics were probed further, the questions often became more closed-ended for the purpose of clarification.

The predesigned range of questions included the following:

- The production person's career track, including education and experience
- The production person's typical workday
- The radio station's formal production processes

- The extent to which the formal production processes are followed
- External factors that influence the production process
- The production person's relationships with other departments and staff
- The division of production responsibilities (writing, voicing, editing, etc.)
- The part of the job the production person likes best
- The part of the job the production person likes least
- Resources available to the production person (client contact, brainstorming)

An audio recording was made of each interview, from which a hard copy was transcribed for in-depth analysis and accuracy. The recordings range in length from approximately forty-five minutes to three hours, and transcriptions of the ten interviews yielded 219 pages of text for analysis. Interestingly, this technique of recording was not only inobtrusive, but it was also a humorous point of connection for the subjects. Since they deal with recording their voices on a daily basis, they were completely comfortable with a recorder being present, except that they were concerned that it was placed optimally for quality voice reproduction—they wanted to be sure they “sounded great.” For the most part, they also spoke in their biggest, most effective “radio voice.”

Analyzing the data. After the data was recorded and transcribed, the analysis began. Of course, as Fetterman pointed out, “...in ethnographic research analysis and data collection begin simultaneously” (2). That statement notwithstanding, during the observation and interviewing process, and certainly during the review of transcripts, analysis was conducted, searching for patterns and themes. Field notes from the observations, including notation of such factors as the workplace environment, the pace of production, nonverbal cues, and interpersonal interactions with coworkers were

reviewed, along with transcription from the interviews. These evaluations focused on the identification of patterns and themes that would suggest what impact the media organization, its processes, personal attitudes of the media workers, or other external factors might have had on the creation of radio commercials. This finding was then weighed against the impact of the media organization on other types of media content, as described by Shoemaker and Reese and demonstrated by previous research. After an initial evaluation of the data gathered from the observation and interview of each individual subject was conducted, a *between subjects* analysis was carried out, incorporating a system of triangulation. Fetterman refers to triangulation as being "...at the heart of ethnographic validity—testing one source of information against another to strip away alternative explanations and prove a hypothesis" (93). In this instance, the fact that multiple subjects offered the same or similar patterns and themes regarding the impact of antecedent factors—such as those within the media organization—on their creation of radio commercials provided a stronger theoretical case, which is discussed in Chapter 5. The next chapter, however, presents the results of the Burkean Cluster Analysis.

Chapter 4—Results of the Burkean Cluster Analysis

As described in Chapter 3, the first phase of the study explored a sample of 96 radio commercial scripts utilizing the qualitative rhetorical method, Burkean Cluster Analysis. The scripts were selected on the basis of having been created by the personnel at the radio stations where the ethnographic observations and interviews were conducted. Initially, each script was examined to determine whether any of the predetermined key themes (which were seemingly ubiquitous)—price, quality, selection, service, and a sense of urgency—were present. As was mentioned earlier, another theme—detailed contact information—was added during the initial analysis of data.

A spreadsheet was created and encoded to reflect which, if any, of the themes was present, and basic descriptive statistics were generated. Next, the terms that clustered around the key themes were charted for further analysis. A discussion of the results follows.

A Descriptive Overview of Initial Results

A breakdown of the 96 radio commercial scripts provided by the subjects for the ethnographic analysis revealed the following descriptive data:

- The theme of “price” was present in 49 (51%) of the radio scripts.
- The theme of “quality” was present in 41 (43%) of the radio scripts.
- The theme of “selection” was present in 31 (32%) of the radio scripts.
- The theme of “service” was present in 34 (35%) of the radio scripts.
- The theme of “urgency” was present in 37 (39%) of the radio scripts.
- The theme of “detailed contact information” was present in 66 (69%) of the radio scripts.

Only 5 of the 96 commercial scripts contained none of the key themes, while 79 contained more than one. None of the scripts contained all of the key themes, but 7 did contain five out of six. The average number of themes present in each of the 96 radio commercial scripts was 2.69. Table 4-1 displays the 96 radio commercial scripts and indicates which of the key themes was present in the script. A “1” indicates that the theme was present, and a “0” indicates that the theme was not present. The “total” column indicates how many of the six themes were present in each of the radio commercial scripts. As a reminder, while analysis of the data related to the presence of the theme “localism” is shown, it is not included in the count displayed in the “Total” column.

Table 4-1

Incidence of the Themes

Client Name	Price	Quality	Selection	Service	Urgency	Contact	Local*	Total
ACCU QUOTE	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	4
ADIDONNA'S TOWING	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
ALEXANDER FORD 1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	3
ALEXANDER FORD 2	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	3
ALEXANDER FORD 3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
ALEXANDER FORD 4	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	4
AMERICAN FREEDOM MTG 1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	4
AMERICAN FREEDOM MTG 2	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	4
AMSOUTH BANK 1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
AMSOUTH BANK 2	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
ANDERSON CAPITAL 1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	4
ANDERSON CAPITAL 2	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	3
AUTO WORLD	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
BAPTIST SPORTS MEDICINE	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	3
BERNARD HALDANE	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	4
BILL SHORES FRAMES	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	2
BLACK CANYON CHIRO	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
BMW OF NASHVILLE	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
BOB & CLAY	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	4
BOB FRENSELY CHRYSLER	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	4
BOMA FIRST CHURCH OF GOD	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	3
BUTLER NETWORKS	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	3
CHEESEBURGER CHARLIES	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	2
COUNTRY PLACE	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	3
COX'S GIFTS & JEWELRY	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	4
CREST CADILLAC	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	3
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 2	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
CUNNINGHAM MOTORS	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
DAVID JENT REALTY	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	5
DELAYKO SERVICE	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	3
ENTERPRISE	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	3
EZ TOYS	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	3
FIRST INSURANCE	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	5
FISH MAGAZINE 1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
FISH MAGAZINE 2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
FISH MAGAZINE 3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
FISH MAGAZINE 4	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
GIANT SUBS	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	3
HAYS AUTOMOTIVE	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
HEAVENLY HAM	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	3
HECHT'S	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
HESTER'S BAR B Q 1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	4
HESTER'S BAR B Q 2	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
HILLER PLUMBING	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	5
HILTON SUITES	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
HOLLY'S PRINTING	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
HOUSTON MEAT & PRODUCE	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
K & D AUTO	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
KELLER WILLIAMS 1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	4
KELLER WILLIAMS 2	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	4
KELLER WILLIAMS 3	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	3

LOGAN'S	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
LOWE'S	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	4
MERCEDES OF NASHVILLE	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	4
MIDSOUTH	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	3
MIDWEST LIFE	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	4
MOD MADIGANS	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
MOUNTAIN HARBOR	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	5
NBC BANK 1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
NBC BANK 2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
NBC BANK 3	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
OLD NEIGHBORHOOD GRILL	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	3
PELM'S HOUSE	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	5
PREDATORS	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	3
PREFERRED MORTGAGE	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
PUREATECH 1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	4
PUREATECH 2	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	3
PUREATECH 3	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
QUICKEN LOANS	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	3
RAFFERTY'S	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
REGENT DODGE 1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	4
REGENT DODGE 2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
ROLLSHOUSE LAW FIRM	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
SLEEP NUMBER BED	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
SMITH AUTO SALES	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
SOUTHEAST IMPRESSIONS 1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	3
SOUTHEAST IMPRESSIONS 2	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	3
SUFJAN STEVENS CONCERT	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
SUMNER HARRINGTON	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	4
SUNSET RESTAURANT	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	3
THW INSURANCE 1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	3
THW INSURANCE 2	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	5
TIN ANGEL	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
TN LIFE DOT COM	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
UDDER CREAMERY	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
UNIVERSITY MEDICAL 1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
UNIVERSITY MEDICAL 2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
UTALK UNLIMITED	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	3
VALLEY CHRISTIAN SUPPLY	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	3
VALLEY WIDE INSURANCE	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
VIRALIZER	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	3
VISION IMPROVEMENT	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	3
YMCA MUSIC FEST	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	4
ZEE'S RESTAURANT	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	5
Total Incidence of Themes	49	41	31	34	37	66	28	2.69
Proportion of Present Themes	51%	43%	32%	35%	39%	69%	29%	

*Not included in totals

Results of the Analysis of Terms that Cluster Around the Key Themes

After the 96 scripts were examined to determine which, if any, of the key themes were present in the commercial, each script was given further close inspection in order to record and chart the terms that the writers used in relation to each of the themes. It is at this point in the study that writing patterns became evident, and the scripts begin to reveal some things about the world of the local direct radio advertising copy writer. It is also at this point in the study that evidence of that which Ryan and Peterson referred to as an art model called *convention and formula* began to emerge. This model implies that there is an agreed-upon “correct” way to produce the piece of media art—in this case, the radio commercial.

The Theme of Price

It may be no surprise that the theme of price is often present in the sample of radio commercials. It has already been established that 49 of the 96 (51%) scripts addressed the theme of price. On the other hand, it is a bit of a surprise to realize the extent to which writers use the same or very similar terms when they write about price. Obviously, phrases that describe “price” in terms of being low rather than high are regarded as *god* terms. But, the intensity with which “low price” is expressed is almost comical. Consider the following examples from the group of 96:

- “save hundreds, even thousands”
- “rock bottom prices”
- “no holds barred savings”
- “prices are being slashed”
- “just one dollar over invoice”

- “one thousand dollar price guarantee”
- “it doesn’t get any better than this”
- “up to 60% off”
- “the best price”
- “guaranteed nationally approved pricing”
- “no one beats our prices”
- “save thousands”
- “one thousand bucks below factory invoice” (four times in one commercial)
- “no one will make you a better deal”
- “super deals”

The most commonly used terms that cluster around the theme of price are “only,” “just,” and “as low as.” Frankly, it seemed odd to think about a very expensive item, such as a luxury automobile, being advertised for any price that began with the term “only.” Perhaps local direct radio advertising copy writers do not give that apparent oxymoron much thought. Another term that was frequently clustered around the theme of price was “free.” In almost every case, however, the product being advertised was not free. Rather, it was usually some ancillary complimentary offer, such as a “free introductory video,” “free dessert with lunch,” “free cable with long distance subscription,” “free batteries with the purchase of an electronic game,” “free gift-wrapping,” or “free career assessment.” A few commercials did offer an actual product at no cost. A chiropractor promised a “free chiropractic adjustment” to any listener who participated in a charitable promotion. A Christian magazine (which itself carried advertising) was available for free to the public. And a bank offered free checking.

Closer analysis revealed that ten of the radio commercials asserting unbeatable pricing were for automobile dealers in the greater Nashville area. One claimed that “no one will make a better deal.” Another made the “one thousand dollar price guarantee.” Yet another exclaimed, “It doesn’t get any better than this!” At a cognitive level, these mutually exclusive claims appear to contradict each other. Only one commercial for an automobile dealer exercised restraint in addressing price. The *god* term “value” was detected in description of the pricing strategy for a BMW dealership.

The aggressive proclamation claiming “best pricing” was not limited to automobile advertising. Other product categories were often equally assertive. The contention that the advertiser can save listeners “hundreds, even thousands of dollars” came from an independent insurance broker. A realtor proposed “great deals.” A car rental company offered the “best rental package around,” but “weekend specials are even better.” A toy store claimed to sell “wholesale to the public” with “up to 60% off.” Another insurance company provided the “best insurance at the best price.” “No one beats” the prices of a home improvement store. And even an exclusive lake community featured acreage with “prices at bargain levels.” As for that “guaranteed nationally approved pricing” (whatever that means), it was a pledge that comes from a local, independent plumber!

It has already been stated that the most consistent terms that cluster around the key theme of “price” are the idioms only and just, or other adjectives that increase intensity. “Only \$170,” “most competitive rates,” “just \$1,” “special rates,” and “historically low rates” are all examples. No matter what the price, the frequent use of only or just implies that it is lower than should be expected.

The similarity of terms used to depict pricing strategies in these local direct radio commercials seemed to indicate that Ryan and Peterson's media art model of *convention and formula* may have been at work in their creation. The fact that so many radio commercials from this sample communicated the same ideas, and in some cases the exact same terminology, may have been because the writers were following a formula for creating commercial scripts, rather than imparting a real and valid claim. Table 4-2 lists the 96 local direct radio commercials and indicates whether or not the theme of "price" is present in each script. A "1" in the "price" column indicates that the theme was present, and a "0" indicates that the theme was not present. If the theme was present, the "cluster terms" column details the terms that clustered around the key theme.

Table 4-2

The Theme of Price

CLIENT NAME	PRICE	CLUSTER TERMS
ACCU QUOTE	1	saving 100s, even 1000s/low cost/paying too much/save up to 70%
ADIDONNA'S TOWING	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 1	1	Just—as low as—/from just—
ALEXANDER FORD 2	1	rock bottom prices/as low as/no holds barred savings/biggest sale
ALEXANDER FORD 3	1	zero down/lowest payments
ALEXANDER FORD 4	1	Sale of the century/prices are being slashed/only (3X)
AMERICAN FREEDOM MTG 1	0	
AMERICAN FREEDOM MTG 2	1	Lowering your interest rate/money back in your pocket
AMSOUTH BANK 1	1	Student loans cost less
AMSOUTH BANK 2	0	
ANDERSON CAPITAL 1	1	most competitive rates
ANDERSON CAPITAL 2	0	
AUTO WORLD	0	
BAPTIST SPORTS MEDICINE	0	
BERNARD HALDANE	1	Free career assessment
BILL SHORES FRAMES	0	
BLACK CANYON CHIROPRACTIC	1	Free chiropractic adjustment
BMW OF NASHVILLE	0	
BOB & CLAY	1	Only
BOB FRENSELY CHRYSLER	1	Just \$1 over invoice/buy and save/just/\$1000 best price guarantee
BOMA FIRST CHURCH OF GOD	0	
BUTLER NETWORKS	1	save \$100 on installation
CHEESEBURGER CHARLIES	0	
COUNTRY PLACE	0	
COX'S GIFTS & JEWELRY	1	every budget/free gift wrapping
CREST CADILLAC	1	up to \$7000 off MSRP/closeout savings/doesn't get better than this
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 1	0	
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 2	0	
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 3	0	
CUNNINGHAM MOTORS	1	slashing prices/discounted a full 7 grand/just/only/as low as
DAVID JENT REALTY	1	great deal/prices are lower now
DELAYKO SERVICE	1	honest estimate
ENTERPRISE	1	best rental package around/weekend specials even better
EZ TOYS	1	wholesale to the public/up to 60% off/free batteries
FIRST INSURANCE	1	best insurance at the best price
FISH MAGAZINE 1	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 2	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 3	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 4	1	Free newspaper/free magazine
GIANT SUBS	0	
HAYS AUTOMOTIVE	1	won't overcharge you
HEAVENLY HAM	0	
HECHT'S	0	
HESTER'S BAR B Q 1	0	
HESTER'S BAR B Q 2	0	
HILLER PLUMBING	1	guaranteed nationally approved pricing
HILTON SUITES	0	
HOLLY'S PRINTING	0	
HOUSTON MEAT & PRODUCE	0	
K & D AUTO	0	
KELLER WILLIAMS 1	1	affordable mini-farm/no matter what your budget
KELLER WILLIAMS 2	1	affordable find/save money
KELLER WILLIAMS 3	0	

LOGAN'S	0	
LOWE'S	1	no one beats Lowe's prices/low prices everyday. Guaranteed.
MERCEDES OF NASHVILLE	1	Value
MIDSOUTH	0	
MIDWEST LIFE	1	Too expensive? Not anymore./quality affordable health insurance (4X)
MOD MADIGANS	0	
MOUNTAIN HARBOR	1	prices at bargain levels (acreage)/from/volume sales pricing
NBC BANK 1	1	great rates on home equity loans and lines of credit
NBC BANK 2	0	
NBC BANK 3	1	special rates/free checking
OLD NEIGHBORHOOD GRILL	1	reasonable prices
PELM'S HOUSE	1	sliding fee (rehab)
PREDATORS	1	only \$170 (2X)/only \$34 a month
PREFERRED MORTGAGE	1	save a lot of money with a re-fi
PUREATECH 1	1	Free fall tune-up on your HVAC
PUREATECH 2	1	Fall tune-up for absolutely nothing
PUREATECH 3	0	
QUICKEN LOANS	1	historically low rates/save thousands
RAFFERTY'S	0	
REGENT DODGE 1	1	1000 bucks below factory invoice (4X)/no one will make better deal
REGENT DODGE 2	1	super deals/\$1000 cash allowance
ROLLSHOUSE LAW FIRM	0	
SLEEP NUMBER BED	0	
SMITH AUTO SALES	0	
SOUTHEAST IMPRESSIONS 1	0	
SOUTHEAST IMPRESSIONS 2	0	
SUFJAN STEVENS CONCERT	0	
SUMNER HARRINGTON	1	Free investment kit
SUNSET RESTAURANT	0	
THW INSURANCE 1	0	
THW INSURANCE 2	1	Value
TIN ANGEL	0	
TN LIFE DOT COM	0	
UDDER CREAMERY	0	
UNIVERSITY MEDICAL 1	0	
UNIVERSITY MEDICAL 2	0	
UTALK UNLIMITED	1	Free basic cable or satellite (6X)/low flat rate/\$1 for 1 month
VALLEY CHRISTIAN SUPPLY	1	only/just/15% discount/save
VALLEY WIDE INSURANCE	0	
VIRALIZER	1	costs only \$35
VISION IMPROVEMENT	1	Free video
YMCA MUSIC FEST	1	tickets are \$30 (benefit)
ZEE'S RESTAURANT	1	all for \$5.49/free dessert/5% off with church bulletin
Total Incidence of Theme	49	

The Theme of Quality

The second theme that was analyzed was the theme of “quality.” A total of 41 of the 96 radio commercial scripts (43%) contained terms and phrases that denote quality in some way. Once again, the kind of terms that one might intuitively expect to find within the artifacts was—in fact—present and—in fact—identifiable as *god* terms. Consider the following inventory of clustered terms and phrases from the sample of local direct radio commercial scripts:

- A number of scripts made comparative statements about the quality of their product or service. Examples included the following: “We are the best at what we do”; “a reputation for superior quality”; “the best of the best”; “the nation’s top handicappers”; “the best insurance”; “the best barbecue in the Valley”; “the best ingredients”; “best state-of-the-art professional treatment”; “best food”; “highest quality of indoor air”; “superior location”; “best French Fries anywhere”; “smoothest, creamiest, super premium ice cream”; and “best in medical care.”
- Commercials for food and dining establishments consistently pointed to “freshness.” Examples included the following: “fresh meats, never frozen”; “great meal, delicious entrees, fresh vegetables”; “fresh everything”; “fresh and delicious”; and “fresh selection of produce.”
- Some simply included the term “quality” itself, used as an adjective. Examples included the following: “a quality used car or truck”; “elegant pieces of jewelry of quality and distinction”; “quality auto parts”; “high quality choice of meats”; “quality windows”; and “quality, affordable health insurance.”

- Others used different, but similar, adjectives. Examples included the following: “a great pair of hands”; “professional experience”; “great music”; “qualified professional sales agents”; “savory ribs”; “delicious breakfast”; “tastiest extras this side of a main dish”; “burger is outstanding”; “great food”; “learning community of distinction”; and “first class style.”
- And a few found official-sounding terms to describe quality. Examples included “certified pre-owned” and “unconditional money-back guarantee.”
- One of the commercial scripts included a phrase that appeared to be another oxymoron, describing quality as “always exceptional.”

