

YOU CAN'T HANDLE THE TRUTH: IRONY IN  
ANTISMOKING ADVERTISING

an Honors Thesis submitted by

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“Irony is a disciplinarian feared only by those who do not know it, but cherished by those who do.”

Søren Kierkegaard

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

## Introduction

According to the Surgeon General, smoking is dangerous. As children in the United States, many are brought up to realize the harms of smoking and the negative effects it can have on our health. Children learn about these dangers from a variety of places: parents, teachers, and peers—even the warning labels on packages of cigarettes. At the beginning of the millennium, however, a new way of presenting this information about the dangers of smoking was established. After a historic legal victory for consumers at the turn of the century, tobacco companies were ordered to pay restitution for the years of knowing abuse that they inflicted upon the consumers who bought their products.

As stated by the National Association of Attorneys General, The Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) as it came to be known, was an agreement entered into in November 1998, originally between the four largest US tobacco companies—*Big Tobacco*—(Philip Morris, R.J. Reynolds, Brown & Williamson, and Lorillard) and the attorneys general of 46 states. The states settled their Medicaid lawsuits against the tobacco industry for recovery of their tobacco-related health care costs, and also exempted tobacco companies from private tort liability regarding harm caused by tobacco use. In exchange, *Big Tobacco* agreed to curtail or cease certain tobacco marketing practices, as well as to pay, in perpetuity, various annual payments to the states to compensate them for some of the medical costs of caring for persons with smoking-related illnesses. Along with the restitution came a fund set up by Congress and paid for with a portion of the funds from the settlement to provide an advertisement campaign targeted at youth to help prevent them from ever smoking. This campaign became known

as the truth® campaign, an Emmy award-winning, multi-media advertising campaign that uses a mixture of humor and information to help persuade the youth of the United States to not smoke.

These unorthodox means of persuasion seem to have been effective too. According to a study released in February 2005 in *The American Journal of Public Health*, researchers from Columbia University conducted a study, which examined students aged 13-17 from 1997-2002 and grouped them according to television markets to analyze the effectiveness of the truth® campaign. The study showed there was a 3.2% decline in smoking before the campaign was launched, from 1997 to 1999, compared to a 6.8% decline after the campaign launch in the years 2000 through 2002. This interesting twist (the use of humor) on the presentation of anti-smoking advertisements to teenagers was not only avant-garde for an advertising campaign against tobacco but has also opened another new avenue for using irony in the world of communication; irony as a persuasive tool in anti-smoking advertising. Perhaps most surprisingly though is the seeming effectiveness of the campaign with so few (relatively speaking) resources. The campaign spends nearly 60 million dollars a year on production and distribution, according to a February 2005 *Newsday* article. While that may seem like a substantial number it becomes nearly insignificant when compared to the amount of money that Big Tobacco still spends on advertising—a number over 10 billions dollars annually.

The truth® campaign was founded in 2000, owing its creation to a clause in the restitution that *Big Tobacco* had to pay the public for its years of known abuse through the sale of its products. In short, tobacco companies had to fund advertising designed to decrease tobacco usage. This ironic creation has spurred over 12 different campaigns in a

little over of a decade, using and discussing a variety of dangers and reasons to not use tobacco products. They have used a series of interesting approaches to help persuade teenagers to not smoke. In 2005, truth® launched a campaign called “Fair Enough” which took a new approach to advertising with a sitcom-style television campaign that featured a cast and theme music. The 2008 sub-campaign from truth® called “The Sunny Side of truth” used animation, music, Broadway-style choreography and sarcasm to illustrate the “sunny side” of smoking tobacco. These advertising campaigns have saturated nearly all media formats. In fact, according to the *American Journal of Public Health* in 2005, the campaign has been extremely effective in reaching young people; over 75% of 12-17 year-olds can accurately describe at least one truth® campaign advertisement. The official website of the campaign (thetruth.com) also states that the advertisements use actual tobacco industry documents to reveal marketing ideas in order to help limit the persuasive strategies employed by *Big Tobacco*. These novel and interesting approaches, and others like them, make the campaign worth analyzing.

*Shards O’ Glass* is a fake-business advertisement that has a CEO of a company called Shards O’ Glass telling their supposed customers that now everyone can agree that their product is not safe for anyone to use and should only be consumed by adults. The CEO of Shards O’ Glass is giving this announcement as a factory in the background is loading individual popsicles filled with glass that come out of a conveyor and into packaging. This 32-second advertisement comes to a close with text reading, “What if all companies sold products like Big Tobacco?”

The researcher purports that the use of irony is highly contextual and ironist must pay careful attention to the specific audience of her irony. To illustrate this, the study will



first begin by looking at irony as a tool of persuasion by examining all of the pertinent research in order to better locate (if it even exists) the irony present in the truth® campaign. The study will then examine the data from a pre-test study before reviewing the implications of further research in this field and the limitations present within it. Ultimately, the complexities required to ground such an assumption are beyond the scope of this study—as such, the researcher has made recommendations for future attempts to answer said claim.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

## Literature Review

To establish a base for the exploration of irony within the truth® ad campaign, it is imperative to understand both the truth® ad campaign and the predominant communication theories concerning irony. The primary focus will be *Toward a Theory of Rhetorical Irony* by Allan B. Karstetter and *Ironic Evaluations* by David S. Kaufer. These two theories offer wide interpretations of irony that allow for easy and appropriate applicability to the truth® campaign. After reading both of these works and researching supplementary materials, it is apparent that a deeper explanation and establishment of these theories is a logical precedent to the goal of this project.

In 1964, Allan B. Karstetter, an Associate Professor of Speech and Theatre at State University College in Brockport, New York realized that no true theory of rhetorical irony had ever been established in academic circles for communication theory. While some work had been done with verbal irony (noted philosopher Søren Kierkegaard did his thesis on rhetorical irony for example) there was a lack of new research. This led Karstetter to write *Toward a Theory of Rhetorical Irony* in which he says that, “irony has been used at times with great effectiveness, and that its potential as a persuasive instrument is so great that past and present neglect is inexplicable” (1963 p. 162). Perhaps one of the largest reasons that rhetorical irony has been and still is so ignored however is due to what David S. Kaufer and Christine M. Neuwirth call in their paper, *Foregrounding Norms and Ironic Communication* rhetorical irony’s ability to hide in plain site. They say that, “[verbal irony] is less direct than explicit mention in that the ironist implies but does not *say* what she or he wants foregrounded (1982 p. 30). Kaufer and Neuwirth feel this is one of the biggest reasons that the reader or listener can have

such a difficult time grasping the irony. Peter L. Hagen writes in his paper *Pure Persuasion and Verbal Irony* “There is nothing that can be said using verbal irony that cannot be said more efficiently by other means” (1995 p. 56). This is an important and especially critical element of irony when used in short-length television commercials and print advertisements where time and space limits dictate the amount of information that can be included.

Karstetter says that rhetorical irony can be conceptualized in five distinct ways; he claims that it must be (1) something said while pretending not to be saying it, (2) something said to the contrary of what is meant, (3) a form of wit, (4) framed as blame-by-praise and praise-by-blame, or (5) an indirect argument. Using these categories as a guideline, we can work under the definition of irony as: the use of messages to convey a meaning opposite of its literal meaning; while taking into account the mode of delivery, the character of the speaker, or the nature of the subject. This is important because by understanding the source of the irony, it becomes much easier to find the intended meaning instead of the stated meaning of the ironist—a pitfall many audiences face when dealing with irony. It will therefore be important in the research of this paper to understand the specific method of delivery (in this case a television advertisement) while also looking at the message itself to discover the intended meaning and the persuasion behind it.

Karstetter’s method, however, is not so simple as naming five broad categorical terms. He goes further to justify the distinct categorization of each irony type. He argues that in the first category for example, (1) “that it must be something said while pretending not to be saying it,” is really an ancient trick of the orator. He quotes the *Rhetorica ad*

*Alexandrum* when it says, “If they are actually well disposed towards us it is superfluous to talk about goodwill... rather it should be presented under the guise of *negatio* [irony]”. This was seen as the most effective way of persuading an audience who *already* agrees with either what is being said or who is saying it. For example, in the film *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Michael Moore approaches members of Congress telling them that he agrees with them that the war in Afghanistan is important and that we need more soldiers. He then presents them with a clipboard urging the congressmen to sign their children up to fight and to fulfill the need for more soldiers. While Michael Moore seems to be agreeing with the views of the Congressmen about the war in Afghanistan, his intended meaning is to show his disagreement about the United States going to war. This is what Karstetter means when he talks about pretending to say something without really saying it. According to Karstetter, this first category is about having someone who is “in on the irony” (the audience of the film in this case) and then someone who is not “in on the irony” (in this case the Congressmen being approached by Moore).

Irony can also be an entertaining way of making a point. One can look to the second category according to Karstetter to see this: (2) something said to the contrary of what is meant. He says that the device can be illustrated for example by saying, “These noble citizens have clearly done great harm to their allies, while we worthless mortals have obviously been the cause of many benefits to them” Karstetter explains this is all just an elementary linguistic trick to say “noble” when clearly “un-noble” is meant, but the trick has been and remains common. This can be an entertaining way of critiquing something when communicating to an audience who agrees with what is being said too. Cicero cautioned this approach though, saying, “it [irony] has a very great influence on

the minds of the audience, and is extremely entertaining if carried on in a conversational and *not* a declamatory tone.” (De Orator III p. 203) So in order to be an entertaining way to effectively persuade, as Cicero would argue, then there must be a conversational tone and anyone using ironic communication needs to be aware of this. In other words, the key is *subtlety*. Otherwise, it could cause the use of irony (and the perceived ability to persuade) to backfire. This will be a critical element of the examination in the truth® ad campaign because how the campaign handles this facet of ironic persuasion will in many ways determine its use as a persuasive tool. While quite similar in nature to his first category, the difference between this category and Karstetter’s first lie mainly in the purview of context.

