Star-Spangled Corporate Identity

Examining the Relationship Between Civil Religion, National Identity, and Communicated Corporate Identity in The United States

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This thesis examines the relationship between national identity, civil religion, and corporate identity in the US. It establishes a relationship between civil religion and national identity through a literature review. After, it employs discourse analysis to identify elements of American civil religion and national identity in the communicated corporate identities of several leading companies from American mass merchants and food retailers, department store, and automaker industries. This thesis finds a wide range in the frequency and prevalence of elements of American national identity and civil religion in communicated corporate identity across the companies included in the study. While some companies embrace American national identity and civil religion as a core part of their identity, others do not refer to these elements at all. Further, some elements of American national identity and civil religion are found in the companies' communicated corporate identities and other elements are found to a lesser degree or not at all. For example, references to the American Dream and 'growth and prosperity' are prevalent and occur frequently in companies' communicated corporate identities, while the use of biblical archetypes and images of national figures were not found. This demonstrates the dynamic nature of American civil religion and national identity in that they are presented differently in companies' communicated corporate identities than other spheres, such as in politics. The presence or lack thereof of specific elements appears to be connected to larger discourses about public and private space, inclusion of different beliefs, multiculturalism, and pluralism.

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Introduction

This thesis explores how corporations can function as platforms for national identity and civil religion in the United States. This analysis is grounded at the intersection between religious studies, political science and economics. It attempts to move away from dominant Western modes of thinking that view religion as inherently private and capable of being separated from other spheres of life within modern secular societies. Talal Asad (2003) has highlighted and analyzed this understanding of religion, finding that the secular is not a neutral space where religious belief is replaced by scientific knowledge, but rather that secularism caries its own exclusions and exists in a continuous dialogue with religion.

Asad (2003) further finds that the secular redefines religion alongside new understandings of the public and private spheres. "The secular . . . is neither continuous with the religious that supposedly preceded it (that is, it is not the latest phase of a sacred origin) nor a simple break from it (that is, it is not the opposite, an essence that excludes the sacred). I take the secular to be a concept that brings together certain behaviors, knowledges, and sensibilities in modern life" (Asad 2003, p. 25).

As such, this thesis explores the ways in which religion, economics, and politics are entangled with one another. There exists substantial work highlighting the intersections between religion and politics, and politics and economics[1]. In acknowledging and analyzing the meeting of religion, politics, and economics, this study takes this interdisciplinary work a step further.

Although civil religion has been studied at length in political and public discourses in the United States, the relationship between civil religion, national identity, and business or marketing remains under theorized. Most literature analyzing civil religion is limited to applications in politics and government activities. Because businesses are extremely influential in American daily life, this thesis extends the study of civil religion and national identity to businesses, specifically communicated corporate identity.

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[1] See, for example, Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2014; Norris and Inglehart 2011; Inglehart 1997; Hibbs 1987.

Corporations are active in American politics and largely influence and contribute financially to politicians and political parties (Korten 1998). Nation States, especially the US, are dependent on businesses investing in their economies, placing businesses in a privileged position (Luger 2005). This dependency expands to jobs, prices, production, economic growth and stability, and standard of living (Lindblom 1977). Lindblom states "government officials cannot be indifferent to how well business performs its functions. Depressions, inflation, or other economic distress can bring down a government" (1977, p. 172-173). Consequently, corporations must be encouraged to invest, giving them an advantage in persuading policy makers to support business interests (Luger 2005). This is not to say that the state cannot or does not act in opposition to business interests, but rather that business investment is a necessary policy concern (Luger 2005).

This privileged position, promoted through lobbying, allows corporations to play a pivotal role in framing public and political issues in the US (Korten 1998). Corporations control media through ownership, sponsorship, and other indirect means, giving them considerable power in the public sphere (Korten 1998). Corporate discourses are influential in societal power relations because of their socio-economic implications and the likelihood that these discourses will be adopted or, at least, appear in other media and political discourses (Van Dijk 1996).

This thesis examines the relationship between civil religion, national identity, and corporate identity by employing discourse analysis to explore elements of civil religion and national identity in businesses' communicated corporate identities.

Discourse analysis assumes that "our ways of understanding the world are created and maintained by social processes" (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, p. 6). This thesis, rooted in social constructivism and postmodernism, argues for the importance of considering the socio-historical backgrounds when interpreting symbols and other communications. It stresses the importance of religious and spiritual narratives in American history, as seen through American civil religion and national identity, specifically for understanding the significance and influence of corporations in the contemporary US political and cultural landscape.

This thesis is guided by the following research question: What is the relationship between national identity, civil religion, and corporate identity in the United States? To better analyze this question, it employs the following sub-questions:

- How does the presence of elements of US national identity and American civil religion incorporated into companies' communicated corporate identities compare *within* industries in the US?
- How does the presence of elements of US national identity and American civil religion incorporated into companies' communicated corporate identities compare *across* industries in the US?
- To what extent were the established elements of US national identity and American civil religion present in companies' communicated corporate identities?

First, this paper describes the theory of civil religion and provides an established means of identifying and understanding its many rites and rituals. Second, it defines national identity and explains the close relationship between civil religion and national identity. Third, it provides a definition of corporate identity and explains the ways in which it is commonly conveyed. The following section explains discourse analysis and the benefits of its application to communicated corporate identity. It provides a detailed explanation of the methodology used. The next section focuses on the analysis of elements of American civil religion and national identity in companies' communicated corporate identities. In doing so, the aim of these analyses is to identify these elements in the communicated corporate identities of companies across three different industries. In the conclusion, the thesis will reflect on the findings of this thesis, opportunities for future research, and its limitations.

American Civil Religion

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1997) was the first to coin the term *civil religion* in 1765 in his book, *The Social Contract*. Rousseau proposes civil religion as a way to address the relationship between religion and secular powers in a pluralistic state. He sees civil religion as organized within a single nation, maintaining its own gods, saints, dogmas, rights, forms of worship outlined in the laws, and viewing other nations as nonbelievers. To support this proposal, Rousseau (1997) argues that religion has been at the foundation of all nation-states and that Christianity undermines the authority and legitimacy of the nation by separating power between the secular and religious. However, he posits that civil religion answers this problem by providing a means of fortifying allegiance to society while allowing for religious diversity. Rousseau defined the simple dogmas of civil religion for his purposes:

> There is therefore a purely civil profession of faith of which the Sovereign should fix the articles, not exactly as religious dogmas, but as social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen or a faithful subject . . . The dogmas of civil religion ought to be few, simple, and exactly worded, without explanation or commentary. The existence of a mighty, intelligent and beneficent Divinity, possessed of foresight and providence, the life to come, the happiness of the just, the punishment of the wicked, the sanctity of the social contract and the laws. (Rousseau 1997, p. 72-73).

Civil religion was never developed into an official system as Rousseau intended; however, similar ideas, without specific reference to Rousseau's works, influenced the American founding fathers (Bellah 1967, p. 43). Before Robert Bellah, several prominent scholars had studied the presence of a set of American values that seemed to have some religious component, such as John Dewey's discussion of the American "common faith" and Robbin Williams's argument for the existence of a "common religion" in America (Cristi 2001). The term "American civil religion" and the study of it was popularized in 1967, when Robert Bellah published the controversial article "Civil Religion in America", in which he describes the civil religion of the United States. Bellah

(1967) outlines three commonly argued national faiths in the US. First, he finds many have argued that Christianity is the national religion. Second, some argued that Judeo-Christian traditions represent the general American culture. Last, he proposed a third alternative that next to organized religion, a separate and developed system of civil religion exists.

Bellah (1967) finds that in addition to ideas similar to Rousseau's concept of civil religion, Christianity and the idea of God had a fundamental role in the minds of the Founding Fathers, who in turn "shaped the form and tone of the civil religion as it has been maintained ever since" (p. 45). Civil Religion has remained an important aspect of political discourse in the US. In making this argument, Bellah (1967) analyzes President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address as an expression of civil religion. Throughout his address, Kennedy references God; however, never remarks on Christianity or Catholicism (Bellah 1967). Bellah (1967) argues that while much of the content is borrowed from Christianity, civil religion is distinctly its own religion. No president, starting with Washington, has mentioned Christ in his inaugural address; however, every president has mentioned God (Bellah 1967). In "God's New Israel", Conrad Cherry (1998), referencing Alan Trachtenberg, defends Bellah's work by reminding his readers that while speeches are often calculated and disingenuous, that does not suggest that the words within them are not culturally significant.

American civil religion, although it has many references to Christianity, is not Christian (Bellah 1967). The US has a long tradition of religion being an active issue in public life, especially in navigating the path between protecting free exercise of religion, applying laws impartially, and preventing the government establishment of, or support for, one religion. Politicians acting in their official capacity on behalf of the state will represent and act within the boundaries of civil religion (Bellah 1967). This, among other aspects, helps to draw a clear distinction between Christianity, other religious institutions, and civil religion (Bellah 1967). Additionally, it is not a general representation of Christian-Judeo traditions, but rather reflects the views of the

founding fathers and is specific enough to avoid being a meaningless formality (Bellah 1967).

Bellah (1967) maintains that within civil religion, God is "utilitarian" and "much more related to order, law, and rights than to salvation and love" (p. 45). Further, Bellah finds that the God of civil religion is active and maintains a special connection to America. This special connection stems from a long accepted analogy equating America to Israel and the Promised Land and Europe to Egypt (Bellah 1967). In the conclusion of Kennedy's address, he reinforces the idea that the US has been given a special destiny by God when he calls upon the American people, "let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own." (Bellah 1967, p. 41). It is important to recognize that America's mission from God has been interpreted differently throughout history, heightening the importance of context when interpreting symbols and rituals (Cherry 1998).

Most nations have institutions to maintain and support common values amongst the people (Moosa, "Civil Religion and Beyond"). For example, Indians are brought together through the institution of cricket and South Africans have utilized a common love of rugby to aid in nation building following the apartheid (Moosa, "Civil Religion and Beyond"). Similarly, Cherry (1998) points out that many nations have the belief that they maintain a special relationship with a divine spirit, and that this "sentiment is probably as old as nationalism itself" (p. 19). Cherry argues that those things held sacred within the American experience, are not diminished in their importance or made less American because others also maintain them or hold them in high esteem.