As this inventory reveals, one very commonly found claim was the declaration that there was no equal for the product. It is one thing for an advertiser to maintain that the product or service advertised is of good quality. It is another thing entirely to maintain that the product or service advertised is better than any comparable or competing brand. Are the “best French Fries anywhere” really to be found in Lebanon, Tennessee? Is the “best medical care” really to be found in Lebanon, Tennessee? And what exactly is the “best insurance”? Should these claims be taken seriously? Or were they simply expressions chosen by radio commercial copy writers, because they fit the accepted *convention and formula*?

Another interesting aspect of the use of some of these *god* terms was the repetitious nature of their use. In one thirty-second automobile dealer commercial script, the phrase “quality used car or truck” appeared three times. A pair of real estate agents was referred to as the “winning team” twice in one thirty-second commercial. A vinyl window installation firm offered a “lifetime guarantee” twice in one thirty-second

commercial. And an insurance company mentioned “quality, affordable health insurance” three times in their commercial, another claim that would likely seem to be an oxymoron to many listeners. Part of the dilemma presented by the use of this particular phrase is that generally one would expect that the use of repetition would be for the purpose of improving either emphasis or recall. If, however, the veracity of the repeated claim is dubious at a cognitive level, is improving either emphasis or recall counter-productive?

Again, the analysis of the terms that cluster around the theme of “quality” in radio commercials give evidence of enough similarities to indicate that there could be a certain *convention and formula* at work in their creation. Table 4-3 lists the 96 local direct radio commercials and indicates whether or not the theme of “quality” is present in each script. A “1” in the “quality” column indicates that the theme was present, and a “0” indicates that the theme was not present. If the theme was present, the “cluster terms” column details the terms that clustered around the key theme.

Table 4-3

The Theme of Quality

CLIENT NAME	QUALITY	CLUSTER TERMS
ACCU QUOTE	0	
ADIDONNA'S TOWING	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 1	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 2	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 3	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 4	0	
AMERICAN FREEDOM MTG 1	1	We are the best at what we do.
AMERICAN FREEDOM MTG 2	0	
AMSOUTH BANK 1	0	
AMSOUTH BANK 2	0	
ANDERSON CAPITAL 1	1	Professional experience
ANDERSON CAPITAL 2	0	
AUTO WORLD	1	quality used car or truck (3X)
BAPTIST SPORTS MEDICINE	1	great pair of hands
BERNARD HALDANE	1	most respected firm/cutting edge services have been successful
BILL SHORES FRAMES	1	reputation for superior quality
BLACK CANYON CHIROPRACTIC	0	
BMW OF NASHVILLE	1	certified pre-owned BMW's/best of the best/ultimate lineup
BOB & CLAY	1	Who is getting the plays right/nation's top handicappers/winning
BOB FRENSELY CHRYSLER	0	
BOMA FIRST CHURCH OF GOD	1	great music
BUTLER NETWORKS	0	
CHEESEBURGER CHARLIES	1	fresh meats, never frozen/we've perfected them
COUNTRY PLACE	1	great meal,, delicious entrees, fresh vegetables
COX'S GIFTS & JEWELRY	1	elegant pieces of jewelry of quality and distinction
CREST CADILLAC	0	
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 1	1	learning community of distinction
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 2	0	
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 3	0	
CUNNINGHAM MOTORS	0	
DAVID JENT REALTY	1	qualified professional sales agents
DELAYKO SERVICE	0	
ENTERPRISE	0	
EZ TOYS	0	
FIRST INSURANCE	1	They can find the best insurance
FISH MAGAZINE 1	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 2	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 3	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 4	0	
GIANT SUBS	1	fresh everything/even the bread is baked on location/best ingredients
HAYS AUTOMOTIVE	0	
HEAVENLY HAM	1	fresh and delicious
HECHT'S	0	
HESTER'S BAR B Q 1	1	Best BBQ in the Valley/savory ribs/chicken like you've never tasted
HESTER'S BAR B Q 2	0	
HILLER PLUMBING	1	advanced certification/best state of the art professional treatment
HILTON SUITES	1	Stay in luxury/delicious breakfast
HOLLY'S PRINTING	0	
HOUSTON MEAT & PRODUCE	1	High quality choice of meats/fresh selection of produce
K & D AUTO	1	quality auto parts
KELLER WILLIAMS 1	1	winning team
KELLER WILLIAMS 2	1	winning team
KELLER WILLIAMS 3	1	winning team (2X)

LOGAN'S	1	tastiest extras this side of a main dish/seriously good food
LOWE'S	0	
MERCEDES OF NASHVILLE	1	performance and luxury/winning tradition of a true dynasty
MIDSOUTH	1	lifetime guarantee (2X)/quality windows
MIDWEST LIFE	1	quality, affordable health insurance (3X)
MOD MADIGANS	0	
MOUNTAIN HARBOR	1	superior location
NBC BANK 1	0	
NBC BANK 2	0	
NBC BANK 3	0	
OLD NEIGHBORHOOD GRILL	1	Lebanon's best food/voted best of the best in Wilson County
PELM'S HOUSE	0	
PREDATORS	0	
PREFERRED MORTGAGE	0	
PUREATECH 1	1	highest quality of indoor air
PUREATECH 2	0	
PUREATECH 3	1	nothing cleans the air in your home as completely
QUICKEN LOANS	0	
RAFFERTY'S	1	burger is outstanding
REGENT DODGE 1	0	
REGENT DODGE 2	0	
ROLLSHOUSE LAW FIRM	0	
SLEEP NUMBER BED	0	
SMITH AUTO SALES	0	
SOUTHEAST IMPRESSIONS 1	0	
SOUTHEAST IMPRESSIONS 2	0	
SUFJAN STEVENS CONCERT	0	
SUMNER HARRINGTON	0	
SUNSET RESTAURANT	1	good wholesome family meal/best French Fries anywhere/great food
THW INSURANCE 1	0	
THW INSURANCE 2	0	
TIN ANGEL	1	always exceptional
TN LIFE DOT COM	0	
UDDER CREAMERY	1	that place is great/smoothest, creamiest, super premium/gourmet
UNIVERSITY MEDICAL 1	1	best in medical care/reputation for being on the cutting edge
UNIVERSITY MEDICAL 2	0	
UTALK UNLIMITED	0	
VALLEY CHRISTIAN SUPPLY	0	
VALLEY WIDE INSURANCE	0	
VIRALIZER	1	sold with an unconditional money back guarantee
VISION IMPROVEMENT	0	
YMCA MUSIC FEST	1	star-studded evening of live music
ZEE'S RESTAURANT	1	1st class style
Total Incidence of Theme	41	

The Theme of Selection

The third theme analyzed was the theme of “selection.” A total of 31 of the 96 radio commercial scripts (32%) contained terms and phrases that denote selection in some way. Here, the kinds of terms that were identifiable as *god* terms included general expressions, more specific statements, and a few comparative assertions. General expressions included such phrases as “hundreds of products,” “plenty of other options,” “great selection,” “wide variety,” “lots of side items,” “a variety of parcels,” “everything from pasta to steak on the menu,” “a variety of styles,” and “they’ve got everything,” often preceded by the imperative “choose from...” More specific statements included such phrases as “forty-five Mustangs in stock,” “twelve million dollars in inventory,” “three hundred Concorde’s,” “three sub sizes,” “over thirty Ram tough trucks, over thirty Durango’s,” and—from a university—“forty undergraduate majors.” Comparative assertions included such phrases as “more agents and listings in Marshall County than any other realtor” and the more common “best selection.”

Undoubtedly, these examples inform consumers that some range of choice is available to them. Too often, however, the choices detailed in radio commercials analyzed in this study seemed too extensive. It seemed relatively common that a veritable grocery list of items (often with the items’ accompanying prices) was delivered within the confines of a thirty-second aural announcement. In the subject sample of 96 commercials, for example, no fewer than 9 not only made statements about a variety of selection, but also listed many of the items from which a consumer could choose. This was particularly true of dining establishments. From Mexican restaurants to sandwich shops to family diners, several of the spots could easily have been mistaken for the menu,

complete with pricing. This would be in conflict with the widely held view that a radio commercial should contain only one core idea (O'Day; Hausman, Benoit, O'Donnell).

In fact, this advertising strategy, which is often referred to as a “price and item” strategy, appears to be quite common in radio commercials—common enough that one might consider “price and item” advertising to be part of an agreed-upon *convention and formula* for creating radio commercials. While such *conventions* and *formulas* may have become popular because they had sometimes been effective, the problem again arises when they become the standard way for all radio commercials to be created, and when it is falsely assumed that they are always effective across all media, all products and services, all audiences and situations, and in the midst of changing market, media, and cultural conditions. But if the strategy seems to be in conflict with accepted and recommended theories about how radio advertising works, how could it have become such a significant part of writing practice for radio? One possible answer (that will be explored further in the ethnographic analysis that follows) is that “price and item” advertising is a client-initiated strategy. Price-and-item advertising has its roots in print advertising—a medium clearly more suited for detail-orientation, and the “link” that brings a print strategy to radio may be none other than the client.

If a client—particularly a local direct client—has a history of using print advertising, the client may be very comfortable using the print strategy of listing items available for purchase with or without an accompanying price. Further, the client may not be versed in the strengths and weaknesses of various media, thinking instead that a print ad and a radio commercial are really no different from each other. If such clients exert influence over the creation of a radio commercial often enough, and that influence is

vigorous, it is one example of an antecedent factor leading to the existence of a certain *convention and formula*. In fact, this phenomenon may even point to what Shoemaker and Reese (1991) referred to as the “hegemonic approach.” McQuail noted that Shoemaker and Reese’s hegemonic approach was one in which “content is a function of ideological positions and maintains the status quo” (278). This is “how it’s always been done.” Table 4-4 lists the 96 local direct radio commercials and indicates whether or not the theme of “selection” is present in each script. A “1” in the “selection” column indicates that the theme was present, and a “0” indicates that the theme was not present. If the theme was present, the “cluster terms” column details the terms that clustered around the key theme.

Table 4-4

The Theme of Selection

CLIENT NAME	SELECTION	CLUSTER TERMS
ACCU QUOTE	1	We'll compare hundreds of products for you.
ADIDONNA'S TOWING	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 1	1	Over 45 Mustangs in stock/truckloads of Mustang Convertibles
ALEXANDER FORD 2	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 3	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 4	1	12 million dollars in inventory
AMERICAN FREEDOM MTG 1	0	
AMERICAN FREEDOM MTG 2	0	
AMSOUTH BANK 1	0	
AMSOUTH BANK 2	0	
ANDERSON CAPITAL 1	0	
ANDERSON CAPITAL 2	0	
AUTO WORLD	0	
BAPTIST SPORTS MEDICINE	0	
BERNARD HALDANE	0	
BILL SHORES FRAMES	0	
BLACK CANYON CHIROPRACTIC	0	
BMW OF NASHVILLE	0	
BOB & CLAY	0	
BOB FRENSLEY CHRYSLER	1	300 Concordes/choose from 15 loaded Voyagers
BOMA FIRST CHURCH OF GOD	0	
BUTLER NETWORKS	0	
CHEESEBURGER CHARLIES	1	Burger alternatives/plenty of other options
COUNTRY PLACE	0	
COX'S GIFTS & JEWELRY	1	great selection/styled for every budget, every taste/best selection
CREST CADILLAC	0	
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 1	1	wide variety
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 2	1	40 undergraduate majors
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 3	0	
CUNNINGHAM MOTORS	0	
DAVID JENT REALTY	1	more agents and listings in Marshall County than any other realtor
DELAYKO SERVICE	0	
ENTERPRISE	0	
EZ TOYS	0	
FIRST INSURANCE	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 1	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 2	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 3	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 4	0	
GIANT SUBS	1	three sub sizes/meat & cheese choices/lots of side items
HAYS AUTOMOTIVE	0	
HEAVENLY HAM	0	
HECHT'S	1	great selection of your favorite Titans jerseys
HESTER'S BAR B Q 1	1	meat choices/menu options
HESTER'S BAR B Q 2	1	meat choices/menu options
HILLER PLUMBING	1	Plumbing, heating, and cooling service
HILTON SUITES	0	
HOLLY'S PRINTING	0	
HOUSTON MEAT & PRODUCE	1	fresh selection/large assortment of grocery items
K & D AUTO	0	
KELLER WILLIAMS 1	0	
KELLER WILLIAMS 2	0	
KELLER WILLIAMS 3	0	

LOGAN'S	0	
LOWE'S	1	over 250 name brand appliances in stock
MERCEDES OF NASHVILLE	1	some symbolize value, others define performance and luxury
MIDSOUTH	0	
MIDWEST LIFE	0	
MOD MADIGANS	0	
MOUNTAIN HARBOR	1	a variety of parcels
NBC BANK 1	0	
NBC BANK 2	0	
NBC BANK 3	0	
OLD NEIGHBORHOOD GRILL	0	
PELM'S HOUSE	1	help with any substance abuse problem
PREDATORS	0	
PREFERRED MORTGAGE	0	
PUREATECH 1	0	
PUREATECH 2	0	
PUREATECH 3	0	
QUICKEN LOANS	0	
RAFFERTY'S	1	Everything from pasta to steak on the menu
REGENT DODGE 1	1	over 30 Ram Tough trucks/over 30 Durangos
REGENT DODGE 2	0	
ROLLSHOUSE LAW FIRM	0	
SLEEP NUMBER BED	0	
SMITH AUTO SALES	0	
SOUTHEAST IMPRESSIONS 1	1	logo on a variety of styles of jackets, shirts, and hats
SOUTHEAST IMPRESSIONS 2	1	logo on just about anything you want
SUFJAN STEVENS CONCERT	0	
SUMNER HARRINGTON	1	note terms range from 3 months to 10 years
SUNSET RESTAURANT	1	laundry list of meats, vegetables, burgers, side orders, desserts
THW INSURANCE 1	1	select the programs best suited for your needs/variety of policies (list)
THW INSURANCE 2	1	combine precise amounts of service, value, and options/precisely (3X)
TIN ANGEL	0	
TN LIFE DOT COM	1	they've got everything
UDDER CREAMERY	1	laundry list of ice creams, sandwiches, salads, pizza, wraps
UNIVERSITY MEDICAL 1	0	
UNIVERSITY MEDICAL 2	0	
UTALK UNLIMITED	0	
VALLEY CHRISTIAN SUPPLY	1	price and item spot
VALLEY WIDE INSURANCE	0	
VIRALIZER	0	
VISION IMPROVEMENT	0	
YMCA MUSIC FEST	0	
ZEE'S RESTAURANT	1	choose from a laundry list/special selection of desserts
Total Incidence of Theme	31	

The Theme of Service

The fourth theme that was analyzed was the theme of “service.” A total of 34 of the 96 radio commercial scripts (35%) contained terms and phrases that detail service in some way. Notice again the kinds of terms that were identifiable as *god* terms. Some were simply adjectival characteristics that were considered positives, such as “honest and efficient service,” “personal service,” “total orthopedic care,” “cutting edge professional service,” “exceptional service,” “good service,” and “service par excellence.” Others were used to quantify the client’s characterization of positive service, such as “Valley-wide service,” “24 hours a day, seven days a week,” “decisions on a home loan in thirty minutes,” “sixty-five years of ministry,” “24-hour emergency service,” “helping people for 23 years,” “over 10,000 satisfied Nashville customers,” and even the specific, extra-mile service: “they’ll even pick you up” or “they’ll even haul away your old ones.” Still others promised to guarantee positive service, as defined by the consumer: “...does what it takes,” “I personally guarantee your satisfaction with our service,” “we’ll do everything possible,” “we’re here to help you,” “you’ll be pleased with the service that State Auto can provide for you,” “going beyond expectations,” and “they make customer satisfaction a priority.”

There were also a few commercials in the sample that were entirely focused on service. An automobile dealership’s service department was the subject of one commercial, in which the announcer (an air personality at the local radio station) expressed his “hatred” for service departments, until he found Hays’ Automotive, exclaiming, “They’re the best!” Commercials for another automobile service shop and a towing service were also entirely focused on service. Table 4-5 lists the 96 local direct

radio commercials and indicates whether or not the theme of “service” is present in each script. A “1” in the “service” column indicates that the theme was present, and a “0” indicates that the theme was not present. If the theme was present, the “cluster terms” column details the terms that clustered around the key theme.

Table 4-5

The Theme of Service

CLIENT NAME	SERVICE	CLUSTER TERMS
ACCU QUOTE	0	
ADIDONNA'S TOWING	1	Valley-wide service/24 hours a day, seven days a week
ALEXANDER FORD 1	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 2	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 3	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 4	0	
AMERICAN FREEDOM MTG 1	1	Does what it takes/honest & efficient service (2X)/personal
AMERICAN FREEDOM MTG 2	1	I personally guarantee your satisfaction with our service/we'll
AMSOUTH BANK 1	1	loans include outreach and support
AMSOUTH BANK 2	1	decision on home loan in 30 minutes (3X)/answer now/right
ANDERSON CAPITAL 1	1	we're here to help you/personal attention
ANDERSON CAPITAL 2	1	we want to be here for you in the long run
AUTO WORLD	0	
BAPTIST SPORTS MEDICINE	1	Total orthopedic care
BERNARD HALDANE	1	cutting edge professional services/ready to help you make a
BILL SHORES FRAMES	1	reputation for superior quality and service in custom framing
BLACK CANYON CHIROPRACTIC	0	
BMW OF NASHVILLE	0	
BOB & CLAY	0	
BOB FRENSLEY CHRYSLER	0	
BOMA FIRST CHURCH OF GOD	1	65 years of ministry
BUTLER NETWORKS	0	
CHEESEBURGER CHARLIES	0	
COUNTRY PLACE	0	
COX'S GIFTS & JEWELRY	1	personal service
CREST CADILLAC	0	
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 1	0	
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 2	0	
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 3	0	
CUNNINGHAM MOTORS	0	
DAVID JENT REALTY	1	They can help guide you
DELAYKO SERVICE	1	they can handle all our major appliance repairs/24-hr
ENTERPRISE	1	They'll even pick you up (2X)
EZ TOYS	0	
FIRST INSURANCE	1	You'll be pleased with the service that State Auto can provide for you
FISH MAGAZINE 1	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 2	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 3	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 4	0	
GIANT SUBS	0	
HAYS AUTOMOTIVE	1	Spot focuses on hating service depts. Until Hays "they're the
HEAVENLY HAM	0	
HECHT'S	0	
HESTER'S BAR B Q 1	0	
HESTER'S BAR B Q 2	0	
HILLER PLUMBING	1	over 10,000 satisfied Nashville customers/going beyond
HILTON SUITES	0	
HOLLY'S PRINTING	0	
HOUSTON MEAT & PRODUCE	0	
K & D AUTO	1	Spot is on service
KELLER WILLIAMS 1	1	ladies who make exceptional service their priority
KELLER WILLIAMS 2	1	ready to help you
KELLER WILLIAMS 3	1	They make customer satisfaction a goal/ready to help you

LOGAN'S	1	we'll greet you like an old friend
LOWE'S	1	They'll even haul away your old ones free (appliances)
MERCEDES OF NASHVILLE	0	
MIDSOUTH	0	
MIDWEST LIFE	0	
MOD MADIGANS	1	larger staff to serve you
MOUNTAIN HARBOR	0	
NBC BANK 1	0	
NBC BANK 2	0	
NBC BANK 3	1	our specialists can help you with all your banking
OLD NEIGHBORHOOD GRILL	1	Full service family restaurant
PELM'S HOUSE	1	help you define some of your problems (4X)/helping people
PREDATORS	0	
PREFERRED MORTGAGE	0	
PUREATECH 1	0	
PUREATECH 2	0	
PUREATECH 3	0	
QUICKEN LOANS	0	
RAFFERTY'S	0	
REGENT DODGE 1	0	
REGENT DODGE 2	0	
ROLLSHOUSE LAW FIRM	0	
SLEEP NUMBER BED	0	
SMITH AUTO SALES	0	
SOUTHEAST IMPRESSIONS 1	1	Help you design a logo
SOUTHEAST IMPRESSIONS 2	1	if you don't have a logo, SI can take care of that, too/help you
SUFJAN STEVENS CONCERT	0	
SUMNER HARRINGTON	0	
SUNSET RESTAURANT	1	good service
THW INSURANCE 1	1	assist you in selecting
THW INSURANCE 2	1	combine precise amounts of service, value, and options
TIN ANGEL	0	
TN LIFE DOT COM	0	
UDDER CREAMERY	0	
UNIVERSITY MEDICAL 1	0	
UNIVERSITY MEDICAL 2	0	
UTALK UNLIMITED	0	
VALLEY CHRISTIAN SUPPLY	0	
VALLEY WIDE INSURANCE	0	
VIRALIZER	0	
VISION IMPROVEMENT	0	
YMCA MUSIC FEST	0	
ZEE'S RESTAURANT	1	4-star setting with service par excellence/a full service
Total Incidence of Theme	34	

The Theme of a Sense of Urgency

The fifth theme that was analyzed was the theme of “urgency.” A total of 37 of the 96 radio commercial scripts (39%) contained terms and phrases that communicated a sense of urgency in some way. As might be expected, *god* terms included phrases such as “right now,” “call us today,” “start today,” “for a limited time only,” “visit them today,” “hurry in today,” “stop by today,” “ready to take home today,” “call now,” and “don’t miss.” Other *god* terms, however, were expressed with much more enthusiasm.