Karstetter also points out that many times irony uses a (3) form of wit to help make its point. This may not just be an effective way of communicating an idea, but according to Adrienne E. Christiansen and Jeremy J. Hanson in their paper *Comedy As Cure For Tragedy: Act Up and The Rhetoric of AIDS* they argue it is a *better* way to communicate. They write, “when individuals or groups act in the comic frame [using a form of wit], they commit themselves to an approach that runs counter to the prevailing tragic impulse in Western society... the comic frame humorously points out failings in the status quo and urges society to correct them through thoughtful action rather than tragic victimage” (1996 p.161). For example, Christiansen and Hanson studied how an activist group called Act Up was able to effectively bring awareness of how people with AIDS were being treated in the 1980s, using this type of discourse. They cite an example of a demonstration by the group that took place in front of a hospital in Los Angeles where “models” in a fashion show modeled how to wear AIDS evening wear—hospital

gowns—as “an outfit that they could take with them.” This was done to highlight the problem of homelessness that AIDS patients were experiencing at the time (1996 p. 163). While this may be an extremely specific example, it does underline the usefulness of wit for a communicator and shows that ironic discourse can benefit from using wit to be a persuasive tool.

One of the other interesting categories Karstetter lays out for irony is the idea of (4) blame-by-praise and praise-by-blame. He lays this out by looking at the two different strategies (praising something for what it *isn't* and blaming the reprehensible for what it *is*) but shows how they essentially do the same thing: communicate in a way that is not expected. For example, a political commentator may mention, “I love that the president’s lack of substance makes note taking easy.” This is a clear example of praising something for what it *isn't*. Karstetter also notes though, that praising something that is reprehensible for what it *is* can also be effective. The same political commentator for example, might mention how he/she thinks that, “If Obama would just follow through on those death panel rumors, at least unemployment numbers would shrink.” These distinctions within irony are important because in order for it to work, for the entertainment value to be there, for the persuasion to exist—the audience *must* be taken off guard. After all, it is difficult to tell a joke when the audience already knows the punch line. This surprise in communication is at the center of ironic discourse and necessary to its success as a persuasive tool.

Finally, according to Karstetter, irony must be in some form used as an (5) indirect argument to be effective. This is different from saying something while pretending not to be saying it though, because here the entire audience of the ironist can

be “in on” the message which is directed at an outside source (villain). He says that, “In indirect argument, [a reasoner] often masks his purpose in order to more surely prove the falsity of his opponent’s arguments” (1964 p. 169). For example, an advertisement on a college campus discouraging the act of binge drinking may post ads saying, “Binge drinking is no big deal, you can always get a liver transplant.” This is the most dangerous part of using irony as a persuasive tool though. The danger comes when the audience perceives only the wit and not the wisdom of what the rhetorician is trying to say.

Karstetter makes it clear that irony is not for every audience or for every communicator. This is an important facet that the application of Karstetter’s theory to the truth® ad campaign must address to see if using irony really is a persuasive tool for the campaign. An answer to the question of whether or not the messages inside the truth® campaign target an audience able to perceive the indirect arguments the campaign is attempting to make, will need to be found.

It is also important to address the impact that Kaufer has had to the development of irony and its use as a persuasive tool of communication. He extends two primary points of analysis in his paper, *Ironic Evaluations* in which he writes, “While it is true that the ironist may not be serious about what is literally said and even creates humor in saying it, it is also true that s/he is serious about conveying a negative evaluation from the literal judgment” (1981 p. 25). This literal judgment is a reoccurring theme in most of the literature about irony. As James E. Ettema and Theodore L. Glasser write in their paper *When the Facts Don’t Speak for Themselves: a Study of the Use of Irony in Daily Journalism* “as a device of rhetoric, irony underscores the duality of language by... contradicting the obvious or common-sense reading of the text. Irony confounds the



appearance of language by inviting readers to ‘read between the lines’” (1993 p. 324).

This duality of language is a critical component of irony and must be understood for irony’s use as a persuasive tool to be effective. To make the point, suppose an individual makes a comment to his friend that, “it’s a beautiful day outside” when it is clearly storming. It is known that the ironist is not serious about what is being said, but serious in criticizing the literal judgment. James Gough and Christopher W. Tindale go even further in their paper *The Use of Irony in Argumentation* noting that, “the ironist’s audience... is bifurcated into two distinct audiences according to its association with either the literal or ironic meaning” (1987 pp. 2-3). Unfortunately when using irony, the end result many times may be having one group of people that understand the *intended* meaning of the ironist and another group who can only see the *stated* meaning.

Which brings Kaufer to his second main point that, “there is a common tendency to misunderstand exactly what the ironist is negatively evaluating” (1981 p. 25). This idea is echoed by Stanley Fish In his paper, *Reading Irony*, where he notes that “they [ironic messages] are all *covert*, intended to be reconstructed with meanings different from those on the surface.” This ability for ironic messages to be reconstructed can lead to easy misinterpretations of what the ironist is trying to say. The important question to ask then is why use irony at all if it will increase the chance for misinterpretation? Ettema and Glasser argue that “irony is an aggressively intellectual exercise that fuses fact and value, requiring us to construct alternative hierarchies and choose among them” (1993 p. 324). While irony may be a barrier for communication on some level (if managed poorly by the communicator or *listener* for that matter) it can still serve to better direct readers to a preferred or intended understanding of communication which can allow the persuasion

through irony, to be better developed. As Adrienne E. Christiansen and Jeremy J. Hanson note in their paper *Comedy A Cure For Tragedy: Act Up and The Rhetoric of AIDS*, the ability of members in the activist group Act Up to use *irony* allowed them to “play the clown to prod the audience into consciousness and to raise awareness that gay men were citizens who deserved compassion and medical attention” (1996 p. 163). Without irony, the ability for Act Up to make a difference in the homosexual community would have been less effective because it would have been more difficult for the audience to see the intended message of Act Up. It will therefore be critically important in the inspection of the truth® campaign to see if the messages created harm in the audience’s understanding of the intended meaning.

Now while Karstetter and Kaufer are the main sources the research of this project will primarily draw from, it is also critical to develop an understanding of irony, in the rhetorical sense, at a deeper level. As with any persuasive message, the speaker needs to understand and know his/her audience in order to best communicate a message. After all, a lecture on the importance of quantum mechanics within the field of physics is probably not best given to group of kindergartners. It is thus appropriate to look at research by Melanie Glenwright on how children perceive and process irony. In their research, *An Acquired Taste: Children’s Perceptions of Humor and Teasing in Verbal Irony*, they point out that “children tended to identify with the target, not the speaker, of ironic remarks and perceived less humor in irony when they did so” (2005 p. 259). While this may seem like common sense, what Glenwright discovered was that irony is perceived *differently* depending on the age of the listener. In their research they also uncovered that children did not use relationship information (speaker and target were friends, strangers,

or enemies, etc) as a cue to the speaker's humorous intent, writing, "we suggest that these characteristics of children's [knowledge] of verbal irony are a function of their social knowledge and representational skills" (2005 p.260). Basically saying, that what an adult may perceive from an ironic message will not necessarily be the same for a child and vice-versa. Or to state it again: just as with any persuasive message, *irony* must also take into account the audience for which it is being presented.

A lot of this boils down to what could be belief-desire reasoning: that is, in order to understand ironic remarks the listener must infer the speaker's beliefs and intentions about his or her remark. Winner and Leekam contend that these beliefs are two-tiered in nature, that there are first-order beliefs (what the speaker believes) and second-order beliefs and intentions (what the speaker intends the listener to infer about the statement) (2002, p. 171). Comprehension of these beliefs then and the irony that entwines these beliefs together is a critical component of verbal irony.

While irony may indeed be based upon belief-desire reasoning it does not explain how irony is processed. That is, how does the listener come to perceive a statement as ironic? According to Stacey L. Ivanko and Penny M. Pexman in their theory *Context Incongruity and Irony Processing*, "[on the] notion of contrast in verbal irony comprehension [must] suggest that the perception of verbal irony and appreciation of its pragmatic functions are subject to contrast effects" (2003, p. 241). They use a hypothetical situation to help make the point:

Imagine the following situation: Joe has agreed to give John a ride to school. Joe is 1hr late to pick John up and apologizes. John says, "you are so punctual." Is this statement ironic? Probably, but the interpretation of John's intent in making the statement might be easier if there had been even stronger

incongruity between the events and the literal meaning of John's statement. For instance, if Joe had never arrived to pick up John and had never apologized, then the event could be perceived as even more negative, and would have contrasted more sharply with the positive literal meaning of the statement.

What Ivanko and Pexman have tried to demonstrate is that the *degree* of contrast within a statement can not only deliver the irony of the statement more quickly to the listener, but also much more correctly (in that the listener "gets" the irony) as well. For example, if it is raining outside and the ironist notes, "What a nice day," it may not be seen as ironic when compared to a statement like, "Wow! It is a gorgeous day outside, today!" when observing the same conditions.

Research about the degree of contrast within ironic statements tells us a lot about how irony is actually processed. As Ivanko and Pexman noted in their findings, "when there was a high degree of difference between the strong and weak version of statements, the speakers of strongly ironic statements were rated to be more condemning, more humorous, and more self-protecting than the speakers of weakly ironic statements" (2003, p. 243). Essentially, the listener can better receive and understand the irony when presented with a high degree of contrast. This reaction goes beyond the audience's take on the ironist; it changes the perception of the message too. In fact, Ivanko and Pexman claim, "a strongly positive statement (the biasing information) presented in a negative situation can make the situation (the target) appear more negative" (2003, p. 244). This means that an effective ironist would do well to pay special attention to deliver the most positive statement possible about a particularly negative situation because it could show that particular situation to be even worse than perhaps it is.

Another essential consideration when analyzing an audience is gender. As Herbert L. Colston and Sabrina Y. Lee write in their paper, *Gender Differences in Verbal Irony Use*, "gender has been found to predict, albeit not always without controversy, some differences

in more general language use such as males' and females' verbal skills and communicative styles” (2004, p. 290). Building upon these generalizations, Colston and Lee decided to apply them to ironic messages and see what could be deduced. They set up a study whereby written scenarios of speakers with indeterminate gender would make ironic statements and then ask both males and females to judge whether the hypothetical speaker was indeed male or female. Overwhelmingly, both males and females attributed the ironic statements to have been made by men. The reason according to Colston and Lee is that, “the results revealed support for an explanation based on a match between the generally greater riskiness of males over females” (2004, p. 288). That is, making ironic statements is seen as a risky endeavor and men will more likely take on such endeavors, in general, than women.