According to Bellah (1967), civil religion is "a genuine vehicle of national religious self-understanding" (p. 46) and has survived an ever-changing cultural and religious environment:

> Behind the civil religion at every point lie biblical archetypes: Exodus, Chosen People, Promised Land, New Jerusalem, and Sacrificial Death and Rebirth. But it is also genuinely American and genuinely new. It has its own prophets and its own martyrs, its own sacred events and sacred places, its own solemn rituals and

symbols. It is concerned that America be a society as perfectly in accord with the will of God as men can make it, and a light to all nations. (Bellah 1967, p. 54-55).

Emile Durkheim (2012) finds that all collective groups maintain a religious dimension. He defines religion as "*a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them*" (p. 47). Durkheim defines s*acred* things as separated, forbidden, and representing the unity of the group; including both good and evil. The *profane* are ordinary things, often concerning individual interests (Durkheim 2012). This division represents the social reality of the group (Durkheim 2012).

Bellah (1992) employs Durkheim's distinction between the sacred and profane to identify the sacred symbols, objects, people and places within American civil religion. Bellah observes the sacredness of the American flag, a collection of documents including The Declaration of Independence, and the national leaders, heroes and martyrs such as Abraham Lincoln. National holidays of remembrance and celebration, presidential inaugurations, and the belief that the US must set an example for the world also represent instances of sacredness in American civil religion (Bellah 1992). Bellah (1967) argues that sacred symbols, alongside many rites, rituals, cultural narratives, and beliefs form the civil religion of the US. "What we have, then, from the earliest years of the republic is a collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred things and institutionalized in a collectivity" (Bellah 1967, 46).

The meanings and sacred statuses of beliefs, symbols, narratives, and rites change and develop overtime. Immediately following the events of 9/11, there was an intensification of American civil religious sentiment throughout the country (Berkowitz 2006). Peter Berkowtiz (2002) commented during a Pew panel discussion, "Heroes were made, tears were shed, flags were flown, money and blood and labor were generously donated in the daunting relief efforts. And God's name and blessing was repeatedly invoked." This renewal of civil religion brought with it an image of the United States that

was predominantly white and a move away from acceptance and cultural tolerance (Berkowitz 2006).

The heightened patriotism in response to terrorism was seen throughout American institutions. For example, Baseball held tributes across the country celebrating the US and mourning its losses (Butterworth 2005). However, these tributes quickly changed into rituals affirming the Bush Administration's war agenda, deterring dissenting opinions, and discouraging the public from discussing and reflecting on its response to terrorism and foreign policies (Butterworth 2005). There were widely reported acts of violence against Muslims and mosques during this time (Williams 2013). However, by the first anniversary of the attacks, attitudes and ideas about the expression of American civil religion were changing again (Gardella 2014b).

Cherry finds some symbolic words, like *freedom, democracy, God,* and *providence* have become ambiguous to Americans and inspired a 'knee-jerk' reaction. Looking to the future, Cherry suggests that through globalization and other international influences American civil religion could begin to integrate international and transnational symbols and beliefs into its framework and acknowledge the legitimacy of other civil religions.

American civil religion has embraced some international imagery and cultural tolerance into its framework. This is evidenced by the creation of sites, such as Disney's Epcot Center that celebrates international culture, The United States Holocaust Museum, and the National Museum of the American Indian (Gardella 2014a). It is further reflected by changes in American politics. According to Peter Gardella (2014a), "Americans have elected an embodiment of internationalism in the person of President Obama . . . Obama will always stand as a symbol of internationalism and cultural tolerance" (p. 368).

This embrace of internationalism does not suggest the end of American civil religion. To the contrary, Peter Gardella (2014b) suggests, "In some ways, American decline is making the four values of American civil religion — freedom, democracy, peace, and tolerance — even clearer". Although present to some degree and a noble

and desirable goal, Gardella and others' views of American civil religion may be overly positive.

Amongst the criticisms of American civil religion is the concern that it undermines diversity and attempts to compel an idea of a 'real American' (Chernus 2010). In doing so, scholars fear, civil religion could "help to foster cultural imperialism and protect the privileged status of white male discourse", possibly leading to military and political imperialism (Chernus 2010, p. 65). Bellah is often critiqued for a lack of self-reflection. Some scholars argue that Bellah supports American civil religion as a means of unity, but fails to fully recognize its pitfalls and exclusion of the "other" (Moosa, "Civil Religion and Beyond"). One commonly cited example is the ease with which the deep seeded belief in manifest destiny can transition into nationalism (Moosa, "Civil Religion and Beyond"). However, Rhys Williams (2013) points out "Bellah himself recognized internal ideological tensions in American civil religion, as biblical and utilitarian themes were both present and not always reconciled" (p. 240).

Another common critique of American civil religion is the lack of a common definition of the term amid scholars (Chernus 2010). However, Williams (2013) reviewed common academic definitions of civil religion and finds significant commonalities. "Although there exists some definitional variation (as with the concept of "religion" itself) the central thrust is clear—civil religion is composed of understandings and practices that treat the sociopolitical collectivity as having sacred dimensions and finds both its collective identity and its history religiously meaningful" (Williams 2013, p. 240).

Further, some scholars argue that the symbols, rites, and rituals often cited as examples of civil religion in the US do not adequately demonstrate the presence of a "separate and differentiated religion" (Wilson 1979, p. 144). Nevertheless, many of these scholars see the research conducted under the umbrella of American civil religion as valuable insight into various aspects of American culture, despite their conclusion that it is not a 'religion' (Chernus 2010). Others argue that American civil religion is "religion in the abstract", an academic construct (Chernus 2010, p. 66).

This thesis presents American civil religion as a unified tradition rooted in a Durkheimian understanding of religion and continuously changing. In analyzing American civil religion as expansive and dynamic scholars are able to study its various, and at times contradicting, discourses, as well as how American civil religion is appropriated or rejected by sub-groups and how it is reflected in different spheres of public and private life. This thesis takes this step by examining how American civil religion is presented in the economic sphere.

The above paragraphs provide a definition of civil religion, an understanding of the historical development of civil religion in academia, and the philosophical underpinnings of the theory. This theoretical understanding is necessary to establish the basis upon which elements of American civil religion can be identified. However, this thesis must expand this understanding as it seeks to identify and analyze the use of American civil religious elements in communicated corporate identity. In doing so, it seeks to operationalize an understanding of civil religion for use in a discourse analysis. To comprehend the development and survival of any religion's elements, we must examine it within the complex contexts in which it arose and operates. Thus, operationalizing elements of civil religion necessarily includes an understanding of American civil religion's origins and its development, alongside a consideration for its presentation in a corporate context.

Elaborating on the work of Bellah, Cherry (1998) identifies three features of American civil religion: 1) the source of beliefs and symbols, 2) institutions, and 3) the relationship between civil religion and other religions. Cherry uses these features to argue for a historical and contextual understanding of the elements of civil religion. This approach is important for the purpose of this thesis, in that it operationalizes American civil religion by providing a means for recognizing the symbols and other references to civil religion in American corporations' communicated corporate identities and understanding their importance through historical background and context.

The source of civil religion goes beyond Christian-Judeo tradition. Cherry (1998) acknowledges the deep importance of the Old and New Testaments, while highlighting the greater significance of the interpretation of American history through biblical images. "Biblical events serve as the archetypes, but *the immediate events of revelation* – those paradigmatic events by which the celebrants of the civil religion interpret the meaning of their national life and the purposes of God in history – *are events in the American experience*" (Cherry 1998, p. 11). To provide an example of how history is interpreted through biblical narratives in civil religion, Cherry identifies The Revolutionary War, and the surrounding period, and The Civil War as the two main events of revelation. The Revolutionary War provided deliverance from Europe, gave the US a higher purpose, and made it the model government for the world (Cherry 1998). The Civil War tried the longevity of the nation and judged the people (Cherry 1998).

Cherry (1998) considers the implicit presence of biblical archetypes in the elements of civil religion in his analysis. He equates the important documents associated with these wars, such as The Declaration of Independence and The Gettysburg Address, with scripture that interprets the events to protect and continue the customs of civil religion. Similarly, leaders in the wars are equated to biblical figures (Cherry 1998). George Washington is both Moses for freeing us, and Joshua for leading us to the Promised Land (Cherry 1998). American history, going beyond events to include people, places, and documents, is interpreted through a biblical lens (Cherry 1998).

In identifying the institutional framework of civil religion in the US, Cherry (1998) first cites the nation as the basic institution and public schools as a primary source for progressing civil religious customs and beliefs. As mentioned, the lack of a national universal religion allowed the nation naturally to assume roles previously held by churches or other religious institutions, such as bringing people together as Americans and fixing them to God's special mission for the US (Cherry 1998). In addition to its own institutions, civil religion is supported further by churches in the US (Cherry 1998).

Cherry (1998) subdivides the relationship between civil religion and other religions into three kinds. First, Cherry cites Bellah's (1967) finding that civil religion exists "alongside", rather than completely distinguished and segregated from other religions. Second, Cherry recognizes the historical closeness between civil religion and Protestantism has dissolved over time. Third, Cherry details the tension between other religions and civil religion, which has historically been a reaction to the Americanization of Churches and often results in harsh criticism of civil religion being religious nationalism, rather than the national religion. Cherry acknowledges civil religion is often discussed as Christian-Judeo traditions.

To describe elements of American civil religion, Cherry (1998) uses contextual understandings and interpretations of objects, symbols, people, and events. Alongside identifying elements of civil religion through a contextual and historical understanding, this thesis aims to recognize elements of national identity in communicated corporate identity. The following section discusses national identity in the US and its relationship to civil religion.

American National Identity

Anthony Smith (2000), also adopting a Durkheimian approach to religion and group identity, defines national identity as "the maintenance and continuous reproduction of the patterns of values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations and the identification of individuals with the heritage and those values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions" (p. 796).

The national identity of the US is closely tied with American civil religion. In a sense, American national identity could be understood as the perpetuation of civil religion. In her book, "After Secularism", Erin Wilson (2011) supports the findings of Bellah, Cherry, and others showing the importance of language, symbolism, and rituals in building and continuing American national identity. Wilson highlights the importance of religious themes, often relating to Judeo-Christian traditions, in the American national identity, and the tension between these themes and secularism. Despite efforts to maintain separation of church and state in the US, religious ideas are inserted into politics through worldviews, values, and the religious themes inherent in maintaining the identity of the national community (Wilson 2011) – civil religion. The importance of civil religion in forming the national identity of the US comes from the diversity of its citizens religious traditions.