A number of commercials emphatically voiced “impending doom” with ominous warnings, which included “Everything must go!” “Hurry, time is running out!” “Act today and save \$100!” “The deals you’ve waited for all year...” “It doesn’t get any better than this!” “Hurry in to Cunningham Motors for the Sale of the Century!” “Don’t waste your time! Go straight to EZ Toys!” “How long since you’ve had good barbecue? Well that’s too long!” “Don’t wait another minute! Call now!” “...selling out quickly!” “Pollen is coming! You’re going to be suffering! You need to call right now!” “This may be your last chance!” “Don’t miss out! Call now!” “Hurry down before it’s gone!” and “Don’t waste anymore time!” Interestingly, it should be noted that the physical scripts that were provided by radio stations often contained two, three, or even four exclamation points after phrases that were designed to create the sense of urgency. According to instructions written on the script, this was done in order to communicate to the person voicing the commercial that expressing this urgency was crucial.

Again, the analysis of the terms that cluster around the theme of “urgency” in radio commercials gives evidence of enough similarities to indicate that there could be a certain *convention and formula* at work in their creation. Table 4-6 lists the 96 local

direct radio commercials and indicates whether or not the theme of “urgency” is present in each script. A “1” in the “urgency” column indicates that the theme was present, and a “0” indicates that the theme was not present. If the theme was present, the “cluster terms” column details the terms that clustered around the key theme.

Table 4-6

The Theme of a Sense of Urgency

CLIENT NAME	URGENCY	CLUSTER TERMS
ACCU QUOTE	1	start saving money right now
ADIDONNA'S TOWING	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 1	1	this is your chance
ALEXANDER FORD 2	1	closeout/savings await you today/biggest sale of the year
ALEXANDER FORD 3	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 4	1	Everything must go/don't miss this sale (4X)/hurry time is running out
AMERICAN FREEDOM MTG 1	1	call us today
AMERICAN FREEDOM MTG 2	1	call us today
AMSOUTH BANK 1	0	
AMSOUTH BANK 2	0	
ANDERSON CAPITAL 1	0	
ANDERSON CAPITAL 2	1	give us a call today
AUTO WORLD	0	
BAPTIST SPORTS MEDICINE	0	
BERNARD HALDANE	0	
BILL SHORES FRAMES	0	
BLACK CANYON CHIROPRACTIC	0	
BMW OF NASHVILLE	0	
BOB & CLAY	1	start today
BOB FRENSELY CHRYSLER	1	limited time only/it's a great time to buy and save
BOMA FIRST CHURCH OF GOD	1	this Sunday
BUTLER NETWORKS	1	act today and save \$100/call or visit today
CHEESEBURGER CHARLIES	0	
COUNTRY PLACE	1	visit them today
COX'S GIFTS & JEWELRY	0	
CREST CADILLAC	1	deals you've waited for all year/closeout savings/doesn't get any better than
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 1	0	
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 2	0	
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 3	0	
CUNNINGHAM MOTORS	1	sale of the century/so hurry to CM for the sale of the century
DAVID JENT REALTY	0	
DELAYKO SERVICE	0	
ENTERPRISE	0	
EZ TOYS	1	don't waste your time, go straight to EZ Toys
FIRST INSURANCE	1	start saving money today
FISH MAGAZINE 1	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 2	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 3	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 4	0	
GIANT SUBS	0	
HAYS AUTOMOTIVE	0	
HEAVENLY HAM	1	stop by today
HECHT'S	0	
HESTER'S BAR B Q 1	1	how long since you had good BBQ? Well, that's too long.
HESTER'S BAR B Q 2	0	
HILLER PLUMBING	0	
HILTON SUITES	0	
HOLLY'S PRINTING	0	
HOUSTON MEAT & PRODUCE	0	
K & D AUTO	0	
KELLER WILLIAMS 1	0	
KELLER WILLIAMS 2	0	
KELLER WILLIAMS 3	0	

LOGAN'S	0	
LOWE'S	1	Ready to take home today or be delivered tomorrow
MERCEDES OF NASHVILLE	0	
MIDSOUTH	1	call now
MIDWEST LIFE	1	call now/don't wait another minute/call now (4X)
MOD MADIGANS	0	
MOUNTAIN HARBOR	1	selling out quickly
NBC BANK 1	1	stop by today
NBC BANK 2	0	
NBC BANK 3	0	
OLD NEIGHBORHOOD GRILL	0	
PELM'S HOUSE	1	please let us help you. Call now.
PREDATORS	1	don't miss the first face-off
PREFERRED MORTGAGE	0	
PUREATECH 1	1	pollen is coming. You're going to be suffering/You need to call right now
PUREATECH 2	1	If you haven't called, what in the world are you waiting for? Call now
PUREATECH 3	0	
QUICKEN LOANS	1	This may be your last chance/Don't miss out/Call now (2X)
RAFFERTY'S	0	
REGENT DODGE 1	1	Right now
REGENT DODGE 2	1	It's the event we've been waiting for/Hurry down before it's gone
ROLLSHOUSE LAW FIRM	0	
SLEEP NUMBER BED	1	Don't waste anymore time.
SMITH AUTO SALES	0	
SOUTHEAST IMPRESSIONS 1	0	
SOUTHEAST IMPRESSIONS 2	0	
SUFJAN STEVENS CONCERT	1	This show is not to be missed/Don't miss/Buy your tickets this Friday.
SUMNER HARRINGTON	1	Call today
SUNSET RESTAURANT	0	
THW INSURANCE 1	0	
THW INSURANCE 2	1	Call today
TIN ANGEL	0	
TN LIFE DOT COM	0	
UDDER CREAMERY	0	
UNIVERSITY MEDICAL 1	0	
UNIVERSITY MEDICAL 2	0	
UTALK UNLIMITED	1	Call right now.
VALLEY CHRISTIAN SUPPLY	0	
VALLEY WIDE INSURANCE	0	
VIRALIZER	0	
VISION IMPROVEMENT	1	Improve your vision today.
YMCA MUSIC FEST	1	You don't want to miss.
ZEE'S RESTAURANT	0	
Total Incidence of Theme	37	

The Theme of Detailed Contact Information

As the 96 commercial scripts were being analyzed for the presence of the five themes that were originally presupposed to be ubiquitous, it became clear that a sixth theme was also present in many of the scripts. Commercial after commercial included detailed contact information—the kind of information listeners would not likely be able to remember. In fact, 66 (68%) of the 96 selected radio commercial scripts included detailed contact information.

Granted, it has long been generally accepted that providing the information needed for a consumer to respond was a necessary component of an effective advertising message. The line of reasoning considered here, however, was the degree of detail with which the information was given. Charting and analyzing the terms that clustered around the theme again illustrated the point emphatically.

For example, almost every commercial in the sample included a telephone number consisting of at least seven digits. A few were easy-to-recall numeric sequences, such as (800) AMSOUTH. These were not counted as being examples of detailed contact information. Most telephone numbers, however, were random numeric sequences that would have required the use of significant cognitive resources in order to commit them to memory. A total of 63 of the radio commercial scripts included seven- or ten-digit telephone numbers that provided no easy method for recall.

Other commercials included the recitation of a street address, often consisting of a random group of numbers and a street name, with no easily identifiable—and memorable—landmarks.

Most of the 96 commercials—47 to be precise—actually included multiple forms of detail-oriented contact information squeezed into the same commercial. A common example was the inclusion of a seven- or ten-digit telephone number combined with a street address. Many commercials included a telephone number and a Web address. Some included all three. One commercial for a lakefront subdivision included a 1 (866) number repeated three times, followed by detailed (and hard to follow) directions and then a Web address!

Another interesting—or was it annoying?—trend emerged from the analysis of terms that clustered around the theme of detailed contact information. Of the 63 scripts that included a telephone number, 35 repeated it two, three, or even four times, and frequently used those infamous radio clichés: “that’s (phone number)” or “that number again is (phone number).”

Perhaps the most flawed presentation of contact information was discovered in a set of commercials written for a rural real estate firm. Two different realtors who worked out of two different offices were featured in the commercials. As a result, each of the thirty-second commercials contained two different ten-digit telephone numbers, one for each of the realtors.

Again, it can be argued that contact information is a necessary part of an advertising message. It seems counter-productive, however, to expect that radio listeners would be able to remember contact information that consists of so many numbers or such a detail orientation. On the other hand, it does indicate that even within the realm of providing contact information for listeners, radio commercial creators tend to follow a pattern of *convention and formula*. Table 4-7 lists the 96 local direct radio commercials

and indicates whether or not the theme of “detailed contact information” is present in each script. A “1” in the “contact” column indicates that the theme was present, and a “0” indicates that the theme was not present. If the theme was present, the “cluster terms” column details the terms that clustered around the key theme.

Table 4-7

The Theme of Detailed Contact Information

CLIENT NAME	CONTACT	CLUSTER TERMS
ACCU QUOTE	1	800 number (3X), web address
ADIDONNA'S TOWING	1	Telephone number (3X)...that's #
ALEXANDER FORD 1	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 2	1	Telephone number (2X), city (4X), street name
ALEXANDER FORD 3	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 4	1	Telephone number (2X)...that's #, street name
AMERICAN FREEDOM MTG 1	1	866 number (3X), Web address
AMERICAN FREEDOM MTG 2	1	866 number (3X), Web address
AMSOUTH BANK 1	0	
AMSOUTH BANK 2	1	800 number, Web address
ANDERSON CAPITAL 1	1	10-digit telephone number (2X), Web address
ANDERSON CAPITAL 2	1	10-digit telephone number, Web address
AUTO WORLD	1	Street address (2X), telephone number (2X)...that's #
BAPTIST SPORTS MEDICINE	1	10-digit telephone number, Web address
BERNARD HALDANE	1	Web address (2X), 10-digit telephone number (2X)
BILL SHORES FRAMES	0	
BLACK CANYON CHIROPRACTIC	1	Street address (2X), telephone number (3X)...that's #
BMW OF NASHVILLE	1	Web address, telephone number
BOB & CLAY	1	877 number (4X)...that's #
BOB FRENSLEY CHRYSLER	1	Street address, telephone number
BOMA FIRST CHURCH OF GOD	0	
BUTLER NETWORKS	1	10-digit telephone number (2X), Web address (2X)
CHEESEBURGER CHARLIES	0	
COUNTRY PLACE	1	Street address (no landmark)
COX'S GIFTS & JEWELRY	0	
CREST CADILLAC	0	
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 1	1	Web address, 10-digit telephone number
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 2	1	Web address, 10-digit telephone number
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 3	1	Web address, 10-digit telephone number
CUNNINGHAM MOTORS	0	
DAVID JENT REALTY	1	Two different telephone numbers
DELAYKO SERVICE	1	Telephone number (2X)
ENTERPRISE	1	800 number
EZ TOYS	1	Location (2X), telephone number (2X)
FIRST INSURANCE	1	Telephone number
FISH MAGAZINE 1	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 2	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 3	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 4	1	Web address, telephone number
GIANT SUBS	1	Street address
HAYS AUTOMOTIVE	0	
HEAVENLY HAM	1	Location, telephone number
HECHT'S	0	
HESTER'S BAR B Q 1	1	Location, telephone number (2X)
HESTER'S BAR B Q 2	1	Location, telephone number
HILLER PLUMBING	1	Telephone number (4X)...that's #
HILTON SUITES	1	800 number (2X)
HOLLY'S PRINTING	0	
HOUSTON MEAT & PRODUCE	1	Location, telephone number
K & D AUTO	0	
KELLER WILLIAMS 1	1	Two different 10-digit telephone numbers
KELLER WILLIAMS 2	1	Two different 10-digit telephone numbers
KELLER WILLIAMS 3	1	Two different telephone numbers

LOGAN'S	0	
LOWE'S	0	
MERCEDES OF NASHVILLE	1	Location, telephone number
MIDSOUTH	1	866 number (5X)...that's # (2X)
MIDWEST LIFE	1	800 number (3X)...that's #
MOD MADIGANS	1	Street address, location, telephone number
MOUNTAIN HARBOR	1	866 number (3X)...that's #, detailed directions, Web address
NBC BANK 1	0	
NBC BANK 2	0	
NBC BANK 3	0	
OLD NEIGHBORHOOD GRILL	0	
PELM'S HOUSE	1	Location, telephone number (4X)...that's # (2X)
PREDATORS	1	10-digit telephone number (2X)
PREFERRED MORTGAGE	1	Web address (2X), 888 number
PUREATECH 1	1	800 number (2X)
PUREATECH 2	1	800 number (2X)
PUREATECH 3	1	800 number (3X)
QUICKEN LOANS	1	800 number (4X)...that's #
RAFFERTY'S	0	
REGENT DODGE 1	1	Location, telephone number
REGENT DODGE 2	0	
ROLLSHOUSE LAW FIRM	1	800 number (3X)...that's #, Web address (3X)
SLEEP NUMBER BED	0	
SMITH AUTO SALES	1	Street address, telephone number
SOUTHEAST IMPRESSIONS 1	1	Street address, telephone number
SOUTHEAST IMPRESSIONS 2	1	Street address, telephone number
SUFJAN STEVENS CONCERT	1	Location, Web address
SUMNER HARRINGTON	1	800 number (4X)...that's #
SUNSET RESTAURANT	0	
THW INSURANCE 1	1	Telephone number, street address
THW INSURANCE 2	1	Telephone number (3X)...that's #
TIN ANGEL	0	
TN LIFE DOT COM	0	
UDDER CREAMERY	0	
UNIVERSITY MEDICAL 1	0	
UNIVERSITY MEDICAL 2	1	Location, telephone number
UTALK UNLIMITED	1	800 number (3X)...that's #
VALLEY CHRISTIAN SUPPLY	1	Location (2X), telephone number
VALLEY WIDE INSURANCE	1	Location, telephone number (2X)...that's #
VIRALIZER	1	Location, 800 number (2X)
VISION IMPROVEMENT	1	800 number (4X)...that's #
YMCA MUSIC FEST	1	Location, telephone number
ZEE'S RESTAURANT	1	Street address, telephone number
Total Incidence of Theme	66	

The Theme of Localism

In similar fashion, while analyzing the 96 local direct radio commercial scripts and recalling the regularity with which localism is regarded as terrestrial radio's greatest competitive advantage, a final question emerged that merited exploration. Would the local direct radio commercial scripts' apparent pattern of *convention and formula* include specific references to clients being local in an effort to exploit feelings of community loyalty and pride? After all, many of these local direct advertisers are independently owned and operated by citizens of the local community, and they face some of the same kinds of competitive threats that local radio stations face in the contemporary business climate. Localism may be the greatest competitive advantage that they have, just as it is for the local radio station.

Interestingly, only 28 of the 96 radio commercial scripts made any kind of reference to localism, and the inclusion of many of those was based on a fairly liberal interpretation of what was meant by the theme "localism." In the end, if a commercial even mentioned the name of the city or town in which it was located, it was counted as having the theme of localism present in the commercial. Therefore, phrases such as "...serving Chattanooga since 1944," "...here in Nashville," or "...over 10,000 satisfied Nashville customers" were all deemed to have adequately utilized a localism theme.

A few commercials did go further than merely mentioning the name of the city or town. Several included references to the client's participation in local charitable events, one was a "...proud sponsor of Cumberland [University] football," and a few spoke specifically about living in, working in, or serving the community. One Nashville-based spokesperson made the comment, "I sing and write songs. Everyone in this town does,

right?” A sub shop bragged that its bread was “baked fresh on location, not shipped in frozen.” A lakefront subdivision positioned its sales effort as an attempt to “bring in new neighbors.” A small-town hospital may have made the strongest case for localism, however, when they boasted state-of-the-art medical facilities “...right here in Lebanon” followed by the question, “Why go anywhere else?”

With the few exceptions mentioned, it does not appear that the theme of localism is part of radio commercial creators’ pattern of *convention and formula*. Table 4-8 lists the 96 local direct radio commercials and indicates whether or not the theme of “localism” is present in each script. A “1” in the “localism” column indicates that the theme was present, and a “0” indicates that the theme was not present. If the theme was present, the “cluster terms” column details the terms that clustered around the key theme.