Surprisingly, it is not those who use verbal irony the most that first come to realize its use by someone else. When it comes to discerning an indirect statement (like irony) it is women that are more likely to uncover any hidden statements before men (2004, p. 292). Therefore, how a gender feels about the use of irony may determine how a particular gender is likely to *receive* ironic statements. Colston and Lee hasten to add in their research, that their study did not show that women are not as effective when using verbal irony but rather that men are much more likely to use verbal irony in a situation (for various reasons, mostly to do with cultural norms and expression.)

Understanding gender differences is crucial when either delivering or receiving an ironic message. Colston and Lee write that, “verbal irony reliably allows a speaker to enhance the condemnation expressed toward some target person or topic” (2004, p. 291). In their study they found that, all else being equal, males might more often seek to enhance their condemnation of such a target. Thus, men might be more apt to use verbal irony in their talk because its performance of this function better fits their particular discourse goals (2004, p. 295). Essentially, men are more likely to be condemning in their rhetoric than women and verbal irony can be a very sharp rhetorical weapon in the right “hands.” The role that gender can play within irony and also how that irony can be understood differently

should not be underestimated and is important then, when crafting ironic messages.

Another fundamental area of irony is the motivation for ironic production. Why is it that individuals choose to respond to situations with verbal irony? In order to understand this foundational aspect of irony, it is helpful to examine Joshua M. Averbek & Dale Hample's paper, *Ironic Message Production: How and Why We Produce Ironic Messages*. The first proposition that Averbek and Hample make is that, "ironic messages are used in situations where there is high rather than low common ground between sender and receiver" (2008, p. 397). The thought behind this is that using rhetorical devices like verbal irony can help create common ground. While irony can take the form of sarcasm and antagonize, it need not. In fact, by focusing on an issue rather than an individual it can diffuse a situation. There is one caveat to this idea however, as Averbek and Hample note, "ironic messages can still be indirectly aggressive and will tend to be endorsed by verbally aggressive individuals" (2008, p. 399). Since verbal irony can technically be used either to incite or diffuse a situation, understanding the motivations behind the ironist aids in proper ironic interpretation.

Moreover, ironic messages will also generally tend to be used by those who favor argumentation (2008, p. 400). It is elementary to say, but the more argumentative individuals will be the ones more likely to argue with others. That being said, while verbal irony is a form of *indirect* argument, it is an argument nonetheless. According to Averbek and Hample, those most predisposed to argue will also be more likely to use irony in their rhetoric (2008 p. 401). So just like any other linguistic tool, irony can be used for a variety of reasons most of which come down to the motivations of the rhetor. Conventional understanding though, states that ironic messages usually fulfill some specific role for which literal messages fail. According to Averbek and Hample's research, irony will mainly be used by those wishing to diffuse a situation or in some cases, start an argument.

It is also helpful to understand why it is that verbal irony can be such a persuasive rhetorical tool. Joshua M. Averbek tackles this issue by stating he believes it has to do with

an expectancy violation. For example, if one asked where the soccer game was being played and someone responded by saying, “I’m not sure, but obviously it couldn’t be at the *soccer* field.” This is expectancy violation. Instead of getting the direct answer to the direct question expected, an indirect (ironic) answer is given. As Averbek writes in his paper, *Irony and Language Expectancy Theory: Evaluations of Expectancy Violation Outcomes*, “it is generally expected that when one is direct with requests, the intent of the message [should be] fairly transparent so that it does not require the receiver to untangle a counter-attitudinal message in order to understand the sender’s intent” (2010, p. 357). In simplest terms, ironic messages are generally unexpected and catch the listener off guard—sometimes causing them to sit up and pay more attention than they normally would have. As Clark and Gerrig write, “an ironic message is counter-attitudinal because it embodies a facetious display of an attitude (2007, p. 171). The question still arises though, why not just be direct? Being ironic may be a face-saving technique. Averbek comments that, “specifically, an ironic criticism softens the blow of a negative reaction by highlighting the normatively appropriate attitude instead of the actor and, thereby, alleviating any direct face threats to the target” (2010, p. 358).

Common ground is another essential element that gives irony its persuasive ability. As Averbek argues, “the common ground shared between the speaker and the hearer is a necessary component of irony” (2010, p. 360). If the expectation of what is *supposed* to have been said is unknown then any persuasion in the ironic message is lost. Imagine you are creating an ironic statement about President Nixon and his famous quote, “I’m not a crook!” If you were to say, “Yep, what an honest guy” and the person you are speaking to has no reference (expectation) of Nixon’s scheming reputation then the ironic statement would fall flat. This is why common ground is so important in ironic rhetoric. The ironist in examining his/her audience must ensure that the rhetoric has enough common themes to be able to resonate with the audience; otherwise they simply will just not “get it.”

Finally, Averbek raises the point that it may be the *tone* used by the rhetor that

determines if the listener perceives any irony (2010, p. 361). As Bryant and Fox Tree note in their research, while it is not critical that any paralinguistic qualities are present within an ironic statement, it can be helpful to the listener (2005, p. 59). The point here is that irony is a complex and nuanced rhetorical tool. After their work in 2005 on tonal context within irony, they followed their research up with, *Is There an Ironic Tone of Voice*, in which they conclude, “[while] there is no particular ironic tone of voice... listeners interpret verbal irony by combining a variety of cues including information outside of the linguistic context” (2007, p. 257). This is important for two reasons: the first is that *other* aspects of communication can play a role in the development of irony, but second, other factors can also affect how that irony is *received*. To make the point, suppose you lean over and speak to your friend sitting in the passenger seat as you go down the road about your cellular coverage. Now suppose you mention how great your mobile service is as you realize you have just dropped a call; while that may be enough to trigger the irony to be seen by the listener, it could also be because you *threw* your phone down in frustration at the dropped call—information clearly out of the linguistic context. Bryant and Fox Tree call this, “layering propositional and non-propositional information together” (2007, p. 272). Combining the linguistic context of the irony along with other items present in the environment (like the physical action of throwing a phone) can enhance the irony or at least make the irony more readily noticeable to the listener.

This brings us to the next question in regards to irony; what is its predominant trait? In other words, looking outside of the broad and useful tenets that Karstetter has laid out, what are the essential characteristics of irony in the *pragmatic* sense? Why use it? Many theorists have generally agreed on two things about this rhetorical tool, first, nothing is ever *said* in irony, and second, irony is generally a tool for *criticism*. The first point is quite simple, as irony by definition delivers two different messages: the literal and *actual*. The ironic statement is always what is implied not what is directly stated. So therefore, irony must contain a duality in its use, while always keeping the actual message from being



literally said. Irony is also quite critical though, as Joana Garmendia writes in her paper, *Irony is Critical*, “the attitude expressed by an ironical utterance is invariably of the rejecting or disapproving kind. The speaker dissociates herself from the opinion echoed and indicates that she does not hold it herself” (2010, p. 401). Simply enough, irony is useful for criticizing something without *literally* criticizing the object of the rhetor. This may seem like a step backward in the analysis of irony but it needs to be noted. Anyone who is attempting to use irony should make sure that the ‘tool fits the project.’ It also is important for the researcher to see the value of irony *in* criticism. For example, when looking for irony within criticism it is important to understand what to look for within the criticism, as Garmendia states, “[in] most cases of irony, the speaker exhibits a positive attitude to express a negative one” (2010, p. 399). This goes back to Averbeck’s view that irony is a face-saving technique of the rhetor—it is difficult to ‘save face’ when negativity is the defining trait of the rhetorical device. Still, irony *is* intended to show negativity about a given situation—it will just be presented in a positive way to create the best possible environment for the criticism to be observed by the listener. In short, understanding the *reasons* why irony generally takes the forms it does is just as important as recognizing the traits and styles of the rhetorical mechanism itself.

Irony does not lie *just* in the purview of communication research either. Recently, irony has become a subject of interest to many psychologists as they look at how the rhetorical device is processed within various age groups. In 2000, Roger J. Kreuz, from the University of Memphis published the paper, *The Production and Processing of Verbal Irony*, in which he examined, “the topic of verbal irony from these perspectives: adult comprehension and production, child comprehension, and neuropsychological underpinnings” (2000, p. 99). In his research he tries to synthesize a lot of the research that had come before him, namely, the distinct studies of ironic comprehension and ironic production. He states,

“So instead of checking to see whether a statement is literally true, listeners are engaged in a very different task, specifically, *why did the speaker say what he or she did?* In other words, the job of the listener is to recover the discourse goals of the speaker and not to identify some rhetorical label like irony or understatement” (2000, p. 104).

Kreuz argues effectively that much of the comprehension within irony that the listener finds is a *direct result* of uncovering the ways in which the production of that irony came about. In other words, you can more easily “get” the irony if you know where the speaker is “coming from” when the irony is verbalized. As Kevin McDonald states, “simply appreciating that a statement is counterfactual is not enough; a person with brain injury may be able to appreciate this discrepancy, but not to understand why such a statement has been made” (2000, p. 49). While Kreuz feels he is on the right track, he hastens to add that, “many aspects of verbal irony remain understudied. Irony comprehension has been much more thoroughly investigated than irony production, and variables such as personality and culture remain largely unaddressed” (2000, p. 105). The point here is that any theory of irony is only a partial one and that there continues to be a need to complete further research and analysis within this fascinating area of rhetoric and psychology.

Using this research as a foundation, it is now appropriate to begin to explore the truth® campaign and the empirical study presented in this paper; in order to discover what can be learned from how adults see and process an ironic message that was initially created for an audience of children and teenagers.

## Chapter 3 – Methodology

## **Methodology**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this pre-study is to determine how adults view an advertisement that was originally designed for children aged 12-17 years and determine the appropriate methodology to use for a full-scale study. This will be viewed in three parts: a quantitative study, a qualitative study, and finally a textual analysis. Without a three-pronged approach such as this, the ability for an accurate dataset becomes infinitely more limited.

### **Quantitative Study**

Students participated in a survey—anonously—designed to determine their perceptions of the truth® campaign advertisement shown to them. The questions were designed to measure at first their demographics, then their knowledge of the campaign and advertisement, before finally determining their opinions of the advertisement itself. This was accomplished through a total of 17 questions—all designed on a structured five-point scale moving from Strongly Disagree to Strong Agree—and two additional qualitative prompts. The qualitative prompts allowed for a deeper insight into participant's views about the advertisement and helped spark other venues into which further examination of the data could occur and supplement the quantitative sections of the survey.

This study used 79 college students of various ages from classrooms at Carson-Newman College and Walters State Community College. The reason for surveying two distinct colleges was to expand the demographics and also hopefully eliminate any pre-conceived biases by the data sample.