Smith (2000) distinguishes between three levels of analysis of the relationship between religion and national identity: official, popular practices, and the sacred properties of the nation. Smith then defines four sacred properties of ethnic communities: 1) ethnic election, "the sense of constituting a 'chosen people" which distinguishes between two kinds of chosen-ness, missionary and conventional[2], 2) Sacred territory, a nation's "historic and inalienable homeland", 3) ethno-history, communal narrative traditions and myths and 4) national sacrifice, the monuments in place for the 'glorious dead'. Applying the four properties of ethnic communities outlined by Smith (2000) to the US, Erin Wilson (2011) analyzes six State of the Union

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[2] Missionary ethnic election is the belief that the community has been chosen by a deity for a special religious task or mission. Conventional ethnic election is the belief that the community and a deity maintain a mutual promise in which the community's obedience to the deity's rules is exchanged for special benefits. (Smith 2000).

addresses, finding that religion shapes subconscious assumptions that influence politics. Similar to Bellah, Wilson analyzes the addresses, drawing strong links between the images and statements that represent national identity and the new and old testaments – America as 'God's New Israel'.

Smith (2000) examines the relationship between religion and national identity, finding religious beliefs, especially concerning the sacred, permeate and form national identity. Smith argues that all religions have ceremonies for both the home and the greater community. Smith finds that both types of ceremonies are intended to bond the participants and create a faith community. Smith's focus on the purpose of ceremonies and his adopting a functional Durkheimian approach to religion, allows him to argue that while symbols may change from one religion to another or overtime within one religion, the function remains. Building on Durkheim, Smith reasserts that religion functions to bind, regulate, and assist in creating a cohesive society through various ceremonies and rites.

This echoes Cherry's (1998) argument that some symbolic words have become ambiguous in modern America and for the possibility of American civil religion adopting international symbols. Smith finds that:

> For Durkheim's functional approach, there could be no real difference. Symbolisms may change, but as he put it, 'there is something eternal in religion', because every society must remake itself periodically in a moral sense, and thereby uphold its identity through rites and ceremonies. (Smith 2000, p. 798).

Functional approaches, and specifically views of religion, have been commented on for defining religion too broadly (Paloutzian and Park 2014). Peter Berger (1974), a notable sociologist, criticizes Durkheim for defining religion in terms of its places within a social or psychological system as working to legitimize a secular worldview. However, Paloutzian and Park (2014) argue that Durkheim escapes this criticism by including the additional criteria of distinguishing between the sacred and profane.

Despite this, and other critiques, Durkheim's functional approach to religion serves the purposes of this thesis. It is fundamental to understanding American civil religion and provides a useful, practical approach to understanding the complex relationship between civil religion and national identity in the US by relating their functions in society.

National identity and civil religion in the US are closely related and often overlapping. The relationship between civil religion and national identity is often difficult to discriminate between and sometimes impossible to separate, as the two often exist in combination and for the same function. In a sense, civil religion is inherent within national identity in the US, in that national identity is the continuance of and identification with America's "distinctive heritage", which necessarily encompasses civil religion.

This thesis endeavors to understand the relationship between civil religion, national identity, and corporate identity in the US. Throughout the analysis, it attempts to identify aspects of civil religion and national identity with the understanding that their relationship often complicates distinguishing between them. The next section defines communicated corporate identity.

Communicated Corporate Identity

Most organizations aspire to create a distinct and recognizable identity, which can differentiate their products, better position them in the marketplace, appeals to investors, and can motivate employees (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu 2006). However, giving a specific definition to the concept of *corporate identity* is challenging, as it goes beyond design themes and visual identification; it incorporates the importance of symbolism, behavior, and communications in conveying corporate strategies (van Riel and Balmer 1997). There is not a consensus amongst scholars or practitioners on the definitions of organizational and corporate identity concepts. Generally accepted features of corporate identity include its inseparability from corporate personality, its multidisciplinary nature, its function in identifying the essence of an organization, and its mix of different elements including behavior, communication, and symbolism (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu 2006). In addition, it commonly includes an analysis of an organization's distinctive features, such as "history, philosophy, culture, communication and the industry the firm operates in." (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu 2006, p. 848).

Some academics suggest distinguishing between the *desired* organizational identity and the *actual* corporate identity (Kiriakidou and Millward 2000). The desired organizational identity focuses on external perceptions and includes the visual representations, management vision, and the corporate mission (Kiriakidou and Millward 2000). The *actual* corporate identity is what the corporation is focusing on in its value orientation, which affects the minds and behaviors of its members (Kiriakidou and Millward 2000). This approach distinguishes between the internal and external orientations of the concept and allows researchers to study them independently. John Balmer (2001) defines corporate identity as a largely internal function. However, he proposes a more holistic approach through new terminology. Balmer suggests analyzing an organization's *business identity*, which he proposes should include corporate identity, but also considers *organizational* and *visual identities*.

Joep Cornelissen (2014), the writer of a leading textbook in communication, defines corporate identity from a communications perspective and provides a largely encompassing definition. Cornelissen defines corporate identity as "the basic profile

that an organization wants to project to all its important stakeholder groups and how it aims to be known by these various groups in terms of the corporate images and reputations that they have of the organization" (p. 9). He highlights that organizations go to great lengths to ensure their diverse stakeholders think of the organization in a positive and generally uniform manner that reflects the corporate identity. In doing so, organizations incorporate consistent tone, themes, visuals, and logos throughout their different mediums of communications (Cornelissen 2014). Corporate identity media includes products, price, logos, names, packaging, websites, and sponsorship, amongst many other modes of communication (Brønn 2005).

The aim of this thesis is to identify likely public interpretations of corporate identity; Cornelissen's definition assists in identifying elements of corporate identity to analyze as it focuses on communications from the company to the public and identifies the pathways for this communication. In addition to examining consistency across tone, themes and visuals, this thesis will analyze logos, mission statements and major elements present on companies' websites. In combination, a discourse analysis of these markers of corporate identity will provide sufficient material to identify aspects of civil religion and national identity that are communicated by corporations.

This thesis is interested in the communicated corporate image, in that it examines elements of the corporate identity as they are communicated to consumers. The next section elaborates on the methodology of discourse analysis and its application in studying the relationship between national identity, civil religion, and corporate identity.

Methodology

This thesis seeks to examine the relationship between national identity, civil religion, and corporate identity in the United States. In doing so, it analyses aspects of the communicated corporate identity across three diverse industries. It seeks to understand likely interpretations of the communicated corporate identities and their reflection of elements of civil religion and national identity. Figure 1, below, provides a simplified representation of the relationships and processes analyzed in this thesis.
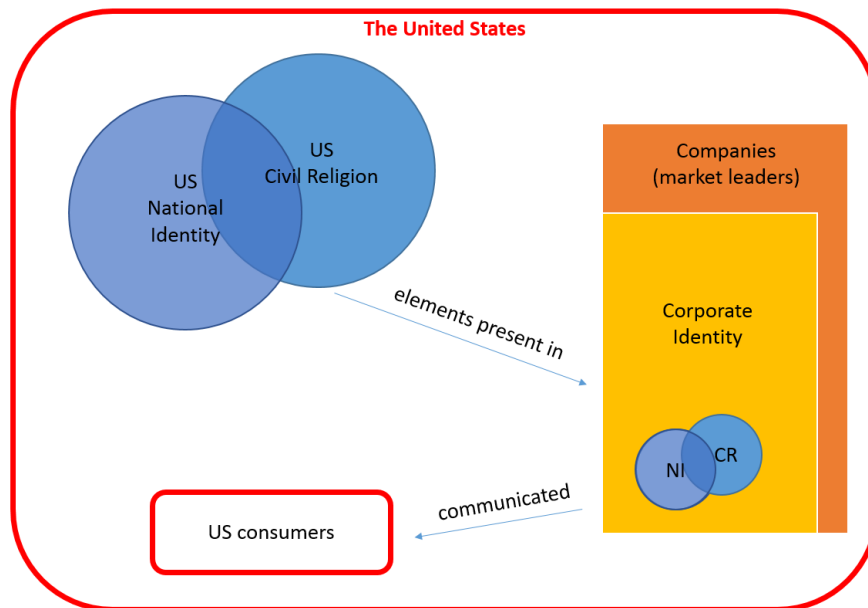
Figure 1, a simplified model of the relationships examined in this thesis.

There are many different understandings of discourse analysis and its applications (Meyer and Wodak 2001). This section outlines discourse analysis as employed in this thesis and the assumptions inherent within it, as a theory and methodology. In addition, it discusses the specific methodological steps taken in this research.

Discourse Analysis

Corporate identity and corporate image lend themselves to discourse analysis because of their acknowledged symbolic nature in combination with organizations' drive to reflect a cohesive and identifiable image. While there are several developed models for studying corporate identity and image, the majority of these are quantitative. As such,

these methods involve gathering large amounts of data and require a great deal of access to the internal workings of the organization (See van Riel and Balmer 1997). In addition, these methods do not speak to how the public interprets a corporation's communicated corporate identity in the same way discourse analysis does. Discourse analysis provides an accessible means to examine consumers' interpretations of elements of national identity and civil religion communicated through corporate identity. Further, it allows a better understanding of these interpretations by connecting them to larger discourses in the US.

There are many forms and approaches to discourse analysis (Meyer and Wodak 2001). Discourse analysis is problem oriented, in that it does not examine specific language devices, but rather allows various methods and theories to be integrated to best analyze a specific problem (Meyer and Wodak 2001). In its simplest form, discourse analysis is a methodology that seeks to identify the most likely interpretations an audience will gather from a 'text', including conversations, writings, and images (McKee 2001). Literary theorist Catherine Belsey defines 'discourse' as:

> A discourse involves certain shared assumptions which appear in the formulations that characterise it. The discourse of common sense is quite distinct, for instance, from the discourse of modern physics, and some of the formulations of the one may be expected to conflict with the formulations of the other. Ideology is inscribed in discourse in the sense that it is literally written or spoken in it ; it is not a separate element which exists independently in some free-floating realm of 'ideas' and is subsequently embodied in words, but a way of thinking, speaking, experiencing'. (Belsey 1980, p.5)

Belsey's (1980) definition eloquently and simply describes possible contradictions between different discourses. This thesis examines discourses from US national identity and civil religion, which can contradict or greatly differ from others. In addition, discourses can be informed by competing strands (Murray 2008). For example, American civil religion functions to provide social unity in "a nation of immigrants" and holds the ideal of America as "a melting pot"; however, it has been employed by various

groups to exclude different immigrant groups throughout history, such as with Muslim-Americans after 9/11 (Beasley 2004, p. 80).