Table 4-8

The Theme of Localism

CLIENT NAME	LOCAL	CLUSTER TERMS
ACCU QUOTE	0	
ADIDONNA'S TOWING	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 1	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 2	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 3	0	
ALEXANDER FORD 4	0	
AMERICAN FREEDOM MTG 1	0	
AMERICAN FREEDOM MTG 2	0	
AMSOUTH BANK 1	0	
AMSOUTH BANK 2	0	
ANDERSON CAPITAL 1	0	
ANDERSON CAPITAL 2	0	
AUTO WORLD	0	
BAPTIST SPORTS MEDICINE	0	
BERNARD HALDANE	0	
BILL SHORES FRAMES	1	Serving Chattanooga in the heart of the city since 1944
BLACK CANYON CHIROPRACTIC	1	Participating in local charity event
BMW OF NASHVILLE	0	
BOB & CLAY	0	
BOB FRENSELY CHRYSLER	0	
BOMA FIRST CHURCH OF GOD	1	Boma Community, reach our community, work places, schools.
BUTLER NETWORKS	0	
CHEESEBURGER CHARLIES	1	... years ago here in Nashville.
COUNTRY PLACE	0	
COX'S GIFTS & JEWELRY	0	
CREST CADILLAC	0	
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 1	1	Located in Lebanon
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 2	0	
CUMBERLAND UNIVERSITY 3	0	
CUNNINGHAM MOTORS	0	
DAVID JENT REALTY	1	More agents in Marshall County than any other realtor in area
DELAYKO SERVICE	0	
ENTERPRISE	1	They're just around the corner.
EZ TOYS	0	
FIRST INSURANCE	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 1	1	Find both support and wings here in Chattanooga
FISH MAGAZINE 2	0	
FISH MAGAZINE 3	1	During our first years in Chattanooga
FISH MAGAZINE 4	1	Thank you, Chattanooga!
GIANT SUBS	1	Bread baked on location, not shipped in frozen.
HAYS AUTOMOTIVE	1	I sing and write songs. Everyone in this town does, right?
HEAVENLY HAM	0	
HECHT'S	0	
HESTER'S BAR B Q 1	0	
HESTER'S BAR B Q 2	0	
HILLER PLUMBING	1	Over 10,000 satisfied Nashville customers
HILTON SUITES	0	
HOLLY'S PRINTING	0	
HOUSTON MEAT & PRODUCE	0	
K & D AUTO	0	
KELLER WILLIAMS 1	0	
KELLER WILLIAMS 2	1	...live and work in Marshall County
KELLER WILLIAMS 3	0	

LOGAN'S	0	
LOWE'S	0	
MERCEDES OF NASHVILLE	0	
MIDSOUTH	0	
MIDWEST LIFE	0	
MOD MADIGANS	0	
MOUNTAIN HARBOR	1	...bring in new neighbors
NBC BANK 1	0	
NBC BANK 2	1	... in Wilson County
NBC BANK 3	1	... any of your Wilson County NBC branches
OLD NEIGHBORHOOD GRILL	1	...some of Lebanon's best food, sponsor of Cumberland football
PELM'S HOUSE	1	...destroying our homes, families, neighborhoods, communities
PREDATORS	1	Your Nashville Predators
PREFERRED MORTGAGE	0	
PUREATECH 1	0	
PUREATECH 2	0	
PUREATECH 3	0	
QUICKEN LOANS	0	
RAFFERTY'S	0	
REGENT DODGE 1	0	
REGENT DODGE 2	0	
ROLLSHOUSE LAW FIRM	0	
SLEEP NUMBER BED	0	
SMITH AUTO SALES	1	Here in Lebanon
SOUTHEAST IMPRESSIONS 1	0	
SOUTHEAST IMPRESSIONS 2	0	
SUFJAN STEVENS CONCERT	0	
SUMNER HARRINGTON	0	
SUNSET RESTAURANT	1	No better place in town
THW INSURANCE 1	0	
THW INSURANCE 2	0	
TIN ANGEL	1	Independent
TN LIFE DOT COM	1	Right here in Tennessee
UDDER CREAMERY	0	
UNIVERSITY MEDICAL 1	1	In Lebanon... why go anywhere else?
UNIVERSITY MEDICAL 2	1	In Lebanon... why go anywhere else?
UTALK UNLIMITED	0	
VALLEY CHRISTIAN SUPPLY	0	
VALLEY WIDE INSURANCE	1	Sponsoring local charity
VIRALIZER	0	
VISION IMPROVEMENT	0	
YMCA MUSIC FEST	1	Sponsoring local charity
ZEE'S RESTAURANT	0	
Total Incidence of Theme	28	
	29%	

The Absence of *Devil* Terms

An important detail emerged from the Burkean Cluster Analysis that must be mentioned. The themes that were originally explored—price, quality, selection, service, and a sense of urgency—revealed a number of phrases that tended to recur as *god* terms. Prices were low or lower or lowest. Quality was high or higher or highest. Selection was wide or wider or widest. Service was absolutely customer-focused—and about that sense of urgency? “Right-here, right-now” will do nicely. It was unmistakable how each of the themes was affirmatively communicated.

On the other hand, *devil* terms were not so apparent. In fact, in the sample of radio commercial scripts, *devil* terms were not present, but implied. It is very rare—generally, as well as in this study—to hear a commercial that proclaims higher prices, or inferior quality, or minimal selection, or poor service, or no rush to buy. It is not unprecedented, but it is rare. But these ideas—and others like them—would be the implied *devil* terms for each theme. The rarity with which *devil* terms are incorporated into radio commercials is another strand of evidence that indicates that there is an “agreed upon” method for creating radio advertising.

Summary of the Burkean Cluster Analysis

It was consistently observed in the analysis and reported throughout this section of the study that a number of similarities existed in the creation of local direct radio commercials. First, the incidence of at least one of the key themes was almost universal in the sample. Second, the terms selected by copy writers that speak to each of the key themes demonstrated a high level of similarity. These similarities gave a strong indication that the creators of these local direct radio commercials followed patterns of *convention*

and formula, a notion that was discussed in earlier chapters, and that John Ryan and Richard Peterson (1982) classified in their study of country music as a media art form. It was noted previously that Ryan and Peterson identified several different organizational models in which “media art” is created, and one of those models was *convention and formula*. According to this model, there is essentially an agreed-upon “correct way” to produce media art. The work of Ryan and Peterson focused on country music, while the results of this study provided evidence that the same model may indeed influence the creation of local direct radio commercials. In some cases, the prevailing *convention and formula* was so potent that it appeared to take on a role of hegemony. The analysis suggested that there indeed may be an agreed-upon, “correct” way to create radio commercials produced at the local station level, and that “correct” way may trump motivations to create radio commercials in other ways.

It bears repeating that this study makes no claim concerning the effectiveness of these or other radio commercials that contain this level of similarity. That is a question for another study. Results of the present study simply revealed that the similarities exist, and a media art model of *convention and formula* does seem to exist in radio commercial production. But, what drives the model? What are the antecedent influences that lead to this conclusion?

One possibility that has already been mentioned is the client. There may be other external influences outside the media organization as well, but another possible antecedent influence is the media organization itself—the radio station and various structures, traditions, and processes within it. Kevin Williams quoted from the work of Paletz and Entman, when he noted, “Media organizations, like other large organizations,

are ‘characterized by hierarchy, division of labour, and routinisation of working operations through relatively standardized rules and procedures. This is seen as responsible for the remarkably similar products that emerge’ (97). As was discussed in Chapter 1, Shoemaker and Reese argued that “...media content is shaped by the characteristics of the media, media workers, and the environment in which the media exist” (253). They considered these factors a “network of influences, ranging from communication workers’ personal attitudes and role conceptions, routines of media work, [and] media organizational structure and culture” (258). These antecedent influences are explored in the ethnographic analysis that follows in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5—Results of the Ethnographic Analysis

The second phase of the study provided the opportunity to investigate more closely that which Ryan and Peterson termed the media art model of *convention and formula*, in light of the findings of the Burkean Cluster Analysis, in which it seemed that the writers of the local direct radio commercials were adhering to an agreed-upon, correct way to write copy. The specific objective of this phase of the study was to identify antecedent factors—especially those within the media organization—that might have influenced the creative process. Following the reasoning of Shoemaker and Reese, the various factors might have included organizational structure and processes, the media worker’s personal or professional “worldview,” as well as the “routine” of the work day. Therefore, this chapter reports what was found in this phase of the study, which made use of field work—going inside a group of ten radio stations and observing the processes in place that influenced the creation and production of commercials—and conducting in-depth interviews with those persons who bore primary responsibility for the creation and production of local direct radio commercials.

The ten in-depth interviews yielded 219 pages of text for this analysis. Again, these were the same ten radio organizations from which the 96 scripts were obtained for the first stage of the study—the Burkean Cluster Analysis. For convenience and ease of reference, Table 5-1 once again briefly describes the ten subjects and organizations that were included in the ethnographic analysis.

Table 5-1

Participant Subjects and Organizations

Subject Name	Organization	Location	Description
Mike Anthony	WBDX/WLLJ	Chattanooga, TN	Standalone FM duopoly. Contemporary Christian music format. Sales staff size 6. Production staff size 1 part time, and Mike was also Program Director.
Kent Bailey	WGFX-FM	Nashville, TN	Part of Citadel's three entity Nashville cluster. Sports Talk format. Sales staff size 30. Production staff size 2 full time.
Dave Benzing	AM/FM	Nashville, TN	Five station Nashville cluster. Dominant mainstream formats. Sales staff size 40. Production staff size 3 full time.
Dan Buckley	WRLT-FM	Nashville, TN	Standalone FM with weak signal. AAA music format. Sales staff size 6. Production staff size 1 almost full time, but Dan also did a two-hour music program.
Paul Creasman	Q96	Phoenix, AZ	Standalone FM. Religious Talk format. Sales staff 2. Production staff 1 part time, and Paul was also Operations Manager.
Bill Goodman	WCOR/WANT	Lebanon, TN	Standalone AM/FM combo. Country music format. Only local station in market. Sales staff size 3. Production staff size 1 part time, and Bill was also News Director and Operations Manager.
Jeff Haislip	WJJM-AM/FM	Lewisburg, TN	Standalone AM/FM combo. Variety music format. Only local station in market. Sales staff size 2. Production staff size 1 part time, and Jeff is co-owner, morning show host.
Paul Hughes	WNSR-AM	Nashville, TN	Standalone AM. Sports Talk format. Sales staff size 4. Production staff size 1 full time.
Mike Koolidge	WRHL-AM	Rochelle, IL	Standalone AM in suburban Chicago. News-Talk format. Sales staff size 4. Production staff size 1 part time, and Mike also hosts afternoon talk show.
Jeff Schmidt	WAFX/WNOR	Norfolk, VA	Three-station Tidewater Communications cluster. Dominant mainstream formats. Sales staff 13. Production staff size 2 full time, who also do imaging for the stations.

A discussion of what was discovered through the observations and in-depth interviews follows.

The Setting: Inside the Radio Stations

Getting inside the radio stations—to gain that which Fetterman (1998) referred to as the *emic* perspective—was not difficult. Neither was securing consent to conduct the in-depth interviews. In fact, in every case the subjects were more than willing to talk. This willingness, by the way, should not be misconstrued as being evidence of some sort of negative attitude on the part of the subjects. On the contrary, it should be noted that in no way did any of the subjects take the interview as an opportunity to “lash out” at an employer, supervisor, or coworker. Every one of them spoke in the most positive terms about their work and about their employers. The tone of the conversations was very “matter of fact,” indicating that their comments reflected their reality as “just the way things are,” suggesting that they were comfortable working within the context of *convention and formula* and with whatever factors influenced or shaped it.

Upon entering the workplaces and making initial observational notes, several patterns began to emerge almost immediately. First, the physical work spaces of those who were observed and interviewed often seemed cluttered and a bit chaotic. The stacks of “production orders” indicated that there was a near-perpetual backlog of work yet to do. Unopened mail and a general absence of orderliness seemed to imply that each subject was inundated with urgent tasks, leaving the less pressing matters of neatness for another day. This was taken as an early and clear indication, before anything was said, that workplace routines, including workload and levels of staffing, might have had an influence on the creation of radio commercials. Second, interactions with coworkers tended to be brief, task-oriented, and efficient. In only a few instances were relaxed, “chatty” conversations observed. Some interactions even displayed a hint of friction

between the production person and a coworker, especially interactions with a salesperson. This was taken as an early indication that organizational structure, including the division of responsibilities and potential conflicts between departments might have had an influence on the creation of radio commercials. Third, interruptions seemed to be the order of the day for several of the subjects. There were telephone calls, knocks on office doors (or Production Room doors), and drop-ins from coworkers. Again, this was taken as an early indication that routines in the media workers' workday might have had an influence on the creation of radio commercials. Any and all of these noted patterns were perceived as being part of the routine and nothing out of the ordinary. The subjects seem unphased by the interruptions.

The Subjects: Background and Preparation

One of the questions that guided this part of the study related to the production person's career track, including education and experience. This question emerged from two thoughts. For one thing, there was the idea that these individuals' experiences may have helped shape their attitudes and behavior with regard to radio advertising form and content, as well as the various processes or influences involved in creating it. For another thing, there was the idea that something could be learned about the structure of the media organization and its expectations about what appropriately qualifies a person to fill the role of production director, or whatever title is given to its primary creator of radio commercials. This knowledge, then, would likely indicate the significance the organization places on that role and its various functions. It was at this point that another pattern emerged. In general, the subjects of this study seemed to have acquired their positions more because of their work ethic than any specific training or education,

including training in any creative realm. Most began working in an entry-level position in the radio organization, such as part-time air personality or even intern. They worked hard. They got the job done. And, apparently working hard and getting the job done was a very high priority for the commercial production position, because they ultimately landed the job—with little applicable education, creative training, or other preparation.

For example, Jeff Schmidt, the Production Director at Tidewater Communications Norfolk cluster, got his start in the Navy with a small station on board a ship. Upon his discharge from the Navy, he landed a part-time on-air position that eventually led to his role as Production Manager.

Paul Creasman, who was Operations Manager at Q96 in Phoenix, began his career at a campus station while in college earning a degree in telecommunications—a degree program that offered little in the creative realm. “All told, I think I had only two formal production courses. I spent a lot of time in the...studios learning it myself.”

Mike Anthony, Program Director at Chattanooga’s J103, received a bachelor’s degree in communication with a minor in English literature. He indicated, however, that the communications program was “not really focused on broadcasting—more on print journalism.” And while it would seem that a minor in English literature would be very useful in the creative realm, he was quick to point out (with laughter) that “I am still proud to say, the least read literature minor in the history of the university.”

Both Dan Buckley, Production Director at Nashville’s Lightning 100, and Bill Goodman, Operations Manager/News Director at small market WANT/WCOR in Lebanon, Tennessee, started to study broadcasting in college, but dropped out upon landing a full-time entry-level job at a radio station. Buckley worked as an intern at

Lightning 100 for one semester while attending school, but his hard work secured his first paid position in the business, as he explained:

When I wanted to get started, my dad told me, “Just go up there, and tell them you’ll take out the trash.” You know, and that was kind of like my whole angle on things was: I want to figure out what everyone else doesn’t want to do, and I’m going to sign up for that. And that was my first...the reason I actually got hired was I volunteered to set up the Hard Rock remote that we had...Friday mornings, we had to be live on the air by six AM, and that meant that you had to get up at about one AM, be down at the Hard Rock knocking on the doors at three AM...

Bill Goodman’s story is similar. He recalled, “I went to Vol State. Never did graduate. I never did complete it, because I got a full-time job working over at WHIN while I was going there.” So, two of the subjects broke into the media field as interns while in college, and both were subsequently offered permanent paid positions, which they accepted. Both dropped out of college and never returned.

Jeff Haislip, co-owner at small market WJJM in Lewisburg, Tennessee, earned a business degree. His professional background was in industrial purchasing and scheduling.

Paul Hughes, Production Director at WNSR in Nashville, earned a degree in communication from the University of Kentucky, but he points to “...growing up in a household where my mother was an English teacher” as being his defining credential. Strict parents drilled the use of correct grammar into Paul and his two brothers, and that

prepared him for his first position in media—as a “military journalist right out of high school.”

At the AM/FM Nashville cluster, Director of Creative Services Dave Benzing graduated with two bachelor’s degrees and a triple major—communications, human relations, and theatre.

Mike Koolidge, Production Director at WRHL in Rochelle, Illinois, received a master’s degree from prestigious Northwestern University, an educational achievement that should have given him excellent preparation for his position. Unfortunately, he only sees his role in production as his ticket to do the afternoon talk show on WRHL.

None of the subjects could identify any specific preparatory training or education *in the creative realm*. Each learned his craft on the job. Paul Hughes was a partner in a Lexington, Kentucky, advertising agency, but he admits that he and a friend started the agency on a stroke of luck while they were still students at the University of Kentucky. Hughes recalled:

I joined forces with one other person, who was an artist, and I figured, “Okay, I’ve got the broadcast knowledge; he’s got the art knowledge; we’re both writers. We basically got together and pitched a downtown mall concept that seven other agencies pitched, and we got it. Wow! What do we do now?”

Further, only one subject mentioned any formal training and development having been offered by the company for which he worked. In Nashville, Dave Benzing’s company brought one of the industry’s best-known and respected creative consultants in for a two-day seminar on copy writing. Dave highlighted the irony of the situation when

he sighed, “Unfortunately, because of [the] other elements of my job, I was unable to attend those.”

From this account of each of the subjects’ backgrounds, education, and experiences, another strand of evidence began to give credence to the notion that antecedent factors, both within and without the media organizations, did indeed influence the creation of these local direct radio commercials, just as they would be expected to do for other forms of media content. The two thoughts from which this line of inquiry emerged—that these individuals’ experiences may have helped shape their attitudes and behavior, and that something could be learned about the structure of the media organization and its expectations about what appropriately qualifies a person to fill the role of production director—both proved to be informative. Generally, the subjects demonstrated a “work hard, can-do, get-the-job-done” kind of attitude toward their work.

They also gave clear indication that the organizations for which they worked placed a very high value on that attribute. In fact, their experience had taught them that their media organizations seemed to place a higher value on that attribute than on any other, including their education or other trade-specific training and preparation. This, in turn, gave insight into the priorities that these media organizations placed on the various functions of the production role. It appeared that “getting the job done” was the role given the highest priority, even over any qualitatively measured functions, such as writing well or being creative. These functions, of course, would have been difficult to assess, but they would have been indicative of how the organizations defined “doing the job well.” In essence, in these media organizations, efficiency seemed to be a higher priority than effectiveness. This dynamic will be discussed further later in this chapter.

The Context: Organizational Structure and Process

One crucial, and somewhat surprising, aspect of the organizational structure of the participating organizations seemed to offer an explanation for the establishment of these priorities. For a long time, it was routinely accepted that some radio stations would have sales persons, who have the closest contact with clients, engaged in writing advertising copy for commercials. But almost fifteen years ago, Charles Warner, in the 1993 edition of his undergraduate textbook Media Selling, declared to potential radio sales professionals that “production and commercial writing skills are less important now than they were in the past.” The reason given for this was that some stations either employed full-time production persons or used “announcers who are temporarily off the air to do commercial production” (387).

The present study, however, found a very different situation. The participating organizations did employ either full-time or part-time production personnel who wrote copy. Some of the participating organizations also used announcers to write copy. Several of the participating organizations did indeed utilize the sales staff to write copy. The fact is, with few exceptions, the organizations that participated in this study used just about anyone who was available to write copy.

In Chattanooga, Mike Anthony noted that he bore primary responsibility for taking copy points and turning them into a script, but that he had some welcome help: “...it’s my job to incorporate that into a commercial. Although lately, Gene has been writing—well, Gene writes his own copy—one of our sales people here. I love it when the sales people write the copy. It’s just a part of my job I really hate!”

Paul Creasman described a scenario in Phoenix in which the responsibility for writing copy was shared:

Spots that required creative writing typically would go to Celeste, our midday gal, because—uh, that was her thing, that’s what she was best at. Simple straightforward copy? I would do it. Owen would do it, the morning man would do it. Spots that needed to be written, but needed a little time to develop I could give to Steve. Late afternoon, evening. He was pretty much a rookie, coming in, but very smart guy—very sharp. And he was the guy that I tried to cultivate the most. I mean I knew Celeste—Celeste had like a bazillion years of radio experience, and Owen came from KRDS, like days before it—days before its demise. Uh, but Steve was a young guy, very talented, just no experience. I tried to cultivate him the most. So when there was time—when we had time to play with I’d—you know—give Steve the package and say you know, “Do something with this.” And then he’d bring it in, and I’d critique it, and so in that sense, it was a learning experience there. So that—that’s what I tried to do when I looked at the lay of the land. This is what I tried to do in assigning the assignments. In the writing process—again as I just said, I think it kind of depended on who it went to.

At Nashville’s Lightning 100, the Production Director, Dan Buckley, surprisingly reported that he did not write copy at all. “I actually don’t write the commercials...No, the sales people have to write them themselves. I mean, sometimes the clients will give a script, and...Sometimes our receptionist ends up writing some stuff (mild laughter.)”