The physical make-up of the demographic found within the study represents mostly young adults aged 18-21 (67 students), who fall under the classification of either freshman (25 students) or sophomore (42 students)—all enrolled at colleges in rural, eastern-Tennessee. While the demographic within the study is made up of young adults classified as lowerclassmen, the gender make-up is much more evenly split. Males represent 41.77% of the study's participants (33 students) while 58.23% of the study is made up of female students (46 students). The classes chosen for the study at each college were all communication classes (chosen because of convenience and accessibility), yet there is nothing to indicate this choice had an effect on the study's outcome other than they were generally lower-tier classes were one would expect to find freshman and sophomores in a higher density.

The psychographics of the participants are also an important component of how the study's results ended up emerging. There was not one participant that responded as strongly agreeing with the label of being a 'heavy smoker.' In fact, most participants strongly disagreed with the statement that they were a 'heavy smoker' (68/79 students). The behavioral make-up of the participants also indicates that many participants had previous knowledge of both the truth® campaign and the *Shards O' Glass* advertisement itself with over 80% responding to being familiar with the campaign and nearly 60% having seen the advertisement before.

The materials used in the research of this project consisted of the survey and the advertisement itself—both of which can be found in the Appendix—which was shown to the classrooms that participated in the survey. The campaign advertisement used from the truth® campaign is a 2004 advertisement called, *Shards O' Glass*. The advertisement

details the account of a fictional business' Public Service Announcement trying to show the risks of using its product: popsicles infused with shards of glass. The advertisement is designed to draw ironic parallels to tobacco company products and their detrimental effects.

The survey was developed using a Likert Scale model as a foundation, utilizing the traditional five-point scale. This data was then collected into a comprehensive excel spreadsheet and used as the basis of the various statistical tests that were run on the data including Welch 2-Sample t-tests and Wilcoxon Rank Sum tests. This was done to get not only the most out of the raw data as possible but also to ensure a measure of accuracy within the various tests.

The way in which the questions were classified and asked must also be explained. The survey consisted of 17 quantitative questions, which were categorized which lead to the creation of three variables: effectiveness of commercial (eff), projections for the commercial (pro), and familiarity with the advertisement (fam). In each case the variables are determined based on an average from the questions in the survey. The reason for this is to not only get more useful and appropriate data, but also diminish the chance of outliers or statistical anomalies disrupting the accuracy of the results. Since the age of all the participants was over 18, the remaining demographic data (namely gender and whether one was a smoker or not) was then applied to the various variables created from the survey.

The way the variables were broken down was to take similar questions or questions about the same part of the subject matter and group those questions together. For example, question 5 on the survey asks the questions, "I am familiar with the truth

campaign,” while question 6, asks the question, “I had already seen this advertisement before.” Clearly both of these questions are enquiring about the viewer’s familiarity with the advertisement—therefore they were grouped together in the variable “fam.” This type of systematic grouping was used for all of the questions in the survey.

While the “fam” variable was formed by questions 5 and 6, the “eff” variable was created by survey questions 7, 8, 10, 11, 15 and 17. To see how this would work, question number 7 asks, “This advertisement made me question my smoking practices.” Survey question 10 then asks, “I am more apt to refrain from smoking after seeing this advertisement.” Finally, after other attempts to gauge the effectiveness of the advertisement on the participant, questions 17 asks rather succinctly, “This advertisement is persuasive.” It was combining all of these survey questions together which allowed for the “eff” variable to be created.

Finally, the “pro” variable was made from questions 9, 12, 13, 14 and 16. These questions were asked in order to judge the projections of the advertisement to the participant—that is, what they thought about the advertisement itself. This was accomplished by asking questions such as number 12, which states, “I enjoyed the style of this advertisement.” To further see how this variable was derived the next question asks the participant, “I am interested in seeing other advertisements in this campaign.” By asking questions related to the advertisement’s style and delivery, one is able to draw inferences and create the “pro” variable.

The process in which the advertisement was distributed to the various participants in the classes also directly relates to how the data was collected for the study. In every class in which the survey was distributed there was first an announcement by the

professor who indicated that a survey was to be conducted in the class for a student's research product. It was then that the surveyor showed the truth® campaign clip, *Shards O' Glass*, to the entire class. Once the video had ended, instructions were given to the classes to fill the survey out based upon what had just been seen in the classroom and to hand it back to the surveyor.

### **Qualitative Study**

This type of pre-study was designed to take advantage of the data that could be gained from a more focus-group-centered style of approach to the advertisement. The qualitative elements of the study came from the participant-observer element inside of the quantitative instrument (the ability to watch participants as they viewed the advertisement and made written responses), answers to the qualitative responses at the end of the instrument, as well as the talkback that was gained from certain students after the completion of the survey.

All of this qualitative data allows for the creation of design parameters that will help to uncover the demographics that would be most helpful to base future studies around, including potential questions most important to ask those groups, as well as some categorical responses to expect and use for further analysis.

### **Textual Analysis**

The purpose of this analysis is to uncover whether or not the presence of irony exists in *Shards O' Glass*. In order to discover if there is irony in the advertisement itself, Allan Karstetter's five tenets of what he says irony must be made up of (at least in part) will be applied to the advertisement. Once the application of Karstetter is complete (which can be found in the next chapter), it will then be important to not only look at the



limitations of the text to a general audience, but also its relationship to the quantitative and qualitative studies.

Chapter 4 – Application of Karstetter

While a complete breakdown of the advertisement appears in the appendix, it is important before applying Karstetter that a brief explanation of the *Shards O' Glass* advertisement from the truth® campaign be given. The advertisement starts with the CEO of Shards O' Glass giving a public service announcement inside one of its factories that produces the sharp-edged popsicle. The CEO goes on to describe where the company stands on important glass freeze-pop issues, stating that, "we can now agree that there is no such thing as a safe glass freeze-pop." As this faux public service announcement continues, it remarks to the audience that the only way to reduce your health risk from the glass pops is to, "not eat them." There is then a website put behind a blank background which gives the website address shardsoglass.com before the CEO finally comes back into view and states that, "and remember, Shards O' Glass freeze-pops are for adults only." At the very end of the advertisement, text appears on the screen, which asks the question, "What if all companies sold their products like Big Tobacco?"

Karstetter believes that while an instance of irony does not have to showcase all of his categories, it does need to fall in at least *one* of these five distinct areas to be considered irony at all. With that in mind, *Shards O' Glass* ends up fitting into four of the five categories of Karstetter which will be discussed below.

The first category regarding irony which Karstetter lays out, (1) that it must be something said while pretending not to say it—is indeed present in the *Shards O' Glass* advertisement. At first glance, it may seem that the truth® campaign's advertisement is *not* pretending about anything—there seems to be a pretty clear connection to smoking. After all, does it not state (quite clearly) that it wonders what would happen if all companies sold their products like *Big Tobacco*? The reason why *Shards O' Glass* can

still fit under the first category of Karstetter is that the intended meaning is hidden from the audience the entire time. For example, while the link to the advertisement itself and *Big Tobacco* is an overt one, there is a *hidden* connection between glass freeze-pops and cigarettes. In fact, the words ‘smoking’ and ‘cigarettes’ are never spoken or seen by the audience at all during the advertisement. It is important to remember too, that the entire purpose of truth’s® campaign was to prevent children and teenagers from smoking (or to stop them if they were). To have an advertisement that never mentions or makes a connection to the *main purpose* of having that advertisement is more than just interesting—it fits into Karstetter’s first category of irony quite nicely. *Shards O’ Glass* plays as being an advertisement criticizing the marketing practices of *Big Tobacco* and while that may be one true claim about the advertisement, it also has a hidden meaning trying to equate popsicles filled with glass to cigarettes.

The second category of Karstetter (2) something said to the contrary of what is meant is also seen in *Shards O’ Glass*. This particular category is the most readily apparent within the truth® campaign advertisement. The CEO’s comments about glass freeze pops and the company’s stance towards them is actually speaking about the viewpoint that *Big Tobacco* has taken toward the health concerns of its own (real) products. The advertisement is saying one thing (talking about popsicles) but the underlying intention behind it all is to connect the ridiculousness of glass freeze pops to cigarettes and smoking—the true meaning of the statement. This become an *opposite* statement (relative to the true meaning) when the advertisement portrays Shards O’ Glass having addressed and completely taken care of the health issues in glass freeze pops. The problem is, of course, that just *addressing* an issue does not solve the danger of the

continuing sale of a product (like cigarettes)—the statement trying to be made by the truth® advertisement. The text at the end of campaign also signifies this type of irony that Karstetter talks about. The question asking what if all companies sold their products like *Big Tobacco* never states—but certainly implies—that the just-seen advertisement is like *Big Tobacco* advertising, but it is! On the surface, the text can be taken as a generality about product advertisement, but the true meaning behind the text is related directly to what was just seen in the advertisement.

The third category that Karstetter outlines for irony is one that is more subjective in nature to discern, (3) a form of wit. To be reasonable, this category of irony is represented in *Shards O' Glass* but not because it *seems* funny to an audience. Instead, it is more appropriate to associate the wittiness of the advertisement to the creativity it took to talk about smoking in a refreshing and different way—something that can stand out to an audience. In other words, what makes *Shards O' Glass* witty is the fact that it went in an original direction to talk about smoking and *Big Tobacco* like nothing before it had. For example, one of the most humorous examples of wit occurs when the popsicles are being checked for “product safety” and the very attentive personnel pass *every* glass-infused popsicle that comes through. This scene in the advertisement provides a subtle point about what it means to say that a product is “safe.” It is also important to point out that this particular truth® advertisement uses various visual and audio devices—like close up shots and background noises.

While the fourth category of Karstetter is not present, the fifth and final category Karstetter says irony can fall under is; (5) indirect argument. Throughout the entire advertisement this type of irony is found in abundance. In fact, this category is

represented by the title of the advertisement itself, *Shards O' Glass*—a play on words which is derived from the pervasive myth that pieces of fiberglass can be found in cans of smokeless tobacco. In the advertisement though, indirect argument first begins in the background of the advertisement itself, with the visual of seeing popsicles on conveyor belts that have glass sticking out of them. The indirect argument here is that cigarettes are basically just as harmful to your health as swallowing glass—even if it is not as apparently so. The next indirect argument to be made in the advertisement is the remarks from the CEO himself when he states, “and remember, Shards O' Glass freeze-pops are for adults only.” The indirect argument here is that if these popsicles were dangerous for the individuals the product is tailored to (adults) then why would it be good for anyone else (like teenagers)? It could also be an indirect argument against *Big Tobacco* for how they market cigarettes in general. *Big Tobacco*, by using the whole “for adults only” gimmick ends up creating a thirst in children—after all what do children want more but what they cannot (or are not supposed to) have? Finally, the last indirect argument made in the advertisement is the text at the end. The indirect argument here is that it would be a dangerous world if all companies sold their products in the scheming and dirty way of *Big Tobacco*.