Further, Belsey's (1980) definition provides a clear understanding of how ideology functions within discourses. Discourse analysis does not seek the 'correct' interpretation of the ideologies imbedded in a particular text, but rather the methodology assumes that multiple interpretations are feasible because a simple objective reality is not available to test interpretations against (McKee 2001). Instead, discourse analysis treats every account of reality as a 'text', including interviews, statistics, 'facts', and so on (McKee 2001). This reflects the philosophical underpinnings of social constructivism and postmodernism that inform discourse analysis, by emphasizing the importance of language in creating, maintaining, and producing social knowledge (Alvession 2009).

Social constructivism underlines the significance of history, culture and context in understanding happenings in society and asserts that this understanding is used to construct knowledge (Derry 1999). In social constructivism, all knowledge is derived from and reflects a specific perspective (Derry 1999). Social constructivism assumes: 1) knowledge is a product of human interaction; 2) knowledge is a social and cultural construct that is influenced by the group and the group's environment; and 3) group and individuals' actions are simultaneously informed by social knowledge (See Cottone 2007; Kim 2001). Kukla (2000) provides a clear and common example of the social construction of knowledge and the reflexive relationship between social knowledge and actors:

> Of course to say that the concept of a woman or a quark is constructed is not yet to say that women themselves, or quarks themselves, are constructed. The claim that these entities themselves are produced by intentional human activity is substantially stronger. In the case of women, it's easy to see how women might turn out to be constructed. Here is one possible (and entirely unoriginal) scenario. We begin by constructing the concept of a woman. We include in this concept all the traditional appurtenances of femininity: nurturance, seductiveness, social intelligence, a poor sense of direction, and so on. Naturally,

those to whom this concept is applied come to know that the concept is applied to them. This knowledge leads them to behave in ways that are different from how they *would* have behaved if they had not been so categorized. Perhaps it causes them to have a poor sense of direction by undermining their self-confidence. The result is social construction, not just of the concept of 'women', but of women. Women turn out to be a type of being that wouldn't exist if a certain pattern of intentional human activity had not taken place . . ." (Kukla 2000, p. 4).

Kukla's (2000) example of the process of social construction of knowledge highlights the need to be suspicious of our assumptions about knowledge and the 'nature' of things. Postmodernism is the backdrop against which social constructivism developed (Burr 2015). In its simplest form, postmodernism is the rejection of modernism, which focuses on rules, underlying and hidden structures, and the use of metanarratives to understand the social world through all-encompassing principles (Burr 2015). Postmodernism repudiates ideas like structuralism and absolute truth (Burr 2015). Instead of seeking an ultimate truth, postmodernism allows for multiple equally valid perspectives (Burr 2015).

Social constructivism and postmodernism provide a conceptual framework for understanding the development and usefulness of Discourse analysis. Examining 'truth' and 'knowledge' as social constructs, changes how we approach research. For example, discourse analysis values multi-perspectival work, as it assumes that different perspectives and methodological approaches produce different kinds of knowledge (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). Analysis of possible interpretations, alongside other forms of research such as traditional quantitative techniques, better allows researchers to understand the ways that people interpret their world (McKee 2001).

Further, discourse analysis has some advantages over other research methods. Interviews, surveys, and other qualitative and quantitative research methods, provide another text, which is often reflective of the situation in which the questions are being asked and may be skewed simply by asking questions (McKee 2001). These often costly and time-consuming forms of research are not necessary to identify likely

interpretations of a text, as individuals' interpretations often reflect the public discourses available (McKee 2001).

Conversely, discourse analysis shares some of these pitfalls. For example, it allows researchers an escape from dictating interviewees' answers through their question formation or mere presence (McKee 2001). However, the findings of a discourse analysis are also reflective of the research question and other researcher influences to some degree. In critiques of discourse analysis, this reflection of the researcher is often attributed to discourse analysis's lack of a set structure (Breeze 2011).This heightens the need for a well explained, systematic approach in discourse analysis research, which this thesis has taken great care to provide.

Other critics of discourse analysis argue that discourse analysts' claims are themselves partial, reflect the researcher's ideological standpoint, fail to acknowledge the possibility of multiple interpretations, and often suggest that their "single interpretation is uniquely validated by the textual facts" (Widdowson 1995, p. 169). However, Fairclough (1996) disputes this position, finding it naïve and lacking sophistication and nuance. While it is critical that researchers remain reflective of their own impartialities and acknowledge the possibility of multiple interpretations, Fairclough argues that this criticism assumes individuals' interpretations can be neutral, implies the social context is neutral, and places the actors outside of the discourses' construction.

Alan McKee (2001) deconstructs discourse analysis into its vital parts, stressing the importance of understanding the context of a text before continuing to ask how it might be interpreted. McKee suggests researchers pose to themselves questions such as "interpreted by whom?" and "in what context?" (p. 144). Context is considered a series of interrelated texts (McKee 2001). As a 'rough guide' to making reasonable interpretations, McKee (2001) defines three levels of context that must be considered when analyzing an element; 1) the entire text, 2) the genre of the text, and 3)the general context in which the text is distributed and viewed; which is particularly important for determining which aspects of the text are more important.

McKee's (2001) levels of context reflect Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis, which focuses on the language of the text, the discursive practices (which consider the processes that influence a text's creation and consumption), and broader social practices. The analysis presented in this thesis takes a similar approach by analyzing the company's use of language, the context in which a company communicates its corporate identity and the many factors that influence an American consumers' interpretation of that text, and general social practices in the US.

This subsection provides the theoretical and practical understanding and arguments for employing discourse analysis in this research. The following subsection discusses the practical methodological steps taken in this analysis.

Establishing Elements of American Civil Religion and National Identity

This thesis establishes elements of American civil religion and national identity for analysis in communicated corporate identity deductively and inductively. First, a deductive list of element types was constructed from the discussions presented in the literature review. Second, an inductive list of elements was assembled as additional significant elements were observed throughout the research process. This subsection outlines these lists and provides a description of the significance of each element in maintaining American national identity and civil religion. For readability, the elements and the arguments supporting them are presented briefly in a list format. In addition, this subsection describes the practical steps for identifying these elements.

Before analyzing elements of civil religion and national identity in communicated corporate identity, this thesis established criteria for identifying these components. These are items that have been identified by previous scholars as important for the maintenance of national identity and civil religion in the US. Constructed from the literature review of civil religion and national identity provided above, the criteria also consider the context of corporate identity. For example, the god of American civil religion is not included as an expected reference to be found in companies' communicated corporate identities as a direct reference to god could alienate some

customers. Further, those aspects of American civil religion closely related to economics are highlighted, such as the belief in boundless growth and prosperity.

Items included on the deductive list represent categories, rather than specific or concrete elements. These items were intentionally left open; first, because they are referred to as they are often presented in literature – general categories with only examples specifically identified. Second, establishing categories of elements, rather than specific images, symbols, words, and so on allowed the researcher the necessary space to recognize the artistic or creative extension of these categories and maintain a high level of awareness for elements not initially included.

Before analyzing the chosen texts, this deductive list was created for identifying references appealing to American civil religion and national identity through the employment of the following:

Employment of biblical archetypes in reference to the US or the American people	Biblical events and narratives, from both the old and new testament, serve as archetypes for interpreting events in the American experience (Cherry 1998; Bellah 1967). For example, Americans as the 'chosen people' is related to a long accepted biblical analogy equating America to Israel and the Promised Land and Europe to Egypt (Bellah 1967).
Displaying images of national figures	Like events, significant figures throughout American history are also interpreted through a biblical lens (Cherry 1998; Bellah 1992). This goes beyond symbolic meaning attached to presidents and political figures, to include prophets, martyrs, and devils, such as George Washington and Benedict Arnold (Cherry 1998).

Self-identification with the US or labeling values, beliefs, actions, or things as 'American'.	Companies self-identifying with the US, such as through an explanation or statement that the company is American (or comes from an American region or city) or has incorporated America into itself in a special way, or identifying their products as American immediately calls upon national identity.
Replication of American values, beliefs, and ideals	American civil religion and national identity maintains its own values and ideals. For example, the idea that 'all men are created equal' is a strong American value. Jefferson, in the Declaration of Independence, to legitimize the US establishes this ideal by calling upon a "higher law" of equality, reflecting both natural and biblical law (Bellah 1967). This value is reproduced in various political and legal discourses. Another example is the belief that boundless growth and prosperity are possible (Robbins 1981).
Displays of support for the American military, or reference to the military in a positive manner	Soldiers in the US armed forces represent the country's sacrifice in maintaining its role as the "New Jerusalem" and being a model for the world (Bellah 1967; Smith 2000). Many of the sacred rites and rituals of American civil religion are codified within the military, such as the sacredness of the American flag (Lorenzo 2014). Many of the national heroes, martyrs, and leaders are associated with the military directly or served in the armed forces (Lorenzo 2014). American civil religion holds the military in extremely high regard and closely associates supporting the military with patriotism, a form of practice of civil religion (Lorenzo 2014). Agnieszka Monnet (2012) finds, "[t]he class of willing sacrifices that every viable nation possesses is its military, which is why soldiers are something like a priestly order: subject to strict selection, training, rules, and privileges." This is true in the US, which accounts for the strong show of support given not only to members of the military but also to their spouses and families.

References to sacred American events	These events function to teach and reinforce symbols and ideas of national identity (Bellah 1967; Smith 2000; Cherry 1998). They function to integrate the community and the family into civil religion (Bellah 1967). Examples include Thanksgiving and Memorial Day (Bellah 1967).
Adoption of sacred national or civil religious symbols, particularly the use of the American flag or its colors	Sacred symbols in American national identity and civil religion extend to objects, words, and places (Bellah 1992). The American flag is a deeply sacred symbol in American civil religion (Bellah 1992). Other sacred national or civil religious symbols include the Liberty Bell (Bellah 1992) and words like *freedom*, *democracy*, and *God* (Cherry 1998). Another example is the physical space of the US, such as an outline of the continental states (Smith 2000).
References to sacred and iconic American places	Places, like events and people, can hold a sacred meaning in American national identity and civil religion (Bellah 1967). For example, The National Mall in Washington D.C. is iconic and holds many commemorative works that memorialize national figures, historic events, and military sacrifice (Gardella 2014a).
Mimicry of sacred rites and rituals	American national identity and civil religion maintain many sacred rites and rituals (Bellah 1967; Cherry 1998). For example, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools remains a common ritual in modern America (Cherry 1998).