Mike Koolidge at WRHL in Rochelle, Illinois, gave an interesting account of one particular salesperson who impressed him with her writing:

I think the salesman (*sic*) wrote this one. We have a new saleswoman here, who is really doing like outstanding...like just selling all these new clients, and just really kicking butt around here. And she wrote, I think she wrote this one, and it's funny, too, because she's the first person who's worked here as a salesman—I think—who's actually worked at a bunch of other radio stations. And she's bringing all of these really great ideas from other stations, but she never once...she does say occasionally to me, "This is the only station I've ever been at that does things this way." But she never said to me, she never made a big deal about that they write the copy. I think she almost kind of enjoys doing the copy, and because it's...she's dealing directly with the client. I think she wants to impress the client, and she's good at it. So she wrote the entire thing.

So, in Rochelle, Illinois, the sales people did much of the writing, and Koolidge was comfortable with that setup and with their level of competence with the task:

I don't put a lot of attention to the copy that's given. If there's a clear error, if there's a clear typo, we make the change on it, but I very rarely if ever look at a commercial and lean back in my chair and say, "How can we make this commercial great? How can we really satisfy the client?" I let the salesmen do that. And all the salesmen are experienced on-air people. They don't do on-air stuff anymore, but they have tons more radio experience than I do. They have these relationships with the clients. I kind

of put it on them to write a good commercial or make it as good as it can be, and don't get involved too much in making it any better. One, I justify it by saying, "It's their sale. It's their client." And two, I need to put my show together. I need to concentrate on my show.

At small market WANT in Lebanon, Tennessee, Bill Goodman also described a scenario in which most of the station's staff participated in copy writing:

It's shared. I probably do as much as 50% of it, I'd say. You know, just because I'm one of the few full-time employees here, who's in the building all day. But, whenever... you know, for different things like...if it's for a women's clothing store, (laughter) you know, it would be my choice that one of the women write that, because they'll understand what they're saying a little bit better and the product a little bit better...Some of the on-air people...the djs...like the girl who does the morning show, she does some amount of writing—not a whole lot, but she'll do a little bit.

Our General Manager here...she'll do some of the writing.

He added that sales people occasionally write commercial copy.

At Sports Radio 56 in Nashville, the AM/FM cluster in Nashville, and the Citadel cluster in Nashville, the full-time production staff wrote almost all commercial copy.

Truthfully, this state of affairs was not expected. It raised a critical question concerning the level of significance given to the task of writing commercial copy.

Although the individuals who participated in this study accepted ultimate responsibility for the creation of local direct radio commercials, it seemed as though the writing portion

of the production process was assigned to whoever was available and had the time to complete it, with little or no regard for that person's ability as a writer.

Beyond the liberal assignment of responsibility for writing commercials, when it came to organizational structure and process, the observations and interviews with the subjects revealed two points of near absolute commonality. The first is that radio stations are virtually uniform in their organizational structure, if not size. The second is that radio stations tend to follow an almost-standardized process of commercial production.

There are usually four departments in a radio station—programming, sales, administration, and engineering/technical—and the observation of these ten media organizations confirmed that the standard structure was in place. The sales department initiates contact with prospective clients in an effort to persuade them to purchase a schedule of commercials on the radio station. The programming department develops the radio station's content, including the production of commercials. Therefore, these two departments by necessity work together in the commercial production process. There was nothing surprising about that finding. There was, however, something very telling about the structure that was common to these media organizations as it related to the relative value that seemed to be placed on sales compared with production. While the ten media organizations represented in the sample were similar in structure, they varied widely in terms of staff size and resources. But every one of them seemed to place more value on the sales department than on production, at least if staff and resource allocations are an indicator of the value ascribed. Each of the small market, independent, and stand-alone stations had only one person designated as a production person, and in most instances, this person was simultaneously responsible for other activities besides production.

Generally, these smaller stations had two or perhaps three persons involved in the sales effort. On the other end of the spectrum, the major market clusters in Nashville and Norfolk had from two to four full-time production people, but thirty to forty full-time sales people. In essence, the consistent discovery that so few production people served so many sales people gave some indication that the structure of the media organizations did indeed influence the production of commercial content, much the same as they have been shown to influence other forms of media content.

Beyond the question of structure, however, there was also the matter of organizational processes. During the course of the interviews, each subject was asked to describe the procedures followed for commercial production at his radio station. The similarities were striking.

Kent Bailey described the process at Nashville's WGFX:

Sales people go out and sell...that sales person will get the copy points from the client, and say, "Okay, what do you want to talk about? What is it that you want your message to be?" They'll give them, you know, some copy points, some bullet points basically that will get turned over to the production department, and he'll write a spot basically, with the copy points...So that will get turned in to Ron in the Production Department. He'll produce it, put music behind it, and then play it (a lot of times clients want to hear it before it goes on the air, so he'll play it for them.) Nowadays, we can send it via email. Email it to them, let them listen to it, and if they okay it, then that's fine. Then from that point, it goes into the system...And, magically, they pay us lots of money to do that. (Laughter.)

Notice the similarities at Nashville's WRLT, as explained by Dan Buckley:

Alright, they want to advertise this "Little Donkey" at T-PAC. So, they may send either a script, or a produced spot, or copy points to the salesperson. When I get a script—again the situation varies—if they come from an agency, direct from an agency, usually they don't want you changing their script much. And they may be very specific with exactly what they want to happen in the commercial. And I can follow that to a "T." Sometimes the salesperson—our best salespeople are not necessarily our best copy writers. So, I kind of "quality control." I look at a script, and I'm like...not bad grammar, this could be rewritten, sometimes I'll actually go back in the computer and totally retype it.

In Lebanon, Tennessee, Bill Goodman followed similar procedures at WANT:

Of course, it starts with the Account Executive, who sells the account. Once they get a contract, what they do is they'll bring back copy points from the sponsor. Sometimes, those copy points will be several pages full of material; sometimes they'll bring us a brochure from the company if they have such a thing, or any other kind of literature they might have; I've had situations before where all I was given was a business card, and was expected to write...and you know, I sat there and I write a commercial off of it, and sometimes the people who write it back here at the station—like me—maybe we would have to do a little bit of research. Look up on the Internet, or something like that, to get a little bit more information about the company itself.

At WJMM in Lewisburg, Tennessee, co-owners Jeff (production) and Missie (sales) Haislip had plenty of reasons to work together in another similar example of the process:

From the time that customer says, “Yes” you know, obviously Missie is trying to get information of...”What would you like on your ad or ads?” And we offer that customer a thirty-second ad or a sixty-second ad, whichever they would prefer. Once she gets that information, then either...most of the time, she will write the copy. I do some of that as well. We’ll write the copy, and then we try to...spread [voicing] out as evenly as we can over our disc jockeys...And they’ll get that recorded in our Production Room, and we usually ask the customer, “Would you like background music, or would you like it as a dry spot?” And they let us know that. The production is finished...and just, you know, just for my own, so I can lay my head on my pillow at night, check and make sure that it’s recorded to the professionalism that I want here.

Mike Anthony in Chattanooga described yet another version of the same process:

...the client tells the sales person, “We’re located here, our hours are this, we offer this to the customers, we specialize in this, this is what we want everybody to know about our business.” And then I—it’s my job to incorporate that into a commercial...on the Production Order that the sales [person] puts in, it’ll have the information on the spot—you know—the facts, the type spot, the length, and so on and so forth...special production instructions.

When it came to local, direct radio commercials, the starting place in the production process was virtually universal. The standard process involved the client providing “copy points” to the radio station sales person, from which a script was written and produced. This seemed to imply that it was an expectation by the client, the production person, and even the organizational process that the commercial would address multiple “points,” again violating Dan O’Day’s (2000) principle of “one core idea” in a commercial.

It is significant to note that each radio station did have a clear and formal policy that spelled out internal deadlines and timetables that sales personnel were to follow in submitting the materials necessary for commercial production. At Nashville’s WRLT, the deadline was 11:00 AM for a commercial that was scheduled to start the next day. But a more typical example was Lebanon, Tennessee’s WANT, which posted a 3:00 PM cut-off for commercials scheduled to start the next day. It is also significant to note how often employees at the stations adhered to—or more accurately, did *not* adhere to—those deadlines, according to the study participants. The subjects interviewed from each of the media organizations discussed in this study self-reported that their colleagues in sales *routinely* disregarded the time requirement.

For example, in Norfolk, Jeff Schmidt conceded that “deadlines are meant to be broken. And they are.” In Chattanooga, Mike Anthony was relieved that although J103’s deadlines had been abused by sales staff, “...it’s gotten better. When I first started, it was pretty bad, because I was a real pushover.” Lebanon’s Bill Goodman agreed, “Not as often as it used to...it still happens every once in awhile, and that’s fine. I don’t mind. It’s my job, and that’s what I’ll do.” Lewisburg’s Jeff Haislip asserted, “You do what you

have to do!” In Nashville, Dave Benzing’s deadlines were broken “rarely...every five minutes,” and Dan Buckley said he finds a way:

Money talks. Money talks. You know, if it’s Friday at five o’clock, and I want to walk out of here, and someone walks in with four thousand dollars for a schedule that they need on the air immediately, that just runs this weekend for Bill Heard, I’m going to make it happen... We do have an eleven AM deadline, which gets broken all the time.

Paul Creasman’s Phoenix experience might have been the most telling. When discussing broken timetables, he commented, “For radio people it’s a cliché!” It is *that* much a part of the production person’s work life.

The implication of all of this was that the propensity for ignoring the organizational policy that was formally in place seemed to reveal an organizational orientation that favored the sales department in such a way as to influence (presumably in a negative way) the production of commercial content. While it would make sense to most observers that the department responsible for generating revenue would be favored in any organization, it must be argued that the formal organizational policies and processes that were in place were there for a reason, and at least part of that reason must have been to allow the production department ample time to effectively fulfill its responsibilities, which in turn would provide a valuable service for the radio station sales department—and by extension—the client. As Bill Goodman of WANT-FM in Lebanon, Tennessee noted, “The quality will suffer if we try to rush things like that, so we try to have some kind of quality control over what we do.” Or in the words of Tidewater Communications’ Jeff Schmidt in Norfolk, speaking of his production colleague Stu,

...when I am seeing less time on the creative end...Stu would take the brunt of it. I respect the hell out of the man, because he's—to be—I have to turn on my creativity every day when I come into here. He is 24/7. I am fortunate enough to crunch numbers, and if someone comes in and says, "Stu, this client needs these revisions, and the spot is starting tomorrow morning," I would pull this sales person aside and say, "You are out of your mind. You have no idea what Stu is gonna have to go through, and I want you to make sure this client knows what's happening, and the fire that we're jumping through to get that going." I don't like to see any creativity rushed. There is always a chance of burning out.

Still, in spite of the formal policy and production processes that were in place, it was reported that there were many instances in which ample time was not made available, and the result was another example of antecedent organizational factors influencing radio commercial content.

Influential Antecedent Factors

These patterns point convincingly to certain antecedent organizational factors within the radio stations—including media workers' attitudes, organizational priorities, and the work routine itself—that clearly have impacted the creation of commercials. The results of the interviews and observations at each of the radio stations provided insights about how these factors are specifically at work in these settings, and they are presented in the following sections.

The Workday

There were several aspects of the “typical” workday that the subjects of this study experienced that merit attention. The first is that *these commercial production people were chronically overworked*. Almost every one of the subjects observed and interviewed described a typical workday in terms of long hours and an intense workload. Jeff Schmidt at Tidewater Communications in Norfolk indicated a workday that runs from “eleven or twelve until about ten o’clock at night.” Dave Benzing at AM/FM in Nashville came to work “about eight-thirty or nine o’clock” to face “between eight and fifteen voice mails.” Then, after a busy day, he checks out sometime after seven in the evening. Dan Buckley at WRLT in Nashville reported, “I usually work at least a twelve-hour day... When I first took this position, I worked seven days a week, eighteen hours a day for six months straight. I didn’t take a day off.” Bill Goodman at WANT-FM in Lebanon, Tennessee, did the early morning newscasts, “I get here at 5 AM,” and generally left the station at 2:30 or 3:00 in the afternoon. Demonstrating the joys of ownership, however, Jeff Haislip in Lewisburg, Tennessee, “won the prize” for long hours and intense workload:

My typical workday, because I am the morning guy, and we are a 24/7 station, we’re on all the time. I’m here shortly before six o’clock in the morning, and my shift is from six until ten. So I get here to try and get everything...going...are there any last-minute...you know, we’re also talking about things like obituaries coming in, and...I’m on the air from six until ten, but then as soon as that’s over, then I go into the Production Room, and I’m working on the AM side of the...loading the logs in the system, doing voice tracking, and then during the different sports seasons,

I'm here, there, and everywhere helping call basketball games, so I mean...I've had as much, Rich, as...you know, sixteen- and seventeen-hour days...now those are rare, but usually twelve hours a day, five days a week, and then I come up here on the weekends and check the news and update things, so...

The regularity with which the subjects reported that they worked many more than the usual forty hours per week was eye-opening for a couple of reasons. First, it was another indication that the persons being interviewed had that "can-do" work attitude. Perhaps Dan Buckley at WRLT in Nashville said it best: "You know, if it's Friday at five o'clock, and I want to walk out of here, and someone walks in with four thousand dollars for a schedule that they need on the air immediately that just runs this weekend for Bill Heard, I'm going to make it happen. That's radio."

Even Jeff Schmidt in Norfolk, who told of pulling sales people aside and saying, "You're out of your mind!" when their quick turnaround times forced him or Stu to put in extra hours to get commercials produced, admitted, "Not enough time is if I get a call on Saturday. Not enough time would be—we very rarely don't make it."

Second, it was another indication that these media organizations placed higher value on the sales effort than they did on the production effort, a reflection made obvious by the greater staff resources allocated for sales than production. The fact that production people so routinely worked long hours would normally have been construed as an indication that the department was short-staffed, but no such indication was articulated by any of the subjects interviewed.

Another aspect of the production person's workday that merited attention is that *these commercial production people tended to feel subservient to most of their fellow employees*. In spite of the fact that in a typical radio station hierarchical structure, the production person reports primarily to one person—usually the Program Director—several subjects in this study spoke of being inundated with frequent direct communication with virtually every other person in the radio station, but especially sales persons. And, without exception, each indicated some sense of subordination to staff members with whom they should have been cohorts. Jeff Schmidt told about “every sales person beating down the door when something's wrong,” and the Traffic Director saying “‘yes’ or ‘no’ to many things.” Paul Creasman of Q96 in Phoenix spoke of sales people approving commercial copy. Dave Benzing said that “a typical morning for me will have six or seven people coming to me and addressing their issues to me of concerns that I need to take care of right away.” Perhaps the most unmistakable example came from Mike Koolidge from Rochelle, Illinois. He remembered an unpleasant confrontation:

I have to say...you know, that always hasn't been perfect. Salesmen (*sic*) have occasionally said to me or just alluded to—it's been brought up at meetings, just generally speaking—“Mike, look, we need a little more attention on the commercials.” One salesman once—and this was just one of those organizational tiffs that happen occasionally—you know, I was, I felt overworked in the sense that I was doing things for the salesmen that had nothing to do with production stuff, that had nothing to do with my show. They needed board ops for things that they were selling on weekends that they were getting extra money for, and I wasn't getting a

dime for. And it was just assumed, because the old guy used to do it, that I could come in on a Saturday afternoon and board up their remote for two hours.

A third aspect of the production person's workday that merited attention was that *for these commercial production people, some long days were longer than others.* When the week came to an end, their motto was more likely to be, "Too Bad It's Friday," rather than "Thank God, It's Friday." Because so many advertising schedules begin on Monday, and because commercial spots and commercial logs for three days (Saturday, Sunday, and Monday) must be prepared by the end of the workday on Friday, the day that most of the workforce longs for was the day that production people dreaded. When asked to describe in one word what Fridays were like, the subjects responded with "Ha!" "Crazy!" "Frustrating!" "Hell!" In essence, the chronic work overload was maximized on Friday.

Jeff Schmidt of Tidewater Communications stated, "I have frantic sales people who have nothing on their mind but the weekend. And they become 'wacks.' Some mistakes are made in the process." Q96's Paul Creasman said, "I would check my box at 4:30 on Friday, and it's empty. And I would check it at five on my way out the door, and there's three things." In Nashville, Dave Benzing agreed when he concluded, "Friday is the busiest day of my week." In contrast, Mike Anthony of J103 in Chattanooga indicated that he employs a "work ahead" policy to avoid that Friday crunch. "My brain is constantly trying to get everything out of there so that on Friday—you know, we don't have twelve thousand things that start on Monday, because we did them Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday." Of course, Mike's policy relied on the cooperation of other staff members who were willing to work ahead as well.

Still another aspect of the production person's workday that merited attention was that *these commercial production people tended to battle the "tyranny of the urgent."* For example, they consistently described their typical workday using the terms "checking the in-box" and "fighting fires." Almost every one of them used those exact phrases. Again, their comments about "checking the in-box" and "fighting fires" were not complaints—they were simply matter-of-fact statements about the way things were. They each recognized that it was crucial to the success of the station that they stay on top of production activity, which translated to continually "checking the in-box." They also recognized that another significant contribution that they made to the success of their stations was solving the seemingly ever-present crises, or "fighting fires."

The point made in including these statements here is that both tasks—"checking the in-box" and "fighting fires"—were never-ending, and they absorbed a significant amount of the time of those already overworked people who are typically involved in, and responsible for, the creation of local direct radio commercials. Most items that were found in the in-box, as well as *every* fire that had to be fought, were immediate and urgent, and the minute one task seemed to be completed, another was waiting with the same urgency. It should be noted, however, that these urgent tasks were often directly related to the production of commercials, including copy changes and updates. The "tyranny" was found in the urgency.

A fifth aspect of the typical workday of the subjects interviewed that merits attention was that *the commercial production process was focused on efficiency—not effectiveness.* In the interviews with each of these production people, there was consistently a sense that getting the spot done and on the air on time was the primary

objective. It seemed that this was the primary objective not only for the production person, but also for sales and management as well. It was the pervading culture of the entire radio station. There was more concern about getting *something* on the air as soon as possible than about whether the commercial would be effective for the client. Perhaps a word should be said here about the use of the term “efficiency.” Normally, one would think of efficiency in terms of accomplishing a task effectively and with little wasted time, effort, or resources. In the course of these interviews, however, several of the subjects used the term “efficiency” to describe getting the job done. It is on the basis of their choice of the term that I have used it here.

For example, at independently owned Lightning 100 in Nashville, Dan Buckley underscored the importance of efficiency when he noted, “...that comes back to another thing that I have to practice in my job. I have to be as efficient as possible. Anything that makes me more efficient is a good thing.” He went on to acknowledge that his workload impacts the quality of his work:

Unfortunately, because I’m so busy, I can’t always spend as much time on every spot that I’d like to. And different times of year, we’re busier than others...For the most part, I don’t spend the time that I’d like to on each ad. A lot of times, I’m just trying to crank it out. I’ve got five spots. My wife’s calling me saying, “What time are you coming home?” I get it done as fast as I can. I can make a commercial usually in under twenty minutes.

Referring to his working relationship with clients, Jeff Schmidt of Norfolk intimated, “I want to impress them—you know, I want to get this spot on air...on time.” On the topic of solving production crises, he advised:

Don't waste any time on finding out who's to blame—even if you're to blame. If you are to blame, admit it and go on! Because that spot that is messed up may be running in ten minutes...I've lost track of how many times I've sprinted down this hallway from one production room to the other to get that spot into the studio in time to run. If I can get it on before it runs, cool.