Having applied Karstetter to the *Shards O' Glass* advertisement by truth® and established that irony is present—even if it is not represented in all of the categories—we can now move on to studying the results of the three-pronged approach to determining adult perceptions of an anti-smoking advertisement originally intended for teenage audiences.

Chapter 5 – Results

## Results

The results of the potential successes and pitfalls from the pre-study are listed below with a description of the findings, and when applicable, the limitations of each type of pre-study or analysis.

### Quantitative Study

The results of the study indicate that by and large there is no statistical significance that any age group, gender, or classification of adults had an impact on the likelihood of someone either feeling different about tobacco or wanting to stop smoking entirely after watching *Shards O' Glass*. But while the data showed no significance about any persuasion effectively leading the study group to stop smoking, the data is still nonetheless quite revealing and says a lot about the nature of the advertising itself, the nature of smokers, and the ages involved within the study. In short, the truth® campaign knew what it was doing by deciding to focus their efforts on teenagers instead of adults.

The nature of the advertising itself may have been one of the largest reasons why no statistically significant amount of persuasion was found within the study. The elements of the truth® campaign, specifically the *Shard O' Glass* sub-campaign, just simply may not have been as pertinent to adults. For example, the advertisement urges the viewer to visit the website [shardsoglass.com](http://shardsoglass.com) for more information. It would seem more likely that a more “plugged in” generation of young people who have more of their lives centered around technology would access the extra materials more readily than less technologically inclined adults. This is not to say that there are not exceptions, or even a large number of them—after all this study was conducted with many between the ages of



20 and 25—but this factor taken in conjunction with other aspects, like the nature of smokers and age, may make it less enticing as a persuasive strategy for adults.

This leads us to the very important element about the nature of smokers, themselves. By deciding whether to smoke (which can be deduced by the act itself) an individual has in many ways made a cognitive and (assumably reasoned) choice on the matter. In other words, one's mind has been made up. When you take into consideration how *adults* will view an anti-smoking advertising campaign with cognitive processes that have *already* determined how they feel about that particular subject it can take much more to influence them. The nature of the advertisement itself reflects this lack motivation by the viewer too. For example, when the text appears on the screen and asks viewers to access a website address at the end of the advertisement, it was not uncommon to get responses like one participant in the survey who put it, “why do I need to visit the website?”

Perhaps the most critical of the elements regarding why there was no statistical difference in adults after watching *Shards O' Glass* is the nature of age as it relates to smoking. This can perhaps best be seen in illustration: marketers more than anything else clamor for the attention and want to understand people ages 18-25. The reasons for this is that they are just beginning to develop their buying habits and if a company can “hook” someone in this age range they with all likelihood will have them for life. So when you are dealing with smoking and the perceptions of it, most people have already made up their minds before ever hitting college-age. This means two specific things: the first is that for anyone who is wishing to persuade someone to not smoke—it is best done from an early age. The second implication regarding the nature of age is that someone who is

already college aged—an adult—will be less likely to change his or her mind regarding the use of tobacco products. Clearly, age can and given the results of the study does have an impact on how people view an advertisement about smoking.

### **Limitations**

The results are not concrete however, as this study was not without its limitations. Perhaps the most glaringly obvious ones were geographic location, a limited sample size, the fact that only one commercial was used in the study, and that all participants were not volunteers. The study was made up of 78 college-aged students from both a private, liberal arts college and a community college in eastern Tennessee. The fact is that eastern Tennessee is a more tobacco-centered area of the country. It is not just a more commonly exercised habit but also a source of income and livelihood for many in the region. This leads to the possibility that the results could have been “tainted” by even stronger pre-existing notions when it came to smoking and tobacco products. As one survey respondent noted when asked what they disliked about the advertisement, “I make my money growing tobacco!” It seems clear that the geographic location may have had an impact on the results of the study.

The sample size of the study could have also led to inconclusive results. By taking such a small sample of college-aged students it would be wrong to draw overreaching conclusions about adults in general and how they would and do view anti-smoking advertisements like *Shards O’ Glass*. Beyond the literal number of participants the study was also limited by a lack of diversity; there was not one student who responded as strongly agreeing with the label of being a ‘heavy smoker.’ The results could have been more meaningful had there been more of a *balance* within the demographic of the study.

It is possible that with a larger sample size the t-tests that were run would be a different, more accurate reflection of the true population. This corresponds with one of the founding principles in statistics which states, the larger the value of  $n$  (sample size) the nearer the results will be to the actual population.

Perhaps one of the largest weaknesses of this study is that only one commercial was used to gauge audience reactions to irony in anti-smoking advertising. This makes it difficult to draw any over-arching conclusions about how an anti-smoking advertisement with irony can influence adult perceptions of tobacco. After all, to say that just one advertisement could radically change someone's perception is unlikely. It is possible though, that by increasing the exposure to more truth® campaign advertisements (that contain irony) that viewers could be more accurately judged as to how the advertisement affected them. This is especially important when one considers that a large number of the participants had already seen the advertisement—or at least been exposed to the campaign in some way. It is also possible by offering a survey before *and* after showing the advertisement—instead of just handing out a survey afterwards—that more comprehensive data could be gained about viewers.

There was also an inherent weakness in the way that the questions were asked on the instrument itself. For example, question 4, “I consider myself a heavy smoker,” asks the participant to judge themselves based upon that statement from strongly disagree to strong agree. This is unfortunately a poor and subjective statement that has the potential to mislead any study because after all, what *is* the definition of a heavy smoker? Question 10 emphasizes this point when it makes the statement, “I am more apt to refrain from smoking after seeing this advertisement.” This is problematic because the word refrain

may be to *completely* quit smoking for one individual, while it suggests just smoking *less* to another. Further questioning (if a survey instrument is used) needs to not only be very specific and free of ambiguity, but also be appropriate to the instrument at hand.

Questions like 4 and 10 would be more competent questions in a qualitatively driven study, than in a quantitative instrument like in this study.

Finally, while no student was coerced into taking the survey, they did not volunteer either. All of the participants in the survey were students in classrooms at Carson-Newman College and Walters State Community College where *professors* allowed the study to take place. The possibility for error by a student simply not caring—just marking whatever answer to finish the survey—is a possible outcome. While it is impossible to prevent this from occurring, with a volunteer participant-pool it is a less likely outcome.

For those wishing to follow up on this study it is recommended that a larger sample size within a different region (or multiple regions) of the country be included in the research. It is also suggested that any further study try to ensure that more than one advertisement is shown—preferably to an all-volunteer participant-pool—in hopes of reaching a more balanced set of data and hopefully getting closer to truth.

### **Qualitative Study**

Using the qualitative data gathered from this study as well as the insight from the design of a future peer-group styled study, some important implications for future research have been gained, including potentially useful demographics, the types of questions to ask those groups, as well as some categorical responses to expect and gain insight from.

There are many different types of demographics that could become quite useful and insightful for future studies—especially focus group-oriented ones. Perhaps one of the most interesting demographics that a focus group could center its attention on is tobacco farmers. After a surprising, negative comment from one participant in the quantitative study stating that, “I make my money growing tobacco!” It may bring some understanding on the type of effectiveness (if any) an ironic advertisement could have on a group that is biased against its message in the first place. There could also be some merit in looking at college freshman to see if there are truly any cognitive differences from high school-aged students when viewing irony. It is also important to note that in the quantitative study, there were few adults over the age of 25; it may be possible that a focus group looking at “older” adults may be able to more properly judge an adult’s perception towards an ironic advertisement initially created for teenagers.

The type of questions that would benefit any researcher looking to capitalize on a qualitative study should be questions that a quantitative instrument is just not competent to handle (a sample set of questions can be found in the Appendix.) For example, asking questions such as what a participant’s definition of irony is, or in what way(s) they felt an advertisement did or did not persuade them would be appropriate. It is also encouraged that when studying the demographics of the participants to ask questions like how much and how often that they use tobacco products, if at all. These types of questions, and other open-ended questions like them, allow for a more detailed analysis of participants in a way that is just not possible (or was unsuccessfully attempted) in a quantitative instrument.

Using the data gathered from the qualitative questions at the end of the quantitative instrument, there are also four broad categorical responses that any future researcher can expect from showing the ironic advertisement, *Shards O' Glass* to a group: (1) a participant “likes it”, (2) they thought it “was funny,” (3) they did not “get it,” and/or (4) they “did not like it.” These responses should all be expected and make sense in light of the research that has been done on irony. For some of the participants in the study, for example, when they responded to “liking the advertisement,” they could have simply been saying that they “got it,” or understood the subtlety in the message of the advertisement. Also, while many participants in the quantitative study listed in the qualitative section that they thought *Shards O' Glass* “was funny,” not one individual laughed—this is to be expected though because irony is a subtle rhetorical device *not* a loud one. For others, a common thread was one of *confusion*. Many participants felt as if they “did not get it”—or if they did—it was only at the end where the advertisement explicitly ties itself to tobacco, causing the viewer to frantically try and remember what came before in order to make sense of the advertisement as a whole. This is to be expected as well because irony tends to bifurcate the audience in such a way where some members understand the rhetoric and others that do not. Finally, for those who did not “get it” (or even those who did), they simply could not appreciate the advertisement because of either a pre-existing bias or personal dislike for the material or manner of presentation.

These different categorical responses to the advertisement may have something to do with a tiered understanding of irony and the advertisement—a ladder of insight. While a basic level of understanding, for example, may be linking popsicles filled with

glass to tobacco products, another step may be the association of a more socio-cultural level of understanding about big corporations and the danger they pose to consumers. This type of understanding is only a theory, but a deeper understanding of how participants may respond to the advertisement is an important aspect for future studies to take note of going forward.