After beginning research and examining companies using the above elements, an inductive list was constructed as other elements emerged. Some of the elements included on the inductive list are contained or assumed in the categories of the deductive list, above. However, these elements are included here as they were either highlighted variations of those on the deductive list in companies' communicated corporate identities or require some explanation for their use in the analysis. The specific findings of the analysis are presented in the next section, *Findings and Analysis*,

and include a discussion of the actual presence, use, and possible function of specific elements. However, as creating an inductive list of elements gathered through research was a necessary methodological step, the inductive list is introduced here.

These elements were identified inductively through repeated analysis of companies' communicated corporate identities:

References to the American Dream	The American Dream is employed and further shaped by individuals and institutions in the US, in large part because of its strong commercial power (Samuel 2012). It has been "appropriated by corporate America as a principle marketing strategy" (Samuel 2012, p. 8). The American Dream is a fundamental sentiment of American civil religion and national identity (Rhodes 2010). It is the belief and narrative of success that anyone, despite class, religion, race, or ethnicity, can make great achievements through hard work, risk-taking, sacrifice, and innovation (Rhodes 2010). "Innovation" is common language employed when referencing the American Dream.
Allusions to the US through sports references	Sporting events are commonly used as stages to celebrate and reaffirm beliefs and symbols of American civil religion (Butterworth 2008). Some popular sports including baseball, basketball and American football, have been stages for patriotism since the First World War, featuring players and spectators singing along to the 'Star Spangled Banner' before every game (Cyphers and Trex 2011). Sports teams' logos and imagery, such as the New York Yankees, are known internationally as symbols for the US and American cities.

References to 'diversity'	American civil religion is continuously adapting and celebrates diversity, allowing for pluralism and multiculturalism (Bellah 1992). American civil religion and national identity contain the belief that the US is the 'land of opportunity', an open and democratic society available to all (Murray 2008). This belief, coupled with civil religious ideals promoting support for immigrants, underlie the connection between American civil religion and the support for diversity in America (Murray 2008).
References to 'growth and prosperity'	The "boundless faith in the potentialities of economic growth and prosperity" is a scared belief in American civil religion (Robbins 1981, p. 476). It is inherently entangled with American civil religion's theism, patriotism, and competitive individualism (Robbins 1981).
References to being a 'good neighbor'	In addition to being one of the ten commandments of the Bible, to 'love thy neighbor' is a fundamental value of American civil religion. Lincoln believed that "the American civil creed was founded on the practice of love thy neighbor (and thy enemy) as thyself" (Havers 2009, p. 19). Further, Lincoln believed this understanding of charity to underlie democracy itself (Havers 2009). By referencing 'loving thy neighbor', companies further identify themselves with the US using civil religion and national identity.

For the purposes of identifying elements of civil religion present in communicated corporate identity, this thesis analyses companies' websites, at their American '.com' domains. Specifically, it systematically examines logos, mission statements, major elements of the websites, and consistencies in tone, themes, and visuals.[3] Consistencies in tone, themes, and visuals greatly contribute to shaping the overall communicated

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[3] For clarity and ease of comparison, the analysis of each company in subdivided into these categories (i.e. consistency across tone, themes, and visuals; logo; mission statement; major website elements; and corporate social responsibility and sponsorship), with the understanding that these classifications are artificial and much of the information could exist in more than one subsection. The compiled notes from this process for each company are available upon request. In addition, screenshots of each homepage and particular graphics highlighted in the analysis are also included in the appendix.

corporate identity. Visuals include images, fonts, style, colors, and so on. Data from each website was compiled around the same time, from mid-May to mid-June 2015.

Corporate websites are important signifiers of corporate identity including company culture, policies, qualities, and so on (Rao and Chaudhri 2008). Companies take great care to ensure their websites accurately convey their desired corporate identity cohesively (Rao and Chaudhri 2008). As several companies' websites are legal subsidiaries or otherwise separate from the parent company, this thesis takes great care to explore the uniformity of the communicated corporate identities through various online platforms and compares the corporate website with the separate retail website when necessary. Information from corporate websites was included in line with the criteria that the corporate and sales websites were well-integrated and communicated significantly similar corporate identities so that an American consumer would reasonably associate the corporate and retail site as one company website. So long as the corporate image presented is consistent throughout, this should not affect the findings.

Websites offer an organized, complete self-representation of the company, and thus a useful setting for analyzing elements of civil religion and national identity in communicated corporate identity:

> The website is the main text through which an organization defines and advertises itself and its activities to the world. It is the primary vehicle through which an organization communicates its core values, main goals, and priorities. This makes the website a rich environment for identifying underlying ideological meanings and assumptions that contribute to the identity, aspirations and actions of civil society actors. (Steger et al. 2012, p. 25).

In addition, when looking at major elements of the websites, this thesis will pay special attention to corporate social responsibility information when present. Most companies use corporate social responsibility to construct their communicated identities and legitimize their actions (Bravo et al. 2012). Corporate social responsibility is often constructed to legitimize and secure corporate power (Banerjee 2008). The scope of the

analysis will limit itself to the company's own website, and not rely on outside information. This ensures that statements are made with the certainty that the source of the communications is in fact the company being analyzed, as it is the aim of this thesis to analyze communicated corporate identities.

This subsection establishes the elements of American civil religion and national identity, provides a specific and practical means of gathering data, and argues for websites and corporate social responsibility information as significant signifiers of communicated corporate identity. The following subsection explains the systematic approach to choosing the industries and companies analyzed.

A Systematic Approach to Choosing Cases

In exploring the relationship between civil religion, national identity, and communicated corporate identities in the US, this thesis analyzes companies' communicated corporate identities across three different industries: food retailers and mass merchants, department stores, and automakers.[4] Looking at companies from diverse and distinct industries provides a greater opportunity for generalizing the findings and promotes further research. In addition, it allows for contrast and comparison between like companies selling like products and dissimilar companies selling dissimilar products. To maintain a systematic approach and ensure diversity amongst the companies analyzed, industries were selected to represent various purchase frequency product categories.

Purchase frequency refers to the number of times a customer purchases a particular product (Lawrence 1980). Marketing researchers and practitioners use purchasing frequency for a variety of purposes, including estimating new product sales before introducing the product to the market; assessing current and future changes in purchase frequency to determine price and sales promotion; determining the customer's investment in a product; and estimating individual retailers or vendors' sales and stock-out quantities (Brockett et al. 1996). Further, purchase frequency is used to assess costs associated with inventory control systems and predict sales trends (Brockett et al. 1996).

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[4] Industry categories represent those used by Bloomberg Industry Market Leaders.

High purchase frequency allows for increased brand switching (Dillon and Gupta 1996). Lower costs provide greater switching opportunities and price sensitivity is higher for frequently purchased items (Dillon and Gupta 1996). For example, a consumer might switch paper towel brands regularly, based on promotions or availability. However, products that are not purchased on a regular basis, low frequency purchase items, do not provide customers the same opportunity to compare and evaluate product performance, increasing the need for communications (Farris and Buzzel 1979). Thus, high and low purchase frequencies dictate different marketing and communications approaches from companies. By employing this selection criterion, the companies chosen should represent diverse approaches to customer communications.

After establishing criteria for choosing industries, companies were selected based on top market share percentages. This allows the greatest generalizability of the findings as these companies represent a large portion of each industry's overall market when taken together. In addition, the selected companies collectively employ hundreds of thousands of American residents; five of the top fifty employers in the US nationally are represented in this study ("U.S. Largest Employers").

The industry of food retailers and mass merchants represents high frequency purchase product categories, as consumers frequent these stores on a daily to weekly basis (Goodman 2008). The most recent data available on leading mass merchants and food retailers to the researcher at the time of writing this thesis was from 2014. The National Retail Federation published a list of the top 2014 retailers in the US based on annual US retail sales (Schultz 2014). According to the study, Walmart, Kroger Company, and Target Corporation were the largest retailers in the US in 2014 (Schultz 2014). Consequently, these three companies represent the industry of mass merchants and food retailers.

Department stores represent the mid-range purchase frequency product category. In the US, department stores are most often located in malls ("MallScape Advertising"). According to one marketing agency, 94 percent of adult Americans visit a mall each month ("MallScape Advertising"). The most recent data available to the

researcher at the time of writing this thesis was from 2014. In 2014, Kohl's Corporation, Sears Holdings Corporation, and Macy's Inc. held the leading market shares for department stores in the US (Schultz 2014).

Automakers represent the low purchase frequency product category. Before the 2008 recession, Americans purchased a new vehicle every four to six years (LeBeau 2012). However, today Americans purchase a new vehicle every six to eight years (LeBeau 2012). In 2014, the leading market share automakers in the US were General Motors, Ford Motor Company, and Toyota Motor Corporation ("U.S. market share of selected automobile manufacturers 2014").

High frequency purchase	Mid frequency purchase	Low frequency purchase
Daily – weekly	Weekly – monthly	Less than yearly
<u>Mass merchants and food retailers</u> - Walmart - Kroger - Target	<u>Department stores</u> - Macy's - Kohl's - Sears	<u>Automakers</u> - Ford - Toyota - GM

Table 1 Overview of selections, indicators, and chosen representative industries and companies.

This section outlines the methodology used to analyze companies' communicated corporate identities in examining the relationship between civil religion, national identity, and corporate identity in the US. It provides theoretical and practical arguments for the method employed and describes this research's commitment to a systematic approach. The next section discusses the findings and analysis.

Findings and Analysis

This analysis is aimed at answering the following research question: What is the relationship between national identity, civil religion, and corporate identity in the United States? Underlying the main research question, this thesis employs three sub questions to divide the analysis section.