Paul Creasman communicated a strong sense of accomplishment during his tenure in Phoenix in that the station was efficiently operated. With only a skeleton crew, and in a start-up situation, he proclaimed, "I kept all my bases covered. Nothing ever went missing under my watch." He had already indicated how important it was that "nothing slip[ped] through the cracks."

Because of workload and time constraints, Dave Benzing has actually had to quantify efficiency with his AM/FM Nashville staff.

The way I've had to do it...is to take it...inside my department, and challenge my guys to be creative, but only do it in an hour increment for each client. You know, make it award-winning, make it excellent, make it sound great, make it sound the best—in one hour. Don't spend any more than an hour on it, because then if you're spending more than an hour on it, you're not using your time wisely.

Paul Hughes of Sports Radio 56 WNSR in Nashville takes great pride in writing efficiently:

I've always had the ability, from the time I started at the first commercial station I worked for in Mississippi, I could sit down at the typewriter and

take the information from the sales rep, and just write it and rip it out and put it on the air. And to this day, I do that. There's no...most of the time, there is no long thought process, because I've done thousands of commercials over thirty years. So from that aspect, the commercial radio aspect, it is basically a crash and burn every time. I sit down, I write it, I put it on the air, and that's it.

Mike Koolidge, Production Director at WRHL in Rochelle, Illinois, on the other hand, was quite candid about ascribing value to the production process that he indicated should be commensurate with the value of an advertiser's schedule:

I would say over 50% of our commercials are straight reads, no background music, just reads, like the commercial that I have in front of me: "Isn't farming enough of a gamble on its own with the ever-changing weather and volatile markets? Well, don't bet the farm...blah, blah, blah." That's a thirty-second commercial...just straight read. Record it right in, and that's it. And the ones that are running for short periods of time, I've kinda decided on my own as a Production Manager that they're not gonna get a whole lot of...music behind them. They're not gonna get a whole lot of sound effects. This client's paying for something that's only running for three days, that's what they're getting.

In Chattanooga, J103's Mike Anthony (who dislikes writing copy) has found a new method of producing copy and the recorded spot with maximum efficiency:

Okay, here's something that's kind of screwy. A lot of times anymore, Duane and I—Duane kind of got me started doing it, because I'd watch

him do it, and I go, “Hey, I can do that, too”... We’ll get the copy points, and I’ll formulate the copy as I go. Because of the miracle of digital editing, you can do that, and you can take three copy points—they’re located here, they’re name is this, and they sell this, this, and this—and then the phone number. And I can take those four things and make a fifteen-second thing on the—spot on the fly. “Today’s Christian Music, J103 is supported by so and so. They’re located here and they sell this, this, and this. Their hours are from blah, blah, blah to blah, blah, blah. Their number is blah, blah, blah—blah, blah, blah, blah. And our thanks again to so and so.” And that’s it, there’s your fifteen-second spot.

The results reported in this section relating to the typical workday of the subjects who were observed and interviewed for this study are reminiscent of the Shoemaker and Reese model, which suggested that antecedent factors within the media organization, including the “routines” of the media workday, were likely to have an influence on media content. Again, while Shoemaker and Reese focused on media content such as news and entertainment, these results gave strong support to the suggestion that the routines existent in the media workday would correspondingly influence commercial content, as well. There was so much work to get done and so few staff resources available to get it done that these commercial production people often found themselves in the position of working at an intense pace simply to keep up, with little opportunity to reflect, for example, on ways to improve their work or better communicate an advertising message. In fact, considering again the similarity of the content of the commercials analyzed in the Chapter 4, the Burkean Cluster Analysis, it very well may have been that the frenetic

pace of the workday might have influenced these creators of local direct radio commercials to—in the interest of time—adopt the elements that Ryan and Peterson called *convention and formula*.

Organizational Priorities and the Client

In addition to the organization's work routine, another antecedent factor already mentioned that emerged in the study as having a great impact on the commercial creation process was the client. While at first glance this may not seem to be a factor within the organization, the reality is that most—if not all—radio stations that participated in this study placed such a high priority and value on keeping the advertising client happy that they were reluctant to create any kind of conflict situation between the client and the radio station. So, although advertising clients are essentially an external or extra-media influence, they greatly affected the attitudes of the individual workers, organizational routines, and management or ownership attitudes within the media organizations. Pleasing them appeared to permeate the cultures of these stations, and this had a significant bearing on advertising content that was produced and aired. Sometimes, this resulted in client input in the commercial production process that may not have been the most creative or effective input. Two related, but different, concerns were exposed in the present analysis. The first was the previously mentioned and frequent use of *multiple copy points*, and the second was the tendency toward *excessive word counts*, leading to too quick, even unintelligible, vocal delivery.

It has already been noted that at a typical radio station, including those that participated in this study, the production process begins with a Production Order, a form that is completed by the advertising sales person in conjunction with the client. It has

already been noted that the typical Production Order includes a list of *several copy points*, from which the commercial is written. This process involves both the client and the radio station salesperson. It has also already been established that the most effective radio commercials are those that follow the admonition to “identify one (and ONLY one) core message for your ad” (O’Day). The use of multiple copy points—or “grocery lists”—is an effective advertising strategy when using print media, but not when using radio. Listeners simply cannot recall multiple message points. It seems, however, that the influence of the client is more powerful than the desire to utilize the advertising strategies that are more likely to be effective. It also seems, oddly enough, that a few of the subjects of this study did not just tolerate, but actually encouraged, the use of multiple copy points.

Mike Anthony of J103 in Chattanooga cited an average of “about five” copy points per commercial and appreciated the fact that they were available. “You can always cut something out. It’s hard to flesh up a spot if you don’t have enough information. You know, if it’s a sixty-second spot, three copy points just ain’t gonna do it.”

Bill Goodman of WANT-FM in Lebanon, Tennessee, stated that when he was provided with a long list of copy points, it saved him the effort required to find them using alternative means, such as Internet research. He lamented that when he was not provided with such a list “...it means a little more work for us.”

In Phoenix, Paul Creasman “tried to limit [copy points] to no more than three, because people typically can’t remember more than three.” He acknowledged, however, that many clients demanded more. “There’s some clients that think, ‘Sixty seconds isn’t a lot of time, so I’ve got to tell them the world.’”

Dave Benzing also fought the “grocery list” battle in Nashville. He reported that the sales people at his stations are learning “that it’s not just putting a phone number in an ad twenty-five times that’s gonna make success.” On the other hand, he also recognized that for many clients “the norm for commercial content is: ‘I want my address, I want my phone number twenty times, and I want my name in there six times—eight—fifteen times.’”

Paul Hughes, who spent a number of years as a partner in an advertising agency, knew and understood the predicament all too well:

...they used to drive me nuts...When a salesman would come in with a script that had 90 seconds worth of vegetables and steaks and whatever on sale this week, the listener isn’t consciously going to make a note of every low price that’s on the list...What I would always strive for is coming up with a better concept to make the customer take the leap, because the whole experience is great...not a laundry list is great. Changing attitudes and habits is really what we are working on.

Another concern that is related to multiple copy points was the matter of excessive word counts. Rather than too many ideas, the concern here was simply too many words. Whether a commercial was produced from client-provided copy points or from a client-completed thirty- or sixty-second script, the sample subjects consistently reported that it was an all-too-common practice for clients to pack as much copy into a commercial as could be read—even if it required “speed talking” or digital manipulation to fit it all in.

Dan Buckley, for example, stated,

Another thing is timing. We do thirty-second spots and sixty-second spots. If you want to run a fifty-five second spot, no problem. If you want to run a sixty-five second spot, hmmm...let's talk about this...People always want to try and cram in as much information into this ad. That's not always going to make a good ad... You do your best to talk them into doing something else, but then if that's what they're...if they're stubborn, I mean, then you make it work. You know, I've got some tricks on getting seventy-five seconds into sixty.

Dan's main "trick" was digitally editing the copy into phrases, and then layering those phrases with some overlap to compress the time required to incorporate all the copy into the commercial.

Kent Bailey at WGFY in Nashville faced the same dilemma. He recalled, "Historically, a lot of times if a client has never been on the air, they want to cram too much stuff into sixty seconds, or thirty seconds. But...so we try to whittle it down a little bit and try to, you know, if they want to do a lot of information, we'll do two spots for them."

Jeff Haislip, co-owner at small market WJMM in Lewisburg, Tennessee made the interesting point that technological improvements have helped make production much easier in most respects, but they have "...brought other problems, as well." Those "other problems" have much to do with excessive copy:

...when you hear a commercial now, they're sped up, there's so much blank space cut out between words, and people are wanting to buy thirty-second commercials, and "how many words can we jumble up in thirty

seconds?” I wonder sometimes if the full effect is really...I won't say we put a word limit on...but I will say this: Chris—the guy sitting behind us on the board right now—if we have a commercial that's jumbled up with words that's a thirty...because we run UT sports, you know they've got to be on the money...versus Bill that's my afternoon guy—if there's something that's got to be quick, Chris is the man. I do some of those. I'm not as good at it as Chris is. Would I ask Bill to do one? No, because he speaks slower. Not good or bad, but he just speaks slower.

So, Jeff's resolution for completing commercials that contain excessive copy was to use the air personality who is best at “speed talking.”

It bears mentioning that these solutions for the excessive copy problem not only created their own set of problems, including unintelligibility, but they also ignored a subtle, but critical, feature of effective copy writing. Commercial scripts that are laden with too many words cannot take advantage of the full palette of copy elements that are at the disposal of the commercial creator, including sounds, silence, and pacing.

Regarding both concerns—*multiple copy points* and *excessive word counts*—the key point to be drawn from these predicaments is that the subjects indicated universally and with no malice whatsoever that when it was all said and done, the client's wishes were adhered to, even if they (the subjects) realized that the result was not the most effective for the advertiser. This indictment must also be extended to the sales staff, since they, too, were involved in the process of gathering information for the commercials. Every one of the subjects seemed to understand the important and direct relationship between his work and the organization's ability to generate revenue. But they also

expressed their serious concern: if they challenged the client's judgment regarding copy, the station's ability to continue to generate revenue from that client would likely be jeopardized.

Kent Bailey at Nashville's Citadel cluster put it plainly, "...it's all about commercials. It's all about clients. It's all about revenue. [Advertising is] what really drives it. That's what gives us the money to be able to do what we do." In Lewisburg, Tennessee, Jeff Haislip spoke of situations "...where you have to do things from a professionalism sound quality style that you don't want to do just to get it on to satisfy the customer..."

Mike Koolidge in Rochelle, Illinois, found great satisfaction in making the client happy:

I realize now that it's money! I mean, these commercials are our revenue. Period. And I emphasize this to the interns...I say, "This is real! These commercials aren't practice. These commercials aren't training methods for you. This is actual money that a business somewhere else is taking money out of their pocket and giving to us...giving to the station in exchange for whatever we do with it. We gotta make it good. So I appreciate that aspect that I'm actually dealing with the product that the station is literally selling.

They understood the relationship, but because of the culture and conditions within which they worked at the stations, their work—and by extension the client's advertising—may have been less creative and more oriented toward *convention and formula*. These findings

were further evidence that factors within the media organization influenced commercial content, as well as other forms of media content, such as news and entertainment.

The Production Person's Attitudes

Mike Koolidge's satisfaction in making the client happy was a primary motivator for him in his work, demonstrating a personal attitude about what parts of his job were significant. Shoemaker and Reese included media workers' personal attitudes such as this as part of their network of influences that impact media content. As a result, this was a line of inquiry in these interviews. What parts of the person's job did they like best, and what parts of the person's job did they like least? What were the criteria for determining that a piece of work—in this case a local direct radio commercial—was a good one or a successful one? From the interviews conducted at the radio stations participating in this study, it was clear—at least in the minds of most of these subjects—that doing great work in creating radio commercials had more to do with technology, audio wizardry, vocal delivery, editing, and the ability to create special effects than it did with creating effective content.

The fact that Mike Anthony at Christian music station J103 actually dislikes writing copy has already been mentioned. "It's just a part of my job I really hate!" He reiterated that point at least three times and even admitted that much of his production was done ad lib with no script at all—only a page of "copy points" to prompt him! "We'll get the copy points, and I'll formulate the copy as I go. Because of this miracle of digital editing, you can do...a spot on the fly." As has been previously noted, the need for speed greatly encouraged this behavior. The "miracle of digital editing" would allow him to quickly and conveniently take several sections of acceptably delivered copy and splice

them together until he filled enough time for the commercial. “To sit down and rewrite [new] copy every week [for the same client] would be tedious and absurd.”

Ironically, just seconds later, Mike stated that the part of his job he liked the *best* was “...sitting down with some neat sound effects and making up a funny, good-sounding spot. That’s very enjoyable, very pleasurable.” He did point out that the station provided “...a nice big thick book of copy that is kind of a fill-in-the-blank thing. You might go to a lawn service, and they’ve already got a spot all written out, and you just kind of fill in the blanks. We haven’t utilized that too much.” If they had, it would have been an undeniable example of a media content producer precisely following *convention and formula*.

Dave Benzing at AM/FM in Nashville also enjoys the process of putting the elements of a spot together. The favorite part of his day was when he was able to “take raw components and do some voiceover work inside some commercials—taking all those things and creating it and making it sound magnificent.” A gleam appeared in his eyes when he continued, “That’s the most fun that I could have in a day. Just put me in a room, and allow me to create.” He went on to specify that his reference was to the actual audio, but he checked himself by adding, “Now I enjoy the creative writing process absolutely, because if I write something, I’ve already got it in my mind as to how I want it to sound.” It also came as no surprise that Dave boasted of multiple cream-of-the-crop audio resources at his disposal.

I’ve got ten sound effects libraries. I’ve got over three hundred twenty-five music discs that go from hard-edged rock to traditional country to classical...I’ve got the resources just about in every capacity from sound

effects and music standpoint to make commercials really, really shine. I've got great facilities, excellent work stations.

But, when asked about resources for the writing part of the process, he responded, "That would probably be a place that I would definitely say that I would like to see improved. I have requested to go on a number of occasions to workshops, and have yet to go to one." On the other hand, when his company offered an in-house creative writing workshop, Dave could not attend, because he was too busy under the crunch of his other duties.

When asked what part of his job he liked the best, Jeff Schmidt in Norfolk responded, "The creative end," then defined "creative" as station imaging, the term used to identify promotional announcements, liners, and other produced on-air elements that give the station its overall image. He went on to describe the process of putting together all the pieces of an imaging spot—voice, effects, and music—to create a finished whole, utilizing state-of-the-art technology. "I get paid to work with expensive toys."

Like Mike Koolidge, Dan Buckley at WRLT-FM in Nashville enjoyed making clients happy through his creativity and professionalism:

...one of the things I really do enjoy is that reply of, "That sounds great. You're so professional. I really enjoyed working with you." That fulfills something inside of me that I enjoy...So I'd say, getting to play with all these cool tools and just using the software. I love it. I'm a geek. I don't know. So, I'd say using it, the gratification that I get from my success from when it's good makes me happy.

A different perspective was provided by Nashville Sports Radio's Paul Hughes, who had spent a number of years as a partner in a Lexington, Kentucky, advertising

agency. He described a listener-oriented approach to writing that none of the other subjects talked about:

Before I write anything, I look at, “Well who are we communicating to?”

It’s not always the same listener driving around listening to sports. You’ve got an eighteen-year-old, you’ve got a fifty-year-old guy like me, you’ve got very few women...so who is it the advertiser is trying to reach within that whole segment of people who are listening to the station, because it’s a pretty wide demo...each individual project needs to do its job for the client...Changing attitudes and habits is really what we are working on. You have a process that requires designing something that is designed to create a response. That has to deal with psychology and knowing that there is an audience that needs to be taken care of from the advertiser’s point of view, so you kind of get those two to meet in the middle.

Consistent with the Shoemaker and Reese model, these findings seemed to indicate that media workers’ personal attitudes were indeed part of that network of influences that impacted the content of local direct radio commercials, just as they impacted other forms of media content. The “toys” of the trade, which included technology, audio wizardry, vocal delivery, editing, and the ability to create special effects, were the things that seemed to excite most of the participants interviewed and affect their attitudes about their work in a positive manner.

Winning Awards

In addition to the gratification that Dan Buckley of Nashville’s Lightning 100 found in positive feedback from clients, he also mentioned another factor that influences

his work: the prospect of winning a peer-reviewed award, such as a local Addy Award, given by local chapters of the American Advertising Federation, or a Radio Mercury Award, given by the Radio Creative Fund. While these awards often go to the creative departments of advertising agencies, entry is open to individuals and radio stations. Buckley's comments directly reflected the sentiments of Roger Wimmer and Joseph Dominick, who were quoted earlier from their 2006 undergraduate textbook, Media Research Methods. They opined that too many advertising professionals create commercials for the wrong reasons, including the potential for winning awards or peer approval (376).

When he first started working at WRLT, Dan was encouraged by the owner of the station to try to win awards:

I want to win awards...In fact, the radio Mercury awards are coming up, and our owner...our owner is really cool. He paid me for winning an award this past year. Out of his own pocket, he pulled out his wallet and gave me \$100 for winning. So, he has said...that's cool that he takes an interest. He comes to those awards. When I first started here, they said, "You need to win an award someday. We won one once." Well, I've won three or four, and I want to win more.

Despite the fact that Wimmer and Dominick referred to awards as "wrong reasons" for creating commercials, there are actually a number of good reasons why individuals and radio stations might pursue them. For the individual, it is presumably an indication from peers that your work is exemplary. There is also the potential for a significant cash prize accompanying the recognition. Further, it is certainly an enhancement for an individual's

resume. For the radio station, an award for creativity can give the sales staff an added benefit to offer to prospective advertisers.

Buckley viewed creative awards as an influence on his radio commercial production efforts, and based on the high level of competition to win them, other radio industry professionals are apparently motivated by them as well. The other participants in this study, however, did not seem to be influenced by the industry award systems. For example, Bill Goodman at WANT in Lebanon, Tennessee, said that it had "...been a long time. It's probably been eight or nine or ten years maybe" since he had even submitted a commercial for award consideration. His reason was "...that's something that I don't generally have time to think about." Paul Hughes at WNSR in Nashville was more pointed: "I'm so focused basically on just getting the job done that I don't consciously think about awards. And let me...just say that I am not a big believer in Addy awards."

Kent Bailey at Nashville's Citadel cluster had still another perspective on awards:

We try to treat all the clients equal. Some clients don't want, you know, award-winning spots. They just want the facts thrown out there. And (client) Horace Bass again: he's not going to win an AIR Award, but he'll sell product. So, I mean yeah, it's in the back of your mind. You want to be winning awards for the things that you do, but that's not...that doesn't drive us, because we don't sit down every day and go, "Okay, it's gotta be an AIR Award winner." Because if we do that, we might not be doing what the client wants.

When the prospect for winning awards was considered as a potential antecedent factor that might influence the production of local direct radio commercials, there was no

clear-cut indication about their impact or their value from the participants in this study. Wimmer and Dominick have criticized those who view them as a positive motivator. Some of the participants in this study did not have the time to consider them at all, while others thought negatively about the criteria and processes applied in awarding them. One thought did emerge, however, that may have some bearing on these findings. If a creator of radio commercials is influenced at all by the prospect of winning an award for creativity, that influence alone might lead the commercial creator away from the common tendency toward *convention and formula*.