### **Textual Analysis**

The textual analysis itself presents many challenges to the researcher. Perhaps the two most serious challenges include an inability to judge the participants knowledge and perception of what irony is to *them* (which may not be in line with Karstetter), and second, there is an issue of truly being able to judge the effectiveness of the advertisement on participants because radical change is unlikely. That is, incremental persuasion is more likely to be expected which becomes difficult and could affect the results of a quantitative study like the one conducted for this paper.

The most glaring issue facing a study of this kind is that participants vary in their knowledge of what irony is, as well as how to identify irony within an advertisement. Without any background knowledge of the rhetorical device (which should not be expected) the challenges to any study become quite obvious. For example, while irony may indeed be present within *Shards O' Glass* after an application of Karstetter's five tenets, a participant may not perceive that same irony within the advertisement or choose to reject any notion of it.

The second problem with the advertisement itself is that it is nearly impossible to have a 30 second advertisement bring about radical change in an individual. While there was a limitation within the quantitative study that showed an issue with showing a 30

second advertisement just *one* time—there is a much deeper underlying problem: showing the same advertisement *multiple* times still would not be expected to bring about radical change—only a change of the incremental kind.

What these results show is that there are serious limitations and issues with the quantitative study as conducted in this paper, but by understanding what to look for both in the textual analysis as well as the quantitative instrument, it can allow for a more qualitative study like that of a focus group to more accurately gauge adult perceptions to an ironic advertisement about tobacco that was originally designed to be viewed by teenagers.



Chapter 6 – Conclusion

## Conclusion

Irony has always been a significant form of rhetoric—used for various purposes, including persuasion and sometimes just for entertainment. As Allan B. Karstetter stated, “irony has been used at times with great effectiveness, and... Its potential as a persuasive instrument is so great” (1963, p. 172). The most important thing about the use of *any* rhetorical tool though, is to make sure that it fits the job at hand. The truth® campaign truly understood this idea perfectly. In this case, it found irony to be the proper technique to educate teenagers about the all-too-real dangers of smoking. After all, as the website for truth® (thetruth.com) states, “tell someone not to do something and they will.” The significance in the choice of irony by truth® cannot be underestimated. It allowed for a subject that is easy to be “overlooked” and “stale” to be seen as interesting and alive. Ettema and Glasser observed this themselves when they argued “irony is an aggressively intellectual exercise that fuses fact and value, requiring us to construct alternative hierarchies and choose among them” (1993 p. 324). *Irony* allowed *Shards O’ Glass* to be not just an entertaining advertisement product, but also a nuanced and sophisticated form of social criticism.

One of the most critical aspects of applying this rhetorical device is ensuring that it is directed at the *appropriate* audience. As Glenwright, et al, discovered; irony is perceived *differently* depending on the age of the listener (2005 p. 259). The producers of *Shards O’ Glass*, like many other truth® productions, seem to have known exactly what target audience it was aiming for—teenagers. A recent statement from the truth® website reads, “Our values are different. Our goals are different. If adults don’t get what we’re saying and how we say it, then it’s probably okay.” Just as it can be nearly impossible for

a marketing team to target *every* demographic with a new product, the same is true for a campaign that is more behavior-focused. According to *The American Journal of Public Health* researchers at Columbia University claim over 300,000 teenagers had been found to stay away from tobacco products specifically because of the truth® campaign and productions like *Shards O' Glass*. After all, “there is nothing that can be said using verbal irony that cannot be said more efficiently by other means,” according to Peter L Hagen in his paper *Pure Persuasion* (1995 p. 56). Had it not been for this specification, it is quite possible that the gains in reducing smoking in teenagers would never have existed.

The future is seemingly bright as the truth® campaign begins its second decade as an advocate against tobacco products. Future research, using some of the foundational insights gained in this paper, will allow such an innovative campaign to be properly analyzed and understood. The need for this understanding is more crucial than ever too—especially as complex rhetorical tools, like irony, are used more often in this multimedia-driven world. After all, what good is a campaign like truth® (that has a main goal of persuading its audience(s) against tobacco) if it is using the wrong tools for the job? It is also clear that this communicative technique called irony is still evolving. It is valuable to not only a campaign, like truth®, but also to academia to plot this evolution as well as the reception that any audience has to irony.

Therefore, building on the limitations and results of this study, it becomes apparent that any future research needs to incorporate a much more qualitatively-centered approach. There is a critical need for future research to use more open-ended responses in order to better judge a participant’s knowledge of irony, appraisal of the rhetorical device, as well as the participant’s disposition and use of tobacco products. An

instrument like a peer-group would allow for more appropriate data collection for these types of factors in a full-scale study going forward—hopefully bringing more conclusive results with it.

What this study has accomplished is that it has shown that for a future researcher wanting to work with irony and advertising—especially with the truth® campaign—it is necessary to have a three-pronged approach. For any study going forward it is critical that both a qualitative and quantitative approach be taken to determine not only participants’ thoughts about the advertisement, but also their own individual views of irony. All of this must also be added to a textual analysis to help identify the most competent questions for the two respective studies. By using this three-pronged approach, future research should be able to triangulate adult perceptions of irony in advertising compared to teenagers.

While not all of them are ironic in nature, truth® has continued to pursue other groundbreaking initiatives to shine a light on what it sees as immoral practices by *Big Tobacco*. Recently, it has expanded the *Shards O’ Glass* campaign to include a “recall PSA,” while also pursuing new campaigns like *Zombierville* and *Kiss My Glass*. As new mediums have evolved so has truth®. You can now find truth® productions on facebook, twitter, YouTube, and many other new social media platforms—all platforms used by their target audience. Since its creation over a decade ago, truth® has become a powerful and creative force in the anti-smoking advertising arena—and it looks like it has no intention of slowing down its goal of spreading the truth, anytime soon.

Chapter 7 – Bibliography

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Chapter 8 – Appendix

## Appendix

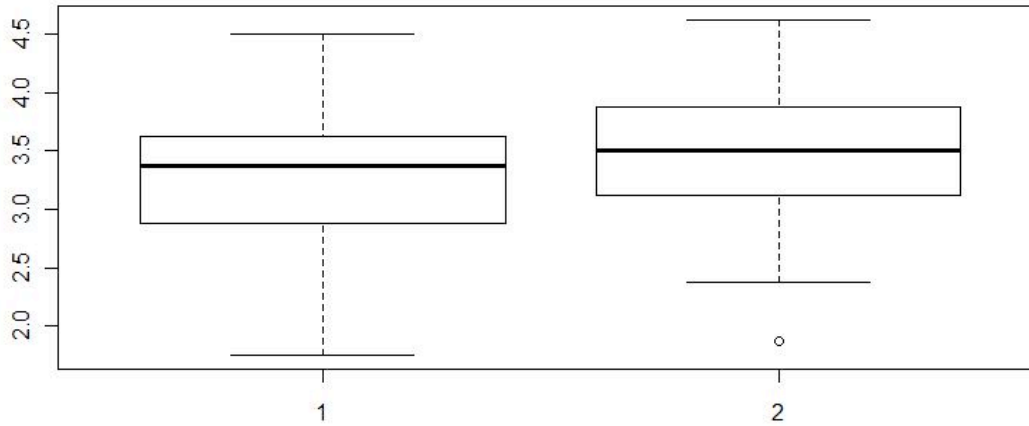
In order for a proper interpretation of the results, three variables were created from the survey handout for analysis. In the survey, similar questions were asked to give a truer reflection of the population. The three variables taken from those results are as follows: effectiveness of commercial (eff), projections for the advertisement (pro), and familiarity with the commercial (fam). In each case they are determined based on an average from the number of questions in the survey. This creates a more “continuousesque RV” and allows for a more proper interpretation of the data.

What is meant by a “continuousesque RV” is that instead of completing all of the tests on *each* variable separately, it makes more sense, objectively, to pull all of the variables together to create an average. This helps ensure more validity in the sample because by taking the average it eliminates misinterpretation from outliers and other statistical anomalies. Simply put, this system of data analysis allows for more *precision*. To better understand “continuousesque RV,” imagine that someone is trying to describe the amount of cash that they have in their pocket. If they are only able to describe that amount in \$10.00 increments but have \$324.79 in cash, it will be much less precise a number than someone who can describe that amount in \$1.00 increments. The principle is the same when trying to establish a more continuous data set out of previously “fixed” numbers (in this case, ranked survey questions).

It is also important to point out the basic structure of the Welch 2-sample t-tests and the alpha values present in the results below. The Welch 2-sample t-test is a statistical test designed to determine if a hypothesis has any measure of *plausibility*. It is not a reflection certainty by any means. In this case, the hypothesis is whether an

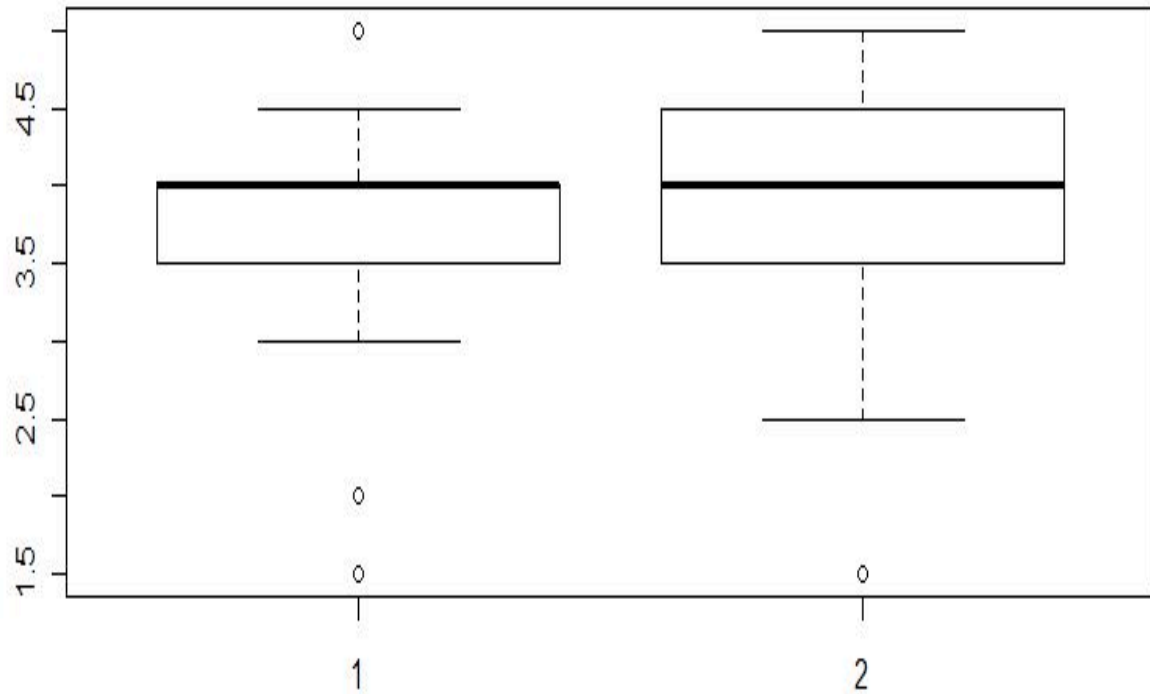
advertisement designed for an audience under the age of 18 has any similar effect on a population with an age greater than 18 years. Following traditional assumptions, the alpha value for all tests will be equal to .05. If a p-value is greater than that threshold, one must “fail to reject” the hypothesis. In other words, statistically, it cannot be said that a variable has any significance in relation to the hypothesis. On the other hand, if a p-value is less than the threshold, one must “reject” the hypothesis because it is *plausible* that a variable does have some type of influence on the hypothesis in question.