The first subsection seeks to understand: How does the presence of elements of US national identity and American civil religion incorporated into companies' communicated corporate identities compare *within* industries in the US? This question is addressed by examining the three industries separately and comparing the market leaders of each industry. For the analysis of each company, a brief description of the company and its website is given, the prevalence and frequency of elements of US national identity and American civil religion are presented and analyzed, and an overall statement is made about the company's use of these elements.

The second subsection addresses the sub research question: How does the presence of elements of US national identity and American civil religion incorporated into companies' communicated corporate identities compare *across* industries in the US? This sub question is utilized to compare the industries themselves. These subsections build upon the findings and analyses from comparing companies within industries. Furthermore, it speculates possible reasons to account for similarities and differences in the use of elements of American civil religion and national identity across companies and industries.

The last subsection seeks to answer the sub research question: To what extent were the established elements of US national identity and American civil religion present in companies' communicated corporate identities? This question takes into account the elements established in the methodology section of this thesis, examines their prevalence and frequency, and speculates on the possible reasons for their inclusion or exclusion in the communicated corporate identities of the companies analyzed. To maintain the readability of this thesis, images referred to in the analysis can be found in the appendix.

Mass Merchants and Food Retailers

The mass merchant and food retailers industry subsection examines the three leading companies in this industry in the US; Walmart, Kroger, and Target. It analyzes these companies individually before comparing the prevalence and frequency of elements of US national identity and American civil religion between them.

Walmart

According to its site, Walmart is the largest retailer in the world. It is also the largest employer in the US ("U.S. Largest Employers"). Despite its size, Walmart continues to be a family owned company. According to its "Investor Information" page, the founder's, Sam Walton, heirs own over fifty percent of the company.

Walmart's website communicates an informal and family oriented corporate identity with a focus on affordability and savings. In general, the themes throughout the pages are mostly directed towards the products, using seasonal aspects. Although the website often points out Walmart's growing international presence, it emphasizes that Walmart originated in the US and continues to invest in America. This is done through presenting a narrative of Walmart that emphasizes its small town Arkansas roots and its American founder "Mr. Sam", or Sam Walton. This narrative reflects the American Dream and references growth and prosperity, by illustrating that Walton was able to grow his company into a multi-national corporation through hard work, innovation and sacrifice. To this end, Walton is presented as having experienced the boundless growth and prosperity available in the US.

Walmart's website displays its investments back into the US. This is demonstrated through Walmart's various US initiatives, including supporting the US military, investing in the American education system and job market, and protecting America's environment. Walmart's website outlines its mission in several ways, referring to its 'responsibility' to positively affect the American communities it operates in:

> It's our mission to create opportunities so people can live better. We consider it our responsibility to make a positive impact in the communities we serve. Whether it's through the grants we provide to the thousands of organizations

that share our mission or through the inspiring volunteer efforts of Walmart associates, we are passionate about helping people live better. One community at a time. ("Walmart Community Giving")

Accordingly, the majority of Walmart's Corporate Social Responsibility efforts primarily take place in the US. Walmart's US efforts are extensive and include working to better inner city food and fight hunger, create sustainable inner city gardens, aiding single working mothers, and supporting independent organizations working to better the US, such as the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and "Supporting Our Troops".

This focus on the US is strengthened throughout the website, through strong language and imagery. An example of this is the "US Manufactures" section of the website, which details a Walmart program in place to increase jobs in the US. The website states:

At Walmart, we believe in making a difference on the issues our customers and communities care about. We believe we can create more American jobs by supporting more American manufacturing. Jump-starting the manufacturing industry and rebuilding the middle class requires a national effort by companies, industry leaders, lawmakers and others.

Together, we can help spark a revitalization of U.S.-based manufacturing. By making production more affordable and feasible in the United States, we can bring our customers more U.S.-made products and manufacturers can create more jobs in America. ("Global Responsibility").

The accompanying image is that of a young woman walking through a cornfield, holding a large American flag, attached to the header "Investing in American Jobs" (see Appendix A7). This image, in referencing iconic American fields and the American flag, strongly fosters national identity, fortifying the message.

Another example is a section of the website titled "Acres for America". It is explained briefly on the website as "A 10-year, $35 million commitment to purchase and preserve 1 acre of wildlife habitat in the U.S. for every acre of land we develop" ("Global

Responsibility"). The picture accompanying the initiative displays a large tree, a bald eagle, and a red, white and blue banner with stars on it. These elements ensure that even without reading the text, the image is connected to the United States. These elements, a reference to the American flag and a sacred bald eagle, invoke strong feelings of national identity and civil religion.

Walmart's pages, including the homepage, advertise its initiatives for employing veterans multiple times. This and the information provided through links, coupled with pictures of veterans in US uniforms provide a strong message of support for the American military. For example, Walmart's corporate homepage shows an American soldier laughing with his two small children, one of which is holding the American flag. The accompanying text reads, "Serving Those Who Serve". This reinforces the image's connection to US national identity and civil religion in that it calls upon common language used to describe a person employed in military service. It further reinforces the belief in American civil religion that military personnel are heroes for serving their country.

Overall, the website employs several strong visual elements of US national identity and civil religion. It does this through, for example, repeated use of the American flag and pictures of American military personal. The language surrounding them reinforces these images' connection to American national identity and civil religion. Walmart's communicated corporate identity references elements from American national identity and civil religion; however, it balances these references by positioning itself in an international and global context. In areas where elements of American civil religion and national identity are employed, they are strongly presented.

Kroger

Kroger is the second largest retailer in the US, and the largest food retailer (Schultz 2014). "The Kroger Co. Family of Stores spans many states with store formats that include grocery and multi-department stores, discount stores, convenience stores and jewelry stores" ("About Kroger"). The company conducts business under more than twenty different banners in the US; Kroger does not operate outside of the US.

According to its website, all of its different stores "share the same belief in building strong local ties and brand loyalty with our customers" ("About Kroger"). Kroger's other brands maintain completely independent and un-integrated websites and are not included in this analysis.

Kroger's website has a clean, simple, and minimalistic theme while retaining a feeling of friendliness and community orientation. Its website is primarily informational; it does not function as an additional sales channel. Unlike many of its competitors, Kroger does not engage in online sales.

The history provided on the website highlights the humble beginnings of its founder Barney Kroger. "In 1883, Barney Kroger invested his life savings of $372 to open a grocery store at 66 Pearl Street in downtown Cincinnati, Ohio" ("History of Kroger"). The language used to describe its history frames it within the narrative of the American Dream by emphasizing innovation, hard work and taking risks as a core component of the company.

Throughout the website, many sections incorporate aspects of national identity and civil religion. Below, selections of these are briefly elaborated on to illustrate Kroger's extensive use of these aspects.

One example is found on a page outlining barbeque and other summer recipes presenting a slide show including pictures of different summer themed foods, captioned "Kroger Red White and Barbeque is here". "Red, white and blue" is a common reference to the national colors of the US, and Kroger has used this saying to construct a play on words by replacing 'blue' with barbeque. Calling upon the colors of the national flag is a way of instantly framing this page and its contents as American.

Kroger's 'Community' page lists its corporate social responsibility initiatives. The subtitle of the page is "Bringing Help and Hope to our Neighbors and Communities". Prior to listing individual links to the company's major initiatives, the website provides a brief synopsis of its social responsibility works:

> Kroger has a long history of bringing help and hope to the communities we serve. Since our earliest days, Kroger and the Kroger Family of Associates have

taken care of our neighbors and each other. Today we contribute more than $220 million annually in funds, food and products to support local communities. We focus on feeding the hungry through more than 80 local Feeding America food bank partners, in addition to supporting women's health, our troops and their families, and local schools and grassroots organizations. We are also strong supporters of The Salvation Army, American Red Cross and organizations that promote the advancement of women and minorities. ("Community").

Not only do these statements, found throughout a large portion of the website, stress Kroger's commitment to programs that aid the communities of its customers, but also engages language that implies it is intrinsically a part of those communities in the US. The use of "our" when talking about "neighborhoods and communities" and supporting the military can be seen as a way of creating a connection between the company and its American customers using aspects of national identity and civil religion. Further, the phrasing 'taking care of our neighbors' strongly evokes themes of powerful values in civil religion, such as 'love thy neighbor'.

At the top of Kroger's homepage, there is a picture of a soldier hugging his young daughter, who is holding an American flag. The picture is captioned "You give, We give". This corporate social responsibility initiative is briefly explained, stating that Kroger is "supporting the troops" by matching all donations to the United Service Organizations (USO), up to one million US dollars. The USO is an organization that provides moral support to US troops, veterans, and their families ("Honoring Our Heroes"). A more detailed description page promotes the military and provides details about Kroger's support. Through its USO initiative, titled "Honoring Our Heroes", Kroger is supporting this practice and further elevating the special status of the military.

Kroger has many references to US national identity and American civil religion. Kroger's communicated corporate identity in itself contains a sense of being American. This is reflected in abundant references to the national colors, Kroger's support for the US military and American communities.

Furthermore, Kroger references biblical and American civil religion values by employing language such as "taking care of our neighbors" several times. Another

example is Kroger's "Request a Donation" initiative link, which says "We are committed to helping our communities grow and prosper. Each year, we assist hundreds of local nonprofit organizations, schools and churches working to make the communities we share better places to live and work" ("Community"). Again, Kroger is identifying itself with the US through its use of language, such as "the communities we share", and the employment of the principle of "growth and prosperity" ("Community"). Kroger is reinforcing the image that it is tremendously American and practicing charity in accordance with American civil religion.

Overall, Kroger's website employs numerous strong elements of US national identity and civil religion throughout. It does so through both its language and visuals. One possible influencing factor is that Kroger operates nationally, but not outside the US. This could also reflect a genuine relation to its American history.

Target

Target operates in all fifty states in the US. In addition to its regular merchandise, some locations have optical centers, clinics, pharmacies, and portrait studios ("The Shopping Experience at Target Stores"). Until the beginning of 2015 Target also maintained operations in Canada, however the company has since abandoned all Canadian business operations (Wahba, "Target Can't Wait to Get Out of Canada).

Target.com is a wholly separate subsidiary of Target. According to its corporate website, "To date, Target.com is the fourth most-visited retail website in the U.S. with more than 26 million unique visitors each month on average" ("The Shopping Experience at Target Stores"). The majority of this analysis uses information from Target's corporate website; however, Target.com maintains a consistent image with Target. It is unlikely a consumer would know the two were legally separate entities.