A Final Note on Antecedent Influences

Early in the present study, several emerging trends were identified that could potentially threaten radio's very existence as an advertising medium. Unpopular developments in the industry, such as consolidation, have brought increased scrutiny from consumers, advertisers, and even Wall Street investors. Emerging media, such as the Internet and satellite radio have brought increased competition for advertising revenue. Oddly enough, these factors do not seem to be "on the radar" for the aural medium. Responding to these emerging threats does not seem to be a conscious part of radio's strategy for increasing—or even maintaining—market share. Rather, discussion about changes in the media environment consistently elicited excitement about new technology making life simpler for production people. In the absence of prompting from the interviewer, none of these threats were introduced by the subjects. Their existence was not perceived to be a threat at all. In fact, the Internet was only seen as another vehicle for generating additional revenue from their existing clients—which it certainly

is—but there did not seem to be a perception of the Internet as a competitor for advertising revenue, and satellite radio was simply seen as a new toy in their own cars.

When asked about the presence of the Internet, for instance, Mike Koolidge at WRHL in Rochelle, Illinois, talked about how much easier it is to get commercials from advertising agencies because of the Internet. “There are some commercials we get that are completely, 100% produced. For example, McDonald’s and Budweiser. They broadcast on the station, we download them from the Web site, they’re done by some ad agency in Chicago that, you know, probably cost a fortune. But they’re great commercials.”

Co-owner Jeff Haislip from Lewisburg, Tennessee, had several intriguing perspectives on the rapidly changing media environment. Like Mike Koolidge, he expressed his satisfaction with the value of the Internet in sending and receiving commercial files: “I think one thing that has changed from a speed standpoint, I can remember—and we still get a lot of commercials in on CD. But we also get a ton of commercials now, especially from our agencies, through the Internet. A sent MP3 more and more.”

About changes in media technology, he made the following observation:

I can remember a time—and this was before we had control of the station—I can remember a time where we were playing stereo records (this is going back to the record era), and our commercials were mono. And you could tell a big difference when you went to a regular commercial. Now, we’re playing out of computer or a stereo CD, and our

commercials are stereo. There may be things that change, and we have to change with them.

Haislip also recognized the added value and potential for audience and revenue growth made possible by webcasting WJMJ on the Internet:

I mean, the Internet brought a whole new system of tools that we never had before, because we're broadcasting on the Internet, as well. We do our ball games, and we have people listening...you know, we get people from all over, from China, people from the Mideast saying they're listening to us, and I go, "Why? Why are they listening to a little bitty town of Lewisburg, Tennessee?"

When he was directly asked, "Do you feel any competition from new media?" his response was,

The only thing that makes me wonder what's gonna happen...here you've had Clear Channel just bought out, or I guess...I don't know if it's approved, yet, but supposedly they're gonna be bought out by a private whatever. I just wonder if the continuous conglomerate can continue to go on. I'm concerned—just like we were speaking before about the recent FCC meetings in Nashville—I'm concerned about one comment that was made about hearing the same twenty songs...you know, if you're in North Carolina, or you're in San Francisco, listen to a country station...I'm concerned about that. We don't play...we don't have a playlist here. We have a Top 50 that our dj's reference off of, and then we have...I mean, to me that's what I'm paying my dj's to do...is make it their show.

There was no hint that these external factors were a real threat to his radio stations at all.

When Kent Bailey at Sports Talk WGFY in Nashville was asked about the rapidly changing media environment and the new competition that it has brought, he launched into a discussion about nontraditional revenue and its importance for radio moving forward. He acknowledged that there was always pressure to grow revenue and profits, noting, "...the station itself is doing better this year, and that's our guidepost. Always do better than the year before." But since the station was sold out of its current sellable inventory much of the time, it was being forced to devise new, nontraditional ways of generating revenue. These new ways included sponsored billboards for program segments and title sponsors for everything from an entire radio show to the special "newsmakers' hotline" for phone-in guests. Nontraditional revenue was, in fact, defined as revenue that did not have actual commercials attached to it.

In the end, the participants in this study acknowledged that things were getting more difficult in the radio industry, but their strategies for adapting to the rapidly changing media environment apparently did not include any consideration of the way they created radio commercials, their organization's primary revenue-generating content.

Summary of the Ethnographic Analysis

It has been consistently observed throughout this Ethnographic Analysis that a number of antecedent factors influence the creation of radio commercials. That which Shoemaker and Reese termed a "network of influences, ranging from communication workers' personal attitudes and role conceptions, routines of media work, [and] media organizational structure and culture" (258) clearly has an impact on radio advertising content.

Based on field observations and interviews at the ten media organizations that participated in this study, it appeared that the most significant and powerful antecedent influence was the “routine of media work.” The degree to which production people appeared to be overworked simply cannot be overlooked. The extent to which the philosophy of “faster over better” or “efficiency over effectiveness” was prevalent seemed to have a great influence on the advertising content that was developed at these stations and ultimately aired.

The “media organizational structure and culture” was another significant antecedent factor. The apparent position of the production person as “servant of all” certainly influenced content. It also prompted the questions, how do they do what they do, and how do they do it so cheerfully? Further, these radio station cultures typically placed such a high value on keeping clients happy that it often appeared to be compromising the effectiveness of its revenue-producing product, which is advertising.

Finally, the “communication workers’ personal attitudes” also had an influence on radio advertising content. In one respect, this was determined by their attitudes about what they do, both generally and in terms of how they view advertising development. Most of the subjects seemed to find their “hot spot” in gadgets, wizardry, and sounds. For the most part, they were not influenced much by the prospect of winning awards. But, they did enjoy creating great-sounding commercials—seemingly more than they enjoyed creating great content or communicating effectively with advertising audiences.

Chapter 6—Discussion and Conclusions

As radio approaches a century of existence, the aural medium faces an increasingly uncertain future. Subsequent to the Telecommunications Act of 1996, several factors, including industry consolidation and increased competition, have conspired to jeopardize radio's position as a medium of choice for listeners and advertisers alike.

In the face of these supposedly uncertain—if not disheartening—times for terrestrial radio, it seemed appropriate to explore how the radio industry is countering the threats it faces from a rapidly changing media environment, especially as those changes impact radio as an advertising medium. The general objective of this study was to get a picture of the “way things are” in a group of radio stations, and, in light of these changes, consider how—and if—they are responding. The more specific purpose was to examine characteristics of the content of local direct advertising produced by these stations and identify and explore key factors in the internal—and to some extent external—environments of these stations that influenced the creation of this advertising content. It was thought that the study would yield valuable insights to both scholars and radio industry professionals as they confront the unique challenges that the radio medium and radio stations are experiencing today.

This final chapter will consist of several components, including a discussion of the findings emergent from both the Burkean Cluster Analysis of 96 local direct radio commercials and the ethnographic analysis of the ten persons within media organizations who were identified as having primary responsibility for their creation. In both cases, the findings reported herein provide illuminating answers to the exploratory research

questions that were posed in Chapter 1. The report will then proceed to an analysis of implications for both local radio station managers and—by extension—the radio industry at large. Finally, the study’s contribution to scholarly thinking and research in the area of media studies will be developed, as well as the author’s suggestions for further study. It begins, however, with comments that address what appears to be a widespread organizational consciousness—at least among the ten media organizations that participated in the study—that denigrates the process of creating and producing local direct radio commercials.

Cinderella’s Ugly Stepsisters

The basic theoretical foundation upon which this study was formed was the model posited by Shoemaker and Reese, which pointed to influences *on* mass media content, including “...communication workers’ personal attitudes and role conceptions, routines of media work, [and] media organizational structure and culture” (258). The sections that follow offer various points of discussion and interpretation concerning a number of *specific* antecedent factors that seemed to influence the creation of the local direct radio commercials scrutinized for this study. But when many of the specific antecedent factors present within the media organizations were considered *en bloc*, a *general* sense emerged that seemed to indicate that the radio commercial production process as a whole was not valued highly. It has already been demonstrated in Chapter 5 that several of the participating radio stations assigned the task of writing commercials to whoever was willing and available to complete the task, with little or no regard for their ability or creativity.

“Willingness” was itself an elastic concept, as was made obvious by WRHL’s employment of Mike Koolidge in Rochelle, Illinois. As Production Director, Koolidge had primary responsibility for radio commercial production, yet he plainly did not *want* to do radio commercial production. Clearly, that situation said something about the level of significance the organization placed on the position. It was Koolidge who commented:

I think of the commercials that have to be done here as a duty (said with a touch of bitterness)...as a thing that HAS to be done, and done decently and done well...I want to host a show. I’m in radio to host a two-hour talk show, and that’s what I want to do. So, when they offered me the job, they said, “You realize this is a production job primarily.” And I talked to the General Manager before I officially said, “I’ll take the job,” and said, “You know, can you pretty much promise me that in a couple months I’ll be on the air in the afternoon?” And he said, “Yeah...”

In some cases, commercial production even seemed to be consciously relegated to a form of second-class status within the radio station. When this overall “sense” began to emerge, the ten interview transcripts were read carefully once again, this time looking to see if there was evidence that would corroborate the vague impression. What was discovered indicated that some of the persons interviewed for the study also shared the same “sense.” In fact, Dave Benzing at the AM/FM cluster in Nashville passionately spoke about it:

I honestly think the majority of radio stations look at the creative guy in the production department as being less important—that they could get monkeys to do—to actually do the job. I think because there is no—you

know, it's all about money. It's all about how much revenue is generated. And production is not a revenue-generating entity. It's a revenue-saving entity. I think the opportunity of companies understanding that—you know, my company obviously understands that we saved them an awful lot of money, so they understand it. But, I still think that the powers that be in the majority of radio stations across the country look at the production department as being secondary, as opposed to being a primary facet of the radio station. If you look at programming, you look at sales, you're able to say you can generate revenue from those things, because—you know, sales is based upon what programming does, and if programming does their job, the numbers are higher, which in turn makes the cost per point go up, and therefore you've got the economic fusion happening between the two. As opposed to the production department being just a—you know, just a—you can get any monkey to put that on the radio. And that's not true. Not true. It's just simply not the case. You can't just pull anybody off the street to do the job. But, I think oftentimes, the suits higher up will say, "Get that board op to do it. He can do it."

Dan Buckley at Nashville's Lightning 100 also pointed to the reality that most radio stations, unlike television stations, do not charge a fee for creating commercials, when he exclaimed, "...and all this production is free! We don't charge them for this production, which is something that I wish that they would do."

Perhaps that was the crux of the matter. This general sense that commercial production was not valued *by* the radio stations, or really appreciated by the clients for

that matter, could have been a reflection of the fact that commercial production had no value *to* the radio stations, since it was provided to clients free of charge. On the other hand, the sales endeavor directly generated revenue, and the programming endeavor indirectly generated revenue, so they were more highly valued by the media organizations. Or perhaps it was exactly the opposite. Commercial production was provided to clients free of charge *because* it was not valued by the radio stations. In either case, this piece of evidence gave strong indication that the organizational culture that was consistently exhibited by these media organizations and reported by the participants in the study had a dramatic impact on both the radio commercial content and those who created it. Said differently, if the radio industry was advertising's "Cinderella," those who created radio commercials may well have been considered the ugly stepsisters.

Burkean Cluster Analysis

As discussed in previous chapters, in their exploration of country music as a media art form, John Ryan and Richard Peterson articulated several different organizational models in which "media art" is created. One of these models was called *convention and formula*, a model in which there is essentially an agreed-upon "correct way" to produce media art. Although Ryan and Peterson's model originated with creators of country music, the present study sought to apply that reasoning to the world of radio commercials. As a form of media art in which sameness seems to be ubiquitous, would a group of local, direct radio commercials manifest *convention and formula*-like characteristics?

The Burkean Cluster Analysis of 96 radio commercials gave strong indication that the creators of these radio commercials did indeed follow a particular *convention and*

formula in their work—that there was indeed an agreed-upon correct way to produce radio commercials. The study examined each of the 96 radio commercial scripts to determine how many—if any—of several key advertising themes were present in the copy. Originally, there were five themes: price, quality, selection, service, and a sense of urgency. Another theme—detail-oriented contact information—was added when it emerged during the initial analysis of the radio commercial scripts. Once it was determined which of the key themes was present in each commercial script, the terms that clustered around the theme and were used to “speak of” the theme were charted. The analysis uncovered a significant number of similarities existent in the sample.

For one thing, the study found that almost every commercial script in the sample included the incidence of at least one of the themes. Further, the terms selected by the writers of the 96 commercials that speak to each of the themes demonstrated a very high level of similarity. These similarities gave strong indication that the creators of radio commercials did follow patterns of *convention and formula*. In some cases, the prevailing *convention and formula* was so potent that it appeared to take on a role of hegemony. There was an agreed-upon, “correct” way to create the radio commercials. A few points should be made about this conclusion.

First, beyond merely charting who uses what terms in a radio commercial, Burkean Cluster Analysis is intended to reveal something about the world of the rhetor or copy writer. The indication was that radio commercial copy writers view the world of creating radio commercials through the eyes of the agreed-upon “correct” *convention and formula*. J103’s Mike Anthony in Chattanooga even acknowledged an awareness of following pattern, almost to the point of plagiarism:

Well a lot of it, uh Rich, comes from stuff you've heard in the past. You know, a spot that particularly sticks with you that you've heard somewhere else—you can take bits and pieces of that and incorporate it into your own spot. And it's a little like plagiarism, I guess, but I think it's just part of the way things get better as people add to them and take away from them. But that happens... we actually have a nice big thick book of copy that is kind of a "fill in the blank" thing. You might go to a lawn service, you know, and they've already got a spot all written out, and you just kind of fill in the blanks. We haven't utilized that too much, but for the most part, we'll use the copy points and our own—own memory.

Second, while in Mike Anthony's example the notion of *convention and formula* in the creation of radio commercials was conscious, it may not necessarily have always been so for others. It is doubtful that a group of "executive production directors" gathered in a room and determined that "this is how radio commercials shall be created." The same could be said about creating country music (Ryan and Peterson). It is not that an elite group of leaders made a conscious determination of how radio commercials should be created. Rather, for the most part, at least in this study, it seemed that the status quo was just the way "things are done." Recall that most of the persons observed and interviewed in the second step of the study—the ethnographic analysis—learned their craft on the job. There was little in the way of preparatory formal "creative" education. What they would have learned on the job was the way things have always been done. This "way" appears to have been handed down year after year, even from generation to generation of media

workers, and over time it has become the de facto standard, a model of *convention and formula*.

Third, no claim is being made herein about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the sample of radio commercials. Intuitively, though, it would seem that different commercials that make similar claims for different—but mutually exclusive—advertisers would be counter-productive. It would seem that if three competing automobile dealerships in the same city claimed to absolutely, positively guarantee the lowest price in town, all three be in direct conflict with each other, thereby canceling out the effectiveness of all three. Intuitively, it would seem that way, but this study makes no such claim. This study simply reveals a high level of similarity in both the incidence of the themes and the terms that cluster around and “speak to” them, providing strong evidence that the Ryan and Peterson model of *convention and formula* may be applied to radio advertising content, just as it has been applied to country music.

In an era in which it is increasingly difficult to gain the attention of audiences, given the incredible clutter of messages that are competing for that attention, it would seem that highly creative advertising messages containing unique appeals would be essential. This Burkean Cluster Analysis suggested that neither creativity nor uniqueness characterized these local direct radio commercials.

Ethnographic Analysis

The Burkean Cluster Analysis of the sample of 96 radio commercials gave strong indication that the Ryan and Peterson model of *convention and formula* may be applied to radio advertising content. The Burkean Cluster Analysis provided a robust indication of “what” was found in the world of radio commercial advertising, at least as it related to

these ten persons who were primarily responsible for commercial production at their radio stations. Still in question, however, was the “why” factor. It was presupposed from the Burkean Cluster Analysis that the creators of radio commercials (rhetors) were following a method of *convention and formula* as they did their work. But, why did they follow *convention and formula*? Were there—as Shoemaker and Reese posited concerning mass-mediated programming and news content—antecedent factors within the media organizations that influenced their creation of radio commercial content? Were there influencing factors that resulted in the virtually universal practice of following the agreed-upon *convention and formula*?

Once again, the Shoemaker and Reese model identified a “network of influences, ranging from communication workers’ personal attitudes and role conceptions, routines of media work, [and] media organizational structure and culture” (258) as having antecedent influence on media programming and news content. The second step of the present study, the Ethnographic Analysis, gave a strong indication that similar types of antecedent factors clearly influenced the creation of local direct radio advertising content.

Beginning with communication workers’ “personal attitudes and role conceptions,” the present study discovered that, while the media workers observed and interviewed indicated a considerable awareness of and appreciation for the relationship between their work and the ability of the organization to generate revenue, when it came to actually creating radio commercials, most found more satisfaction in “playing with expensive toys” than in producing effective and engaging content. From the perspective of these participants, their perceived role in the radio commercial production process generally seemed to consist more of “getting the job done” and “making it sound great”

than of effectively communicating a message to the advertising audience, or perhaps even fully understanding that audience and its various elements. Of course, it has already been shown in Chapter 5—and alluded to earlier in this chapter—that several of these participants in the study did not actually write commercials at all. In fact, it was found that a wide variety of employees with a wide variety of professional experience and skill sets were assigned writing duties.

As a result, it may be reasonable to infer that there was a lack of appreciation for copy writing within these organizations, but neither the participants in the study nor the organizations for which they were employed seemed to be disturbed by it. That was just the way things were. This inference was further corroborated by the understanding that most of the participants in this study were given responsibility for the creation of radio commercials as a result of previous experience as a voice talent or a “good pair of hands” and a “can-do” work ethic, which again demonstrated that those were the qualities more highly valued by the organization over any specific creative training or skills. The logical implication of these conclusions is that the participants’ own conceptions about their role in the organizations would also place a higher value on these qualities over skillful, creative writing, thereby perpetuating the tendency toward following *convention and formula*.

When the focus of the ethnographic analysis moved from personal attitudes and role conceptions to the “routines of media work,” perhaps the most significant finding of the ethnographic analysis portion of the study emerged. This was the discovery and disclosure of the reality of the radio commercial production person’s day-to-day routine. The creators of radio advertising content were profoundly overworked, and as a result,

they were not able to give the attention to content that they believed the clients deserved. They consistently worked very long hours, an often-neglected detail that surely must have had an impact on their ability to think, produce, and/or write creatively. By their own admission, they valued efficiency over effectiveness, but only because their workday routine demanded it. The consistency with which the frenetic routine of media work was reported was astounding. Their experiences were so similar that they even used the same language to describe them. “Fighting fires” and perpetually “checking the in-box” and “scrambling” to keep up with their work were common expressions of their workplace reality. Several of the observations and interviews conducted for this study actually had to be delayed until after the fourth quarter of the year, because the workload related to Christmas and the end of the year was so great; there was simply no time to spare for meeting with a researcher. On several occasions, appointments for the observations and interviews had to be rescheduled for the same reason.

In the previous chapter, a rhetorical question was raised—how could production persons continue to maintain such a vigorous pace and do it so cheerfully? While the question was originally rhetorical in nature, these conclusions actually may have provided a possible answer. The “can-do, get the job done” personal attitude that seemed to be responsible for their landing their positions in the first place is the same “can-do, get the job done” personal attitude that compels them to do just that. And the wheels continue to turn.

The next level of the Shoemaker and Reese model of antecedent influencing factors was “media organizational structure and culture.” Here the study revealed a few broad and wide-ranging influences, the most significant of which was that overall sense

of what appeared to be an “organizational consciousness” that denigrates the process of creating and producing local direct radio commercials. This finding was discussed earlier in this chapter. A second discovery at the level of organizational structure and culture, however, was that organizational cultures tended to allow advertising clients to exert undue influence on commercial content—often in negative ways.