Another important procedural issue is that Welch 2-Sample t-tests have specific conditions that must apply before they can be used correctly. In this case, decimal values instead of whole numbers are necessary for the Welch test—another reason for the need to combine questions to get more continuous-like variables. This allows for distributions to be determined from the data set as either normally distributed or binomially distributed, which is imperative because Welch 2-Sample t-tests only work with normal distributions (or in some cases, similarly shaped distributions).



Clearly, both distributions are close enough to being left-skewed to conduct the Welch 2-Sample t-test. The idea is that you are sampling from two different populations. Why a boxplot was used, again, was to determine if the distributions were indeed normal. A boxplot is a graphical representation of a 5-step summary (the determination of the minimum, maximum, median, etc of a data set). If the data is large enough and the boxplot is the same shape it is still possible to do a t-test. In the case above for example, you can tell the boxplots are indeed slightly left-skewed because the bottom arm (the line below the box) is longer than the top arm (the line above the box) and therefore meets the criteria for conducting a 2-sided T-test. These are not normal but they are shaped correctly to begin the t-test below:

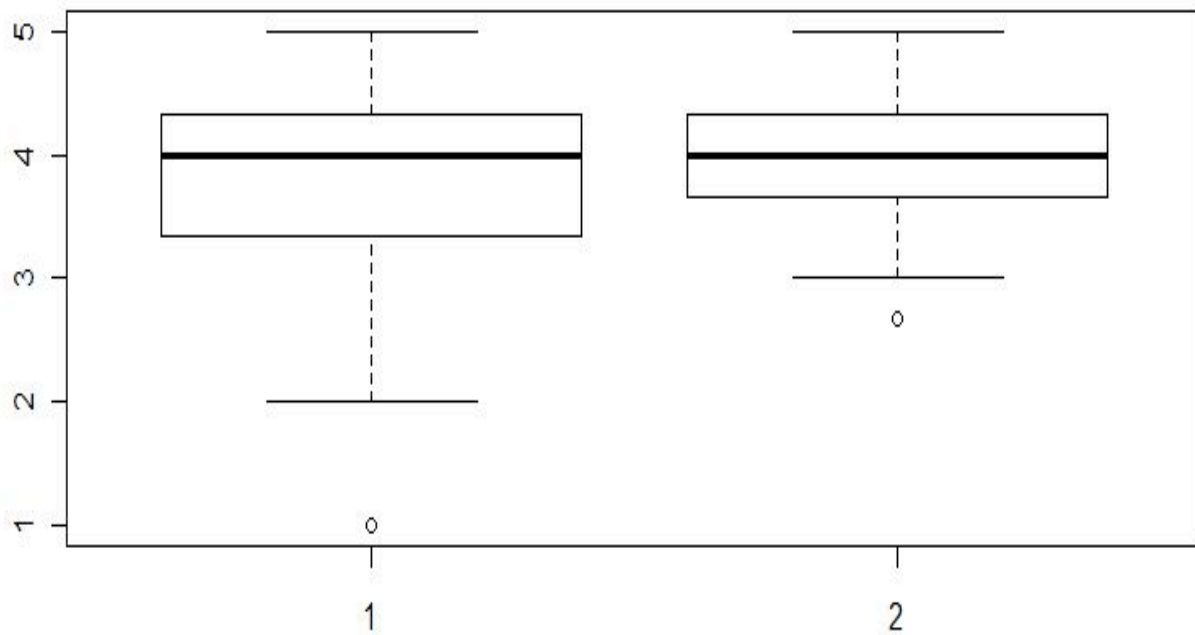
1.  $H: \mu_M - \mu_F = 0, K: \mu_M - \mu_F \neq 0, \alpha = .10.$
2.  $t = (\bar{x}_M - \bar{x}_F) / (SE(\bar{x}_M - \bar{x}_F)) \sim t(61.069)$
3.  $t = -1.4464$
4.  $P = .1532$



5. Fail to reject. Based on the data we cannot conclude that gender significantly plays a role in how the person is affected by the commercial.

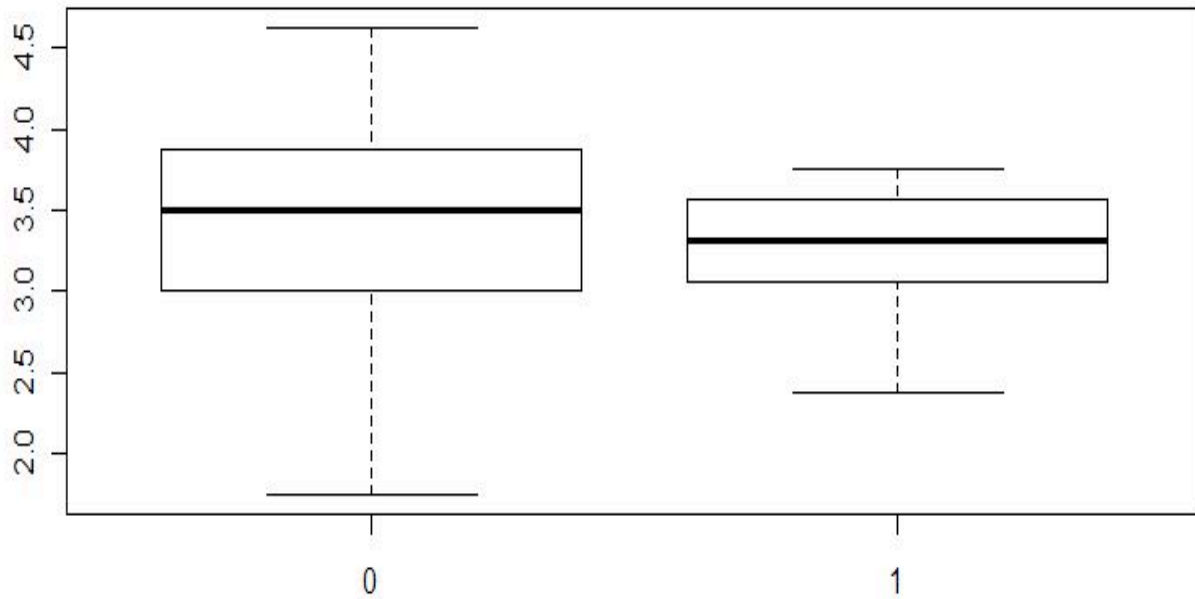
In this instance, the distributions are even more seriously left-skewed than with the eff variable. This means that the Welch 2-Sample t-test should give very useful data about the pro variable.

1.  $H: \mu_M - \mu_F = 0$ ,  $K: \mu_M - \mu_F \neq 0$ ,  $\alpha = .10$ .
2.  $t = (\bar{x}_M - \bar{x}_F) / (SE(\bar{x}_M - \bar{x}_F)) \sim t(67.869)$
3.  $t = -0.4848$
4.  $P = 0.6294$
5. Again, it is imperative to fail and reject the null hypothesis. Based on the data it cannot be concluded that gender significantly plays a role in how the person is affected by the projections of the commercial.



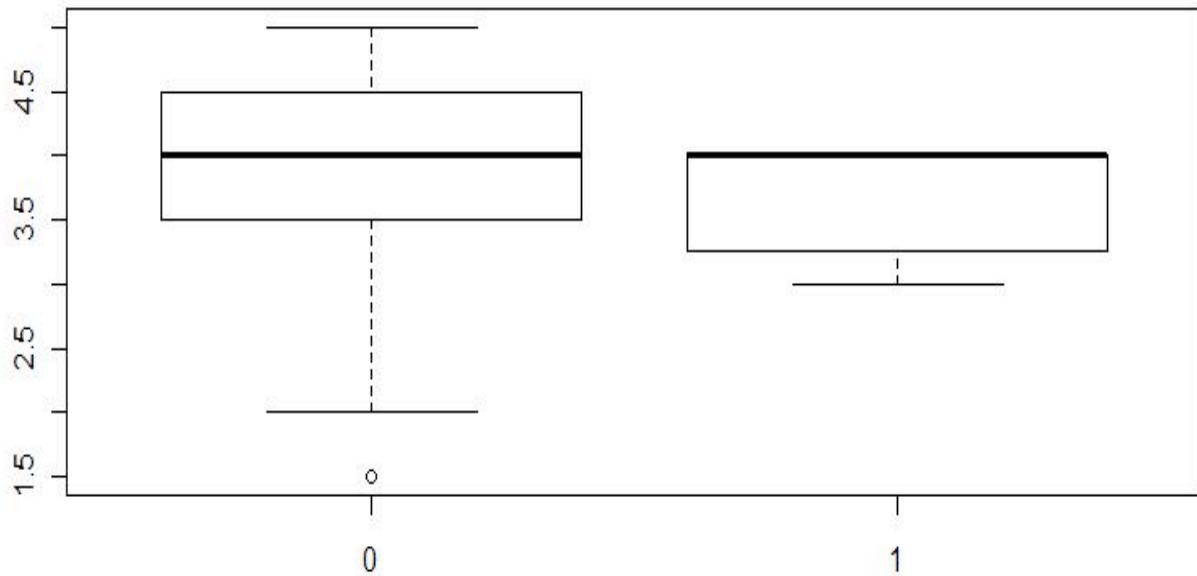
Same situation as before, both distributions are left-skewed.