Target's website presents a fun, clean, and trendy image. As Target.com is primarily a sales channel, nearly every aspect of the website is devoted to sales or sale advertisements. There are several links throughout the website that offer "tips" or "advice" on style, makeup, home décor, cooking, and so on. Additionally, Target has

multiple pages dedicated to communicating its corporate social responsibility initiatives on its corporate site.

Target's corporate homepage's topics range from innovative design and guest experience to supporting "the communities [Target] shares" ("About Target: Our Passion, Our Commitments"). The page briefly describes some of Target's social responsibility works:

> We have a long history of **supporting the communities** where we do business by giving 5 percent of our income. We also volunteer our time and talent, partner with like-minded organizations to build stronger, safer, healthier communities, and invest in the development and well-being of our team members. ("About Target: Our Passion, Our Commitments").

This information is repeated several times throughout the website. It appears on the homepage with a link to a "mission & values" page, where it is recited again using nearly identical language. It is also highlighted on the company's social responsibility page.

Target's "Corporate Responsibility" page lists "areas of commitment" that the company focuses its various initiatives on:

> Every time we open our doors, we continue a commitment that's been growing since 1946: a brighter future for our team members, our communities and the world we live in. Explore our areas of commitment:
> > Education, sustainability, health & well-being, responsible sourcing, safety & preparedness, team members, volunteerism ("Corporate Responsibility: Here for Good").

The page offers a link to each initiative and various corporate reports. The majority of the initiatives' descriptions include reoccurring references to "community":

> Supporting communities through giving has always been a cornerstone of our business and a belief that guides so many of our decisions. Each year, we've given 5 percent of our profit to communities, which adds up to more than $4 million each week. We also believe that donating our time, talent and resources

is equally important as the income we give. Our team members give hundreds of thousands of hours volunteering in their communities every year. ("Corporate Responsibility: Here for Good").

Target strongly focuses its corporate social responsibility efforts on community, volunteerism, and educational efforts. Although the company no longer maintains stores outside of the US, there are no direct references to the US. Even when mentioning specific efforts, the communities or schools' locations are not mentioned. The majority of Target's social responsibility and volunteer affiliates are internationally oriented organizations, such as United Way and Points of Light. Although, Target does list working with the Corporation for National and Community Service, an American Federal agency promoting and organizing volunteer work in the US, it is not prevalent on the website.

The only direct references to the US on the website at the time of research were in two or three quotes across different pages. For example, on the Corporate Reasonability page there is a quote from the U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan; she says, "Target has been a great supporter of our efforts to improve education" ("Corporate Responsibility: Here for Good").

Conversely, Target does specifically identify its international works on its "education" page. It is possible that this implies its many other projects take place in the US; however, Target's comments about its international work are not prominent on the site, but rather are placed at the bottom of a secondary page of its Corporate Responsibility pages. Further, the remarks are brief:

> Our team members live and work in nearly 30 countries around the world. To strengthen those communities, we launched the Target International Giving Program in 2002, supporting disaster relief and education programs for children and youth. In 2014, Target gave more than $2.5 million on behalf of Target to 69 NGOs in 13 countries. ("Education: Support, Programs, Activities").

While Target makes many references to its commitment to support communities, it does not identify these communities as specifically American. At times Target's website uses inclusive language, such as "our communities"; however, more often it discusses "supporting communities" generally or its team members' supporting "their communities".

Overall, Target's communicated corporate identity demonstrates a distinct lack of incorporation of elements of American civil religion and national identity. Although it strongly focuses its corporate social responsibility efforts on community, volunteerism, and educational efforts, it does not make many direct references to the US. This could reflect Target's fun trendy image, which possibly views references to the American civil religion and national identity as traditional or conservative. Further, it could speak to the company's target customer base being educated, wealthy and non-ethnocentric. Alternatively, it could reflect Target's recently failed ventures in Canada, or a combination of them.

Comparison of Mass Merchants and Food Retailers

The communicated corporate identities of these three mass merchants and food retailers share many commonalities and differences. While each company included information about its beginnings and its ongoing corporate social responsibility efforts, they each did so in distinctly different ways and with great variation in prevalence of aspects of national identity and civil religion. Overall, Kroger maintained a high prevalence, Walmart maintained a moderate prevalence, and Target maintained a very low prevalence of elements of US national identity and civil religion.

From a broad perspective, Kroger involved and encompassed numerous elements of US national identity and American civil religion into its communicated corporate identity. Walmart, although it employed many of the same elements, did not fully embrace these elements as a core component of its communicated corporate identity. Target engaged little to none of these elements of US national identity and civil religion on its website or in its communicated corporate identity.

Both Walmart and Kroger emphasize their humble beginnings in the American mid-west (Arkansas and Ohio, respectively). However, Walmart uses its humble beginnings as a means to highlight the company's growth into the multi-national corporation it is today. Alternatively, Kroger highlights its similarly modest start to frame the current communicated corporate identity of the company and maintain a local, small store feeling despite being one of the largest retailers in the US. Both allude to the American Dream in the description of their history. Unlike Kroger and Walmart, Target does not refer to its beginnings or the US in explaining its mission or company values.

This difference between Kroger and Walmart can also be seen in the two companies' treatment of their mission statements and core values. Kroger uses inclusive language, "we always live by our core values", to describe values of honesty, integrity, respect, diversity, safety, and inclusion. Kroger attributes these values to its small American beginnings and prominently displays them on their own, easy to find, page. While Walmart also attributes its mission statement to its founder, "We save people money so they can live better", it is not available on any page, but rather is an answer in the 'Frequently Asked Questions'-section. However, Walmart does have a statement of its "Global Ethics" available through the website. Walmart's Global Ethics statement emphasizes Walmart's growing international presence, while referencing the company's efforts to promote these ethical standards in its US stores.

While Walmart and Kroger show a significant prevalence of elements of national identity and civil religion, Target does not. The main difference between Walmart and Kroger lies partly in the fact that Walmart has a very balanced overall presence of nationally and internationally focused pages, sections and initiatives, while Kroger strictly focuses on the US. This could reflect Walmart having significantly more international activity than Kroger. Interestingly, Target also highlights it global initiatives, despite it no longer maintaining international activities. This is particularly noticeable, as Target does not refer to the US.

Walmart and Kroger both refer to the American Dream, have numerous allusions to the American flag and national colors, highlight support for the US military and

veterans, refer to US neighbors and community abundantly, and have extensive corporate social responsibility efforts in the US on which they elaborate. In contrast, Target does none of this.

In short, within the industry of mass merchants and food retailers, there is a noticeable difference in the prevalence and frequency of aspects of US national identity and American civil religion in the communicated corporate identities of its largest market shareholders.

Department Stores

The following subsection examines the department store industry. It does so by analyzing the three market leaders in the US, Macy's, Kohl's, and Sears. Before discussing a comparison of the companies, they are analyzed individually for prevalence and frequency of elements of US national identity and American civil religion.

Macy's

Macy's is one of the oldest department stores in the US. All of its stores are located in the US and US territories (Guam and Porto Rico). Macy's, Inc. owns Macy's and several other department stores, including Bloomingdales. Some of the information for this analysis was necessarily gathered from the corporate site. However, because Macy's, Inc.'s corporate site is only loosely integrated with Macys.com, it is noted where information comes from. Because this thesis examines Macy's communicated corporate identity, the analysis is based on information from Macys.com as much as possible.

Macy's hosts several well-known American traditions, including The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, Fourth of July Fireworks in New York City, flower shows in San Francisco and several other cities, and holiday traditions including the arrival of Santa Claus, tree lightings and animated window displays. These events are highlighted on Macy's corporate site. Macy's is arguably an American icon in itself and this is often at the center of its communicated corporate identity. Several times throughout its self-descriptions, Macy's refers to itself as "Iconic" and "American".

Macy's logo is a stylized writing of the name accompanied by a red star. Although this symbol on its own it cannot be assumed a reference to the American flag,

variations of its use throughout the website clearly are. Matching it with white and blue strongly resembles the American flag and US national imagery generally.

The Macy's.com website is clearly a sales channel; in that it advertises products and provides little additional information beyond its promotions and product displays. Its homepage highlights its current sales and some corporate social responsibility initiatives as they immediately relate to customers.

The website quickly associates itself with American culture. For example, instead of advertising "Father's Day", the top of the company's homepage advertises gifts for "Great American Dads". Below the Father's Day advertisement, men and children are shown together wearing a mix of sports merchandise from across the US. Los Angeles Dodger's jerseys and hats, and New York Yankees' hats and shirts are clear symbols of the US, as these sports teams' logos are iconic American symbols. Notably, the New York Yankees logo is the most widely recognized sports logo in the US ("Ranking Best Logo's in Sports").

At the time of research, Macy's website was promoting its annual summer long "American Icon celebration". The slogans for the "celebration 2015" are "a celebration of the people, places, and things we love" and "a celebration of American pride". This "celebration" includes donations to a veterans' fund for 25 percent off in-store purchases, a donation to a veterans' fund for every "American Selfie" submitted, a showcase of American designers (notably displaying items in red, white and blue), and more.

Alongside the language used to describe the "celebration", the imagery used in these promotions evoked numerous elements of US national identity and civil religion. Red, white and blue were the dominant colors for the promotions, in fonts, graphics and pictures. In addition, many other elements of US national identity and American civil religion were present; including, the American flag and stylized references to it, outlines of the continental US, New York skyline, pictures of military personnel, military patches, photos of well-known American landmarks such as the Golden Gate Bridge, and stylized

items commonly associated with American culture such as apple pie and hot dogs (see appendix D).

The posts on corporate social responsibility initiatives on Macys.com are infrequent and contain little information. Macy's, Inc. does have a "Social Responsibility" page. The majority of these initiatives are aimed at bettering the manufacturing, production, and other processes of the company and do not significantly encompass elements of US national identity and civil religion.

Overall, the clear use of these elements further communicates the importance and inclusion of American civil religion and national identity at the core of Macy's communicated corporate identity. Although the website mainly functions as a sales channel, Macy's incorporate these elements wherever possible and does very explicitly. This observation fits perfectly with the company's extensive commitments to supporting and celebrating American traditions as discussed in the beginning of this section.