This finding was not entirely new to this study. Industry leaders have privately spoken of the dilemma that the radio industry faces: Such a high value is placed on client satisfaction that radio stations are afraid to question a client’s judgment when it comes to creating commercials. This finding also did not ignore the obvious reality that clients are paying for advertising; therefore, they have every right to exert considerable control over the content of their advertising messages. Allowing clients to exert such great influence over advertising content, however, seems to further undervalue the radio station professional. One could assume that these media professionals are more qualified than clients to understand the field of advertising, particularly in their own medium. Radio professionals may be more qualified than clients to understand how to best utilize the aural medium to effectively communicate an advertising message. It seems that other media, such as television, have done a better job (not perfect, but better) of guiding clients through the process of creating effective commercial content than radio.

Because of their powerful role in the local direct radio advertising process, many radio clients have continued to insist on “*multiple copy points*” advertising strategies such as “price-and-item” commercials or “laundry lists” of products and services—strategies, as was suggested in Chapter 4, that are much more suited to detail-oriented media such as newspapers. They have continued to insist on saying as much as possible in every

commercial, providing or requesting copy that consists of what has been termed “*excessive word counts*.” The level of the client’s influence on the creation of local direct radio commercials is reminiscent of another of Ryan and Peterson’s models for creating media art forms, that of *product image*, in which the prevailing motivation on the creator of media art is approval from those next up the organization’s hierarchy of approval, or in this case the client.

Because clients have exerted undue influence on the content of radio commercials, at least two basic deficiencies may have often materialized. First, as Dan O’Day (2001) asserts, the commercial may be less effective. Second, the commercial may give listeners a valid reason to tune out. The irony is evident. Radio places such a high value on client satisfaction that radio stations are afraid to question a client’s judgment when it comes to creating commercials; as a result, radio advertising is often likely to be less effective than if the commercials were created in ways that take better advantage of radio’s strengths as an advertising medium. If the advertising is less effective, the client will not be satisfied; ultimately, radio station revenue will be negatively impacted. In the interest of client satisfaction, the client may be lost. To add insult to injury, if the creativity-challenged commercials do not engage listeners, and listeners are given a valid reason to tune out, ultimately radio station ratings will be negatively impacted. The client *and* the listener may both be lost, at least temporarily; in both cases, station revenue is negatively impacted.

These findings were reached after carefully analyzing field notes and the transcripts of the ten interviews. Each of the different levels of the Shoemaker and Reese model was considered, and at each level, Fetterman’s strategy of triangulation was

applied, whereby one participant's point of view was tested against another's. The similarity with which participants described these phenomena was striking. In each case, the triangulated evidence was convincing that various antecedent factors within and without the media organizations influence radio advertising content.

Therefore, the fundamental conclusion to which the results of both the Burkean Cluster Analysis and the Ethnographic Analysis led was that the radio stations involved in the study did not give an indication that they were responding to the threats brought on by the rapidly changing media environment at all. As it pertained to the creation of advertising messages, they were, rather, operating from within the same patterns of *convention and formula* that have characterized the industry for years, and a number of influencing factors within the media organizations encouraged their continued adherence to those patterns moving forward.

Implications for Local Radio Station Managers

While some of the conclusions of this study may have appeared to cast a certain amount of negative light on radio stations—and particularly those stations that participated in the study—they actually generated potentially good news for media organizations and local radio station managers. The results of the study clearly suggested that there is significant room for improvement in the realm of radio commercial content, and in the rapidly changing media environment—with its increased competition for advertising revenue—it was evident that this was more important than ever. The good news for these radio stations, however, was that the assembly-line mentality that has been driving the radio commercial production process—especially at the local direct level—seems to have been rooted in influencing antecedent factors within media organizations

that could be transformed. Their influence could be changed from negative to positive. The key implication for local radio station managers, then, was this: while they have the opportunity to affect this change, they must intentionally choose to do so.

A number of additional implications emerged from the findings in this study. First, local radio station managers need to rethink their historical perceptions about radio commercials and begin to regard them as a form of programming content, rather than an interruption to programming. In Chapter 1, this study referred to the common practice of designing radio station “hot clocks” in such a way as to minimize the negative impact on audience size that was presumed to occur at commercial breaks. This practice emerged from the assumptions that commercials were perceived negatively by listeners, that listeners universally practiced ad avoidance, and that these opportunities for listeners to tune out were to be minimized. But what would happen if radio commercial content was better? What if local radio station managers regarded commercials as a form of programming content on par with music and information? Considering that radio stations allocate up to sixteen minutes or more for commercials each hour, they are in fact a significant portion of a station’s programming. It seems that if local radio station managers placed the same value on commercial content and production that is placed on information and entertainment programming, it might be possible that radio commercials could become captivating and truly compelling.

Second, local radio station managers need to embark on a meaningful conversation about radio’s persistent use of advertising strategies that are more suitable for print media—strategies such as “price and item” and other forms of “laundry lists.” If the local radio station really values its clients, should not the clients be given the most

creative and engaging advertising tools? If the local radio station's staff claims to be the advertising experts (which in theory they are), should not the station provide the value of that expertise to its clients? While these matters of client-driven commercial scripts that contain *multiple copy points* and *excessive word counts* are industry-wide dilemmas, what better place is there than the local radio station (where managers and staff are known and trusted in the business community) to initiate this much-needed change?

Third, local radio station managers need to recognize that much of the commercial advertising content existent on their air is driven by the prevailing *convention and formula* and not rooted in effective communication strategies. Again, this study did not make direct claims regarding the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the radio commercials that were analyzed. It did, however, find a significant amount of sameness in commercial copy, because of the commercial creators' dependence on following patterns of *convention and formula*. It seemed quite clear that there was at the very least a considerable amount of potential for more creativity and communication effectiveness in local direct radio advertising that needs to be explored. This study's review of literature referred to Alexis Tan's (1981) description of Carbone's Theory of Stylistic Variables which impact comprehension to radio commercial advertising. The variables that Carbone identified as resulting in easier comprehension were listen-ability, level of human interest, vocabulary diversity, realism, and verifiability. If nothing else, it seemed apparent that the sameness that resulted from following *convention and formula* was deficient in listen-ability and level of human interest. Was this an example of the most effective job that could be done for radio advertisers?

Fourth, local radio station managers need to provide better and more appropriate training for creators of commercial content. As this study demonstrated, many of the participants who were creating local direct radio commercials were simply following patterns of *convention and formula*, and many had little or no formal training in creative processes. Others had gotten caught up in using the tools, such as digital editing software and sound effects libraries, rather than really understanding theoretical constructs in communication and persuasion or audiences and creative processes. It seemed peculiar that radio stations, which invested significant time and resources into training sales personnel who represent the station in marketing advertising time to clients, invested little time or resources to training the personnel who create the content with which the advertising time is filled.

Fifth, local radio station managers need to develop substantial systems of reward and recognition for creators of radio advertising content. As this study revealed, many of the participants conveyed a feeling of being used, abused, or underappreciated. On the other hand, Dan Buckley had been at Nashville's Lightning 100 for ten years, and one of his most pleasant memories was the \$100 bonus his employer gave him for winning a Mercury award. It is not at all unusual for radio stations to specially recognize exemplary achievement in sales and programming. It is time to pay more attention to providing similar incentives for creators of advertising content.

Sixth, local radio station managers need to foster an environment in which personnel in departments other than production have a better understanding of and appreciation for these creators of advertising content and their work. Part of this understanding might emerge naturally from implementing the suggestions already

mentioned. For example, if radio commercial content is repositioned as an integral part of programming content, and if better training is provided for production personnel, the result could be more creative commercials, which, in turn, could enhance others' appreciation for the creators of radio advertising content. It may also be useful, however, to offer similar training for other station personnel who are involved in the process of creating advertising messages. These individuals might include sales personnel, other staff personnel who are asked to write commercial copy, and perhaps even clients, since this study has also demonstrated their influence in the commercial production process. It is entirely conceivable that employees, clients, and prospective clients alike could benefit from educational activities, such as workshops and seminars, that cover various topics in advertising, communication, persuasion, or audiences.

Finally, and most significantly, local radio station managers need to address the serious deficiencies in staffing for commercial production personnel. The consistency with which participants in this study demonstrated and reported that they were severely overworked gave a clear indication that more appropriate allocation of human resources is long overdue. It is time for a completely new paradigm regarding the management of media organizations. The rapidly changing media environment and the increased competition that accompanies it have brought radio stations—like other business enterprises—squarely into the “do more with less” way of thinking that has resulted in labor practices that are—at best—dishonorable and—at worst—unlawful. Addressing these staffing issues would not only help rectify the problem of production personnel being excessively encumbered with labor, but it would also allow more time for the

important tasks of creative thinking, brainstorming, and reflection on commercial messages.

As a brief—but significant—added note, it seems that some local radio station managers also need to find some time of their own to think creatively about the management of media organizations in today’s competitive business environment. In Chapter 2, a summary of basic management theory was presented, indicating that as organizations evolved and became more sophisticated, management perspectives evolved with them. Progressively more attention was given to employees and their needs, rather than simply fine tuning systems and processes to maximize productivity and efficiency. Clearly, the thinking was that employee satisfaction was positively related to organizational productivity. The findings of this study, however, seemed to indicate that something different is occurring in radio station management today, something that may go beyond the commercial production process. Although the scope of this study was limited to the processes and outcomes of creating local direct radio commercials, the findings may be indicative of a broader problem in radio station management philosophy that undervalues employees in general and inevitably leads to organizational environments where chronic overwork is considered acceptable. This kind of thinking is contradictory with trends in management theory and practice, and it will need to change for radio stations to compete effectively in today’s marketplace.

Implications for the Radio Industry

In light of the increased scrutiny and competition facing the radio industry in the rapidly changing media environment, it seems evident that the radio industry *as a whole* must also reevaluate its thinking, its focus, and its strategies as they relate to the creation

of radio commercial content. While this study makes no attempt to generalize its findings beyond the scope of the ten media organizations investigated, the consistency with which the participating professionals reported the findings of the study makes it reasonable to infer that these antecedent factors could be at work across the industry. At best, it is apparent that the industry as a whole has offered no alternative strategies for creating local direct radio commercials than the traditional practice of *convention and formula*, in spite of the newly developing threats to radio's survival as an advertising medium. The following paragraphs offer a few critical suggestions.

First, the radio industry needs to give attention to, and actually heed, the findings of studies about advertising—especially the few studies that explore radio advertising. Roger Wimmer and Joseph Dominick assert, "...advertising experts do not incorporate 'cutting edge' research into the development of commercials" (376). Perhaps that is why the radio industry continues to utilize advertising strategies for clients that are much better suited to the detail orientation of print media. Perhaps that is why the radio industry continues to follow prescriptive patterns of *convention and formula* in the creation of radio commercials, leading to the level of sameness demonstrated in this study. On the other hand, perhaps the rapidly changing media environment with its increased level of competition for advertising revenue will be the catalyst to finally compel the radio industry to respond by better integrating what is known about advertising effectiveness. The public voices of the industry, including the more visible corporate leaders, as well as trade organizations, such as National Association of Broadcasters and the Radio Advertising Bureau, could provide guidance, leadership, and encouragement for the local radio station manager in this regard.

Second, perhaps it is time for the radio industry to reconsider its standard policy of providing commercial production free of charge. Apparently this is beginning to happen with a few larger companies in a few larger markets. If the radio industry *as a whole* adopted the practice as a standard and began to charge an appropriate fee for production services as a matter of course, several positive outcomes would likely result. The additional revenue would allow radio stations to enhance the resources—both human resources and material resources—available for commercial production, which would in turn likely lead to improved commercials. The additional revenue might also become an entirely new and substantially lucrative revenue stream. Most important, charging an appropriate fee for radio commercial production might place a higher value on the task of creating compelling radio advertising content, as well as on those who create it.

Third, the radio industry needs to focus its attention back on content and not solely on technological wizardry. HD Radio is an example of a technological advancement that holds tremendous promise for the industry, but technology alone will no longer be sufficient for attracting and sustaining audiences. With all the choices available to consumers, listeners are clamoring for more compelling content, whether it is entertainment, information, or—as this study suggests—advertising content. If the radio industry *as a whole* really wants to remain competitive and “win” in the rapidly changing and highly competitive media environment, long-term success will be achieved through encouraging local radio stations to provide the best content, including the best advertising content. Commercials do not necessarily need to represent an opportunity for listeners to tune out. Commercials—if they are created in entertaining or engaging ways—can be

another form of compelling programming content that draws listeners in, rather than repelling them to other radio stations, or worse, to other media entirely.

Phillip Swann, author of TV.Com: The Future of Interactive Television, made the following prediction about the future of television commercials in light of the growing competition for consumers' attention: "The TV commercial, as we know it, will not fade away. Rather, companies will have to invest more money in creating entertaining commercials that viewers will want to watch...The model: Super Bowl commercials, which sometimes are more interesting than the actual game" (32-33). If that is true of television commercials, surely it is true of radio commercials. Again, it stands to reason that the public voices of the industry and trade organizations, such as National Association of Broadcasters and the Radio Advertising Bureau, could provide leadership, direction, and encouragement to local radio stations.

The Study's Contributions to Media Theory

Several theoretical conclusions have emerged from this study. First, this is apparently the first study that has applied the Ryan and Peterson organizational model of *convention and formula* to advertising content. Their application of the model pertained to the creation of country music, and in this study it has been shown that it may also be applied to the creation of local direct radio commercials. It is significant to note, however, that while the two applications may be similar in nature, they are not similar in degree. In country music, *convention and formula* might typically refer to the practice of composing a song following a pattern of "verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge, chorus, and tag," or some similar structural outline. In the local direct radio commercials analyzed for this study, *convention and formula* actually referred to the practice of

writing a script using the same themes and even the same language. The country music equivalent would be to write songs using the very same lyrics or melody! Additionally, the power with which patterns of *convention and formula* seemed to be followed in the creation of the 96 local direct radio commercials was striking. This study contributes to mass media theory by being the first scholarly study to recognize that association.

Second, this is apparently the first study that has applied the Shoemaker and Reese model to advertising content. Shoemaker and Reese reported that antecedent factors within and without media organizations influenced media content, but their findings were limited to news and entertainment content. This study extends the model to advertising content, by demonstrating that a “network of influences, ranging from communication workers’ personal attitudes and role conceptions, routines of media work, [and] media organizational structure and culture” (258) have an impact on the creation of local direct radio commercials. As this study suggests, advertising content is another form of mediated content, not unlike news and entertainment programming. Therefore, it stands to reason that if the typical antecedent factors observed by Shoemaker and Reese influence other forms of programming content, they would influence advertising content, as well. The findings of the study provided validation for that reasoning.

Third, media organizations, and local radio stations in particular, are not helplessly constrained by the circumstances in which they conduct their workday routines—especially as they relate to the creation of local direct radio commercials, a media content product that is crucial to their ability to generate revenue. This study has identified several specific ways in which factors within the participating media organizations influenced the creation of local direct radio commercials, often in negative

ways. But in the same way that these antecedent organizational factors have been able to influence the creation of local direct radio commercials negatively, the media organizations are able to redirect them in ways that can result in a positive influence. By intentionally modifying processes, cultures, and policies, for example, greater significance can be demonstrated for the production process, as well as the people primarily responsible for that process. This result of this implication is a meaningful contribution to media organization theory and radio station practice, understanding that the modifications and outcomes suggested would lead to more creative and possibly more effective radio commercial content.

It may also be worth noting that this is apparently the first study to utilize Burkean Cluster Analysis methodology, a rhetorical method, in exploring advertising content, a contemporary form of mediated rhetoric.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research

Several limitations impact the value of the present study. First, both of the samples analyzed (for the Burkean Cluster Analysis and the Ethnographic Analysis) were of inadequate size to yield any prescriptive findings. The study was designed to offer exploratory insight into and rich detail regarding a very important subject. Nonetheless, the inability to generalize the findings represents a limitation that is significant. While it is suspected that similar attitudes, structures, cultures, and outcomes exist at many other radio stations and within many other local direct radio commercials, the small samples selected for this study do not permit such generalization.

Second, neither sample was purely random. While it was intentional to use a purposive sample for the present study, as is often the case in qualitative research, it, too,

prevented the possibility of generalizing the findings of the study beyond the scope of these samples. Again, it is suspected that similar attitudes, structures, cultures, and outcomes are present at many other radio stations and within many other local direct radio commercials, but the decision to use a purposive sample made any application of standard statistical models that would allow for further generalization impossible.

Third, the validity of the study is limited to the local direct radio commercials that were analyzed and the participants that were observed and interviewed. While this limitation must be acknowledged, it must also be recognized once again that the findings reported herein are likely not isolated instances. The purposive sample was intentionally stratified or selected from a cross section of media organization sizes and characteristics, and the findings reported were consistent across all sizes and types of organizations included in the sample. This study did not explore influences on other forms of advertising that are aired at the station level, such as advertising created by advertising agencies, national advertising, and station “promos.” There are also other facets of the Shoemaker and Reese framework that could be explored, especially other factors external to the media organization.

These limitations notwithstanding, the present study provides a number of valuable insights, but it also raises further questions and invites further research on several levels. The most obvious suggestion for further study is a recommendation to expand both samples and pursue similar lines of inquiry. A quantitative content analysis might be of value, but it would certainly need to be conducted using a larger, randomly selected sample of radio commercial scripts. It would, however, provide the opportunity to generalize the findings more definitively. At the same time, input from creators of

radio commercials themselves seems to be of optimum value, so further ethnographic analysis would also be beneficial.

Another suggestion for further study is to explore the subject of message similarity further, building on Carbone's Theory of Stylistic Variables. While it is acknowledged that advertising effectiveness is a difficult construct to define, much less measure, it seems that both the radio industry and advertisers could find value in knowing what kind of effect commercials have when similar claims are made by different—even competing—advertisers. Several measures of effectiveness might be explored in such a study, including any possible correlation between sameness and ad avoidance, as well as the relative level of recall and consumer attitudes toward the commercials and/or the advertisers when the variable of sameness (or *convention and formula*) is manipulated.

On a larger scale, as the radio industry confronts its future and hopefully renews its focus on its greatest strength—being a local medium—it seems that the industry, listeners, advertisers, and scholars could all benefit from additional studies that explored the effectiveness of radio advertising, specifically at the local direct level and in the various dimensions previously discussed in Chapter 2. It would be especially helpful if scholarly studies were conducted that examined different message characteristics, such as the use of humor, message forms and styles, and/or message delivery techniques, all at the local direct level. Perhaps it is also time for scholars and radio professionals to explore and test new, unique, and creative forms of local direct advertising.

Conclusion

These conclusions presumably describe the current state of radio commercial creation and some of the antecedent factors that influence it. In light of the rapidly

changing media environment and increasing competition for consumers and advertisers, however, important questions remain concerning how—and if—the radio industry will respond to the imminent and growing pressures and threats. At this time, it appears that the radio industry perceives that the key to the medium’s future is in technology. For example, it appears that all industry bets are on HD Radio “coming” and satellite radio “going.” There is frankly no indication from the participants in this study, or from the industry, that any review or revision of processes or strategies related to the creation of radio advertising is necessary or advisable. The radio industry apparently does not view advertising content—or any content for that matter—as an area that needs to be evaluated. Unfortunately, as can be inferred from what was found in this study, many listeners might disagree.

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