Although this is the most significant of the tests, the p-value is still well above the alpha value limit of .05. There is a bit of interesting data that appears out of this test though. In the population of the data set, it appears that females are more familiar with the material than males.



Again, both distributions are left skewed. So here's the two-sample t test.

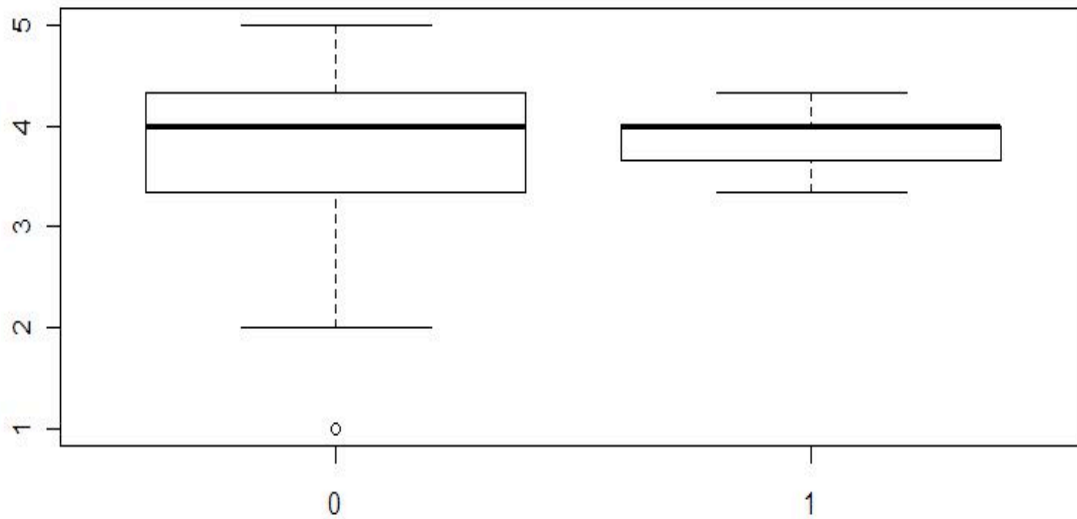
1.  $H: \mu_M - \mu_F = 0$ ,  $K: \mu_M - \mu_F \neq 0$ ,  $\alpha = .10$ .
2.  $t = (\bar{x}_M - \bar{x}_F) / (SE(\bar{x}_M - \bar{x}_F)) \sim t(20.317)$
3.  $t = 1.1309$
4.  $P = 0.2713$
5. Again, it is necessary to fail and reject the null hypothesis. Based on the data it cannot be concluded that being a smoker or non-smoker in this population plays a role in how the person views the effectiveness of the commercial.



Again, both distributions are left skewed so it is appropriate to attempt a Welch 2-Sample t-test.

1.  $H: \mu_M - \mu_F = 0, K: \mu_M - \mu_F \neq 0, \alpha = .10.$
2.  $t = (\bar{x}_M - \bar{x}_F) / (SE(\bar{x}_M - \bar{x}_F)) \sim t(28.943)$
3.  $t = 1.6398$
4.  $P = 0.1119$
5. Again, it is imperative to fail and reject the null hypothesis. Based on the data it cannot be concluded that being a smoker or non-smoker in this population plays a role in how the person is affected by the projections of the commercial.





The boxplot shows something different than in previous tests. The sample distributions are quite different in shape and thus a Welch 2-Sample t-test is not appropriate. Additionally, the means are so close for this variable that it is unlikely to discover any significant difference. This means that a Wilcoxon Rank Sum test is more fitting for this scenario. In the case above, because the right boxplot is not left-skewed, particularly to the extent the left boxplot is then this does not meet the criteria necessary for a two-sample t-test. The Wilcoxon Rank sum test is based on the binomial distribution instead of a normal distribution. It allows for weaker assumptions on the rank sum test and can be used in a wider variety of situations—which is more conducive to this particular boxplot. To explain, suppose that entrance into one professional school required just a grade point average (GPA) while another professional school wanted a student GPA *and* an entrance exam score. The first professional school has a more general requirement—in this way, it is apt to talk about a Wilcoxon Rank sum test. In

other words, a Wilcoxon Rank test requires a more limited number of criteria than a Welch 2-Sample t-test.

1.  $H: Mns - Ms = 0$ ,  $K: Mns - Ms \neq 0$ ,  $\alpha = .10$ .
2.  $W \sim N'$  (since sample sizes are moderately large)
3.  $W = 432.5$
4.  $P = .6133$
5. In this test, it is necessary to fail to reject. Based on the data, it cannot be concluded that the medians for the variable familiarity are significantly different based on whether or not one is a smoker.

Indicate the accuracy of the following statements.

**1. Please circle your gender:**

Male

Female

**2. Please circle the age range which best describes you:**

18-21

22-25

26-34

35+

**3. Please circle the classification which best describes you:**

Freshman

Sophomore

Junior

Senior

**4. I consider myself a heavy smoker.**

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

**5. I am familiar with the truth campaign.**

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

**6. I had already seen this advertisement before today.**

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

**7. This advertisement made me question my smoking practices.**

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

**8. This advertisement is an effective anti-smoking tool.**

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

**9. This advertisement should be shown to other college age students.**

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

**10. I am more apt to refrain from smoking after seeing this advertisement.**

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

**PLEASE TURN OVER TO BACK SIDE**

**11. I would recommend this advertisement to a friend or family member.**

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

**12. I enjoyed the style of this advertisement.**

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

**13. I am interested in seeing other advertisements in this campaign.**

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

**14. I found this message ironic.**

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

**15. I plan on visiting shardsofglass.com**

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

**16. I find the message in this advertisement to be straightforward.**

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

**17. This advertisement is persuasive.**

Strongly Disagree   Disagree   Neutral   Agree   Strongly Agree

**What do you like about this advertisement? Please Explain**

**What do you dislike about this advertisement? Please Explain.**

### *Shards O' Glass*

Given the critical nature of this campaign advertisement it is important to offer a full and complete dissection of the video advertisement by truth®. Below is an attempt to give a textual version of that 32-second video advertisement.

At the beginning of the advertisement there is a middle-aged man dressed in a suit who plays the part of the CEO of Shards O' Glass. He is standing in a production facility where glass freeze pops are being made. In the background you see conveyor belts full of the glass-infused popsicles with what appears to be a factory worker loading them into boxes. On the background wall there is the logo for Shards O' Glass and all of the sounds heard by the viewer throughout the advertisement are the various sounds of machinery. The CEO begins by saying that, "At Shards O' Glass freeze pops, we want you to know were we stand on important glass freeze pop issues."

The image on the screen changes to a close-up of the glass-filled popsicles themselves moving along a conveyor belt while the CEO's comments continue to be heard although he is no longer seen. The glass pops are red with the large pieces of glass inside of them with what appears to be an almost shine effect bouncing off of them from the lights in the production facility. The CEO for Shards O' Glass can be heard saying, "We now agree that there is no such thing as a safe glass freeze pop." It is towards the end of this statement that the image on the screen changes again to another facility worker pouring hunks of glass into a chute where a liquid popsicle base is being stirred.

The next image on the screen is one of the popsicle sticks being pushed into the semi-solid popsicles by a machine where the CEO continues to iterate that, "The only proven way to reduce health risks from our glass pops is to not eat them." It is then that

the image changes to one of the freeze pops being held underneath a microscope and checked by what appears to be a quality control worker where another close-up of the popsicle is shown to the viewer. After the close-up of a quality control worker showing the glass freeze pop, the popsicle is put back on a conveyor belt.

The next image brings the CEO back into the view of the camera with him saying, “To learn more, visit our website.” It is then that the viewer is treated to another full conveyor belt of glass-filled freeze pops and a message in the foreground stating, “shardsoglass.com.” A close-up of the CEO’s face then appears where he states, “And remember, Shards O’ Glass freeze pops are for adults only.”

The image now changes dramatically to a black background, yet the movement of machinery in the factory can still be heard. A second or two after the black background appears on the screen, the foreground is lit up with white text, which reads, “What if all companies sold products like Big Tobacco.” After, the truth® logo appears on the screen for a few moments and the advertisement is over.

### Sample Questions For Peer-Group Study

The ideal environment for this qualitatively-styled instrument would be a small group of less than 15 participants that would view the truth® advertisement, *Shards O' Glass*, and then be asked a series of questions similar to the ones below. It is also suggested that the participant pool follow some of the guidelines listed in the results chapter of this paper. Of course, this is by no means a definitive or exhaustive list, but a set of questions that would help get quality data in ways that a quantitative study is incompetent. The overall thing to keep in mind is any questions need to be open-ended to allow for a more accurate reflection of the participants feelings toward the advertisement.

1. *How would you define irony and what does it mean to you? What makes you think it is or is not present in this advertisement?*

This is an appropriate question because it allows for any differences in understanding from a traditional, academic definition to be brought into consideration in the dataset. That is, does this person really *know* what irony is—at least as Karstetter would define it?

2. *How often do you use tobacco products, if at all? What is your disposition towards tobacco companies?*

This line of questioning helps to avoid the pitfalls of the limited response options that a quantitative instrument, like a survey, creates. It should also allow for better and more detailed demographic information to be available to the researcher.

3. *Did you like the advertisement you viewed today? What made you like or not like the advertisement?*

As stated in the results chapter, most of these answers should fit into one of the four categorical responses identified by the study in this paper. However, by asking this type of question in a peer group it should allow the back-and-forth type response that could be beneficial to locating if the use of irony had anything to do with participant's views of *Shards O' Glass*.

4. *Will you think differently about tobacco products or change your behavior after viewing this advertisement?*

This is perhaps one of the most valuable questions that could come out of an instrument, like a peer group study. This could become a much better indicator of what the quantitative variable “eff” attempted to do—unsuccessfully—in this study. The range of answers allowed by the instrument ensures that the persuasion (if there was any) from the advertisement can be better measured—something especially true in light of the fact that persuasion is known not to happen radically but *gradually*.

Using these types of open-ended questions should allow for any future researcher to get the most out of a qualitative study, like a peer group. The questions listed in this sample are chosen not just for their competency within this type of instrument, but also because of the incompetence that these type questions have in a quantitative study.