Kohl's

Kohl's is an American department store operating in 49 states. Currently, Kohl's does not maintain stores internationally; however, it does offer international shipping from its website. According to its website, Kohl's operates over 1,100 family-oriented department stores and a retail website. Kohl's has several different websites, including their main sales site Kohl's.com, Kohl's careers, and Kohl's corporate. While Kohl's refers to these as distinctly different websites, customers would not likely view them as such. The sites present consistent identities and are well integrated, despite serving different functions.

As Kohl's main customer website is a sales channel, the majority of the site is dedicated to displaying products. In its corporate materials, Kohl's defines its identity as "approachable, real, inclusive, understandable, [and] friendly" ("Investor Relations"). In addition, the company limits their marketing material by also defining what it is not. According to its website, "Kohl's is not surreal, edgy, high maintenance, dark, [or] too sophisticated" ("Investor Relations"). This image is successfully executed and consistent throughout its website.

At the time of research, its homepage hosted a "Memorial Day Sale" promotion. This sale advertisement was predominantly placed at the top of the homepage and displayed several American flag inspired products like shoes and shirts with stars and stripes. American themed products were not highlighted anywhere else on the site. In addition, visiting the website after Memorial Day, Kohl's had already removed any references to the American flag.

Furthermore, Kohl's participates in and supports numerous corporate social responsibility initiatives. The website describes the company's mission in doing so:

> At Kohl's, we believe in giving back to the communities we serve, not just with money and resources but also with talent and time. Through our community giving and volunteer program, we support kids' health and education, environmental initiatives and women's health. ("Investor Relations").

However, there are few references to these programs on its main website and no strong emphasis on American communities. On the bottom of its homepage, Kohl's promotes one of its corporate social responsibility initiatives, its "Kohl's Cares" program. The initiative supports children's education and health. Customers are encouraged to purchase select books and stuffed animals, from which all of the net profits are "donated to kids' health and education initiatives *nation*wide" ("Kohl's Cares"). This is one of the few instances where Kohl's mentions the US explicitly.

Overall, Kohl's website, and subsequently its communicated corporate identity, incorporates few references to elements of US national identity of American civil religion. As Kohl's does not operate outside of the US, and maintains an image that could easily incorporate elements of American civil religion and national identity, it is difficult to speculate as to why Kohl's distinctly lacks these elements.

Sears

'Sears, Roebuck and Company' is an American department store. Sears' communicated corporate identity is simple, minimal, family and household oriented, and focused on savings. Although once a successful department store and arguably an American Icon

itself, today Sears is fully owned by its parent company, Sears Holdings Corporation. Its parent company owns several other brands, including K Mart. Sears and its parent company do not maintain integrated websites and communicate vastly different corporate identities. However, Sears' does not contain mission statements or corporate social responsibility initiatives, nor does it report its parent company's social responsibility initiatives. Its website operates exclusively as a sales and advertisement channel, and provides almost no information beyond its product promotions and credit card offers. As such, the communicated corporate identity, when considered alongside the minimal features of the website, feels somewhat bland and generic.

Sears.com does not acknowledge any corporate social responsibility. However, through its parent company, Sears Holdings Corp., Sears follows several strict employment programs designed to support military members, veterans, and their families. This information is also repeated in MySears Community. MySears Community is an online forum that employs the Sears logo. The site allows customers to ask Sears associates questions about their products and other DIY projects, and provides project ideas and articles. However, it maintains a distinctly different communicated corporate image from either Sears or its parent company. In addition, it is not accessible through sears' website.

Overall, Sears' communicated corporate identity does not encompass many elements of US national identity or American civil religion. This is likely the result of its website being used only for sales and promotions that are directly related to sales. Although in actuality Sears' may encompass more elements of US national identity or American civil religion through its holding company, this is not reflected in its *communicated* corporate identity as seen by customers and visitors of the website.

Comparison of Department Stores

As the individual analyses above exemplify, Macy's, Kohl's, and Sears vary dramatically in their use of elements of US national identity and American civil religion. Macy's fully embraced and incorporated aspects of US national identity and civil religion into the

core of its communicated corporate identity. However, Kohl's made few references to these elements and Sears made almost none.

This is highlighted by Macy's extensive use of numerous elements of US national identity and civil religion throughout its website in the promotion of its products and in its self-descriptions. In contrast, Kohl's presented few references to these elements. Aside from mentioning the US as the place of one of its social responsibility initiatives, it promoted a Memorial Day sale. However, the sale was detached from any social responsibility initiatives or further elements of US national identity and civil religion, such as 'support the troops'. Nevertheless, Kohl's showed some recognition of the US, while Sears did not explicitly reference the US or allude to elements of national identity and civil religion.

This could speak to differentiation among companies, in that companies want to maintain independent and unique image to attract customers. This could also be attributed to differences among their target audiences. In the case of Sears, this likely reflects a lack of independent operations between Sears and its parent company.

Automakers

This subsection is focused on analyzing the communicated corporate identities of the leading automakers in the US. As with the other industries' analyses, this includes first individually examining the three market leaders of the industry. In this case, the leading market shareholders are General Motors, Ford Motor Company, and Toyota.

General Motors

General Motors, commonly referred to as GM, was originally founded in 1908 in Michigan and has a long history in the US and Canada. The company has been one of the most successful automakers historically. However, in 2009 GM went through a government-backed reorganization after filing for bankruptcy protection under Chapter 11 ("Courts Documents and Claims Register"). Today, the company is again profitable and publically traded. The information on the website moves towards creating a new communicated corporate identity for the "new GM". The company identifies itself as starting in 2010, after its 2009 government-backed reorganization. On its "about us"

page, it refers to customers and communities, however never explicitly US customers or communities. The same is true for their "Corporate Strategy", which is internationally oriented, and does not have any specific references to the US.

GM's website is dramatic, dark, sleek, and modern. A large portion of the website is devoted to GM's products. The GM.com website focuses on GM's "core brands", Chevy, Buick, GMC, and Cadillac. While GM holds several other brands, which are listed on the homepage of the US website, they are not sold in North America. There are also links to its four American brands' websites; however, each brand has its own communicated corporate identity. As this thesis seeks to examine the communicated corporate identity of GM, it is beyond the scope of this research to conduct an in-depth analysis of each of its brands' websites.

There are several sections of the site devoted to GM leadership and a strong emphasis on technology, research and development, and innovation. GM's website also reports a great deal of corporate social responsibility efforts, dealing with various social issues, including supply chain responsibility, environment, sustainability and diversity. However, there are almost no elements of US national identity or American civil religion. Most of the pages discussing GM's corporate social responsibility initiatives are internationally oriented and make several mentions to GM's international works.

One of the site's pages does discuss a specific corporate social responsibility effort in the US, specifically in Detroit, famously the home of GM's headquarters. It is common knowledge within the US that the company's 2009 bankruptcy and previous financial trouble has had a devastating impact on the city, which is likely why GM has distinguished it from its other efforts in the US and around the globe. This page reports on a grant donated by GM and the GM Foundation that is meant to increase graduation rates in the city of Detroit ("Team GM Cares"). The page goes on to describe GM's commitment to helping other communities where GM operates. Although these initiatives take place in the US, the reporting on GM's website makes few references to the US.

However, one GM Foundation page specifically highlights all of GM's efforts in the US. While it does repeat information found on other parts of the website, it does so in a way that highlights the US. For example, the page elaborates on its effects across America, "The General Motors Foundation has provided Habitat for Humanity with a grant to help revitalize cities across the United States. The grant is dedicated to help construct healthier and stronger neighborhoods." ("About the GM Foundation"). While this page does frame GM's corporate social responsibility efforts in an American context, it does not place GM in the same context. For example, the website never refers to these neighborhoods as "ours" or otherwise connects itself to them.

Overall, General Motor's website and communicated corporate identity does not embrace its long American heritage or use a significant number of elements of US national identity and civil religion. As mentioned in the first part of this subsection, GM sees its 2010 regain of independent status as a fresh start, which could explain why their focus is more on the future and not their heritage. However, this does not explain why even in these communications the US is referenced so little.

One reason could be that GM's four American brands, GMC, Chevrolet, Buick, and Cadillac, maintain very independent websites, and that these are the vehicle for more aspects of American national identity and civil religion. Although these websites are not integrated, and do not communicate GM's corporate identity, but rather their own brand identity, it is important to recognize that these brands' communicated corporate identities generally embrace aspects of American national identity and civil religion more than GM. This is especially noticeable in their corporate social responsibility and promotion efforts, as each of GM's four base brands in the US advertises and offers a military service discount.

Ford

Ford Motor Company is an American Automaker, founded by Henry Ford in Detroit, Michigan. It is commonly referred to as Ford. Ford's headquarters remain in Detroit today. The Ford family maintains a controlling share of the company. Unlike some of its competitors, Ford was able to survive the 2008 crisis without governmental aid.

Ford's corporate website and brand sites are extremely well integrated. It is unlikely a consumer would recognize the move from one to the other. Because of this, this thesis examines information from both. However, because Ford's other brands, such as Lincoln, are not integrated into either site and maintain independent communicated corporate identities, they are not examined.

Ford's website and by extension, its communicated corporate identity, is vibrant, colorful, energetic, and modern. Although the website is modern in its design, there are references to the company's long history. The history of Ford is intertwined with the US and the website acknowledges this. For example, near the top of the homepage, there is a link that highlights Ford's famous past, "Over a Century of Innovation, celebrating Ford's history" is written below a picture of a model-T car. The information on the link acknowledges Ford's American roots and its future plans in Detroit.

In addition, The Ford Drives U program page elaborates on how students and recent graduates can get 500 dollars back after purchasing a Ford vehicle. The images surrounding the promotion include an aerial photo of a typical American college campus sports facility including a baseball field and an American football field, and a photo of graduates throwing their traditional 'caps' in the air at graduation (see appendix H). The explicit mention of American university graduates alongside an image of an American football field can be seen as a reference to US national identity. As discussed in the latter half of the methodology section, sports, especially baseball and American football, are a part of the US national identity and civil religion in that they represent a historical means of belonging and following 9/11 came to be viewed as a symbol of resilience and patriotism (Butterworth 2008).

In addition, Ford's website has a section highlighting its employees. The "Our people" section features pictures of the company's employees and either a short quote, description of their job, or description of their experience. Several employees are described as active duty Reserves. For example, Todd Brooks, an engineering supervisor, description reads, "as an engineering supervisor at Ford and a deployed U.S. Navy Reserve Force intelligence supervisor, Todd has two serious careers" ("Who We Are:

Ford Career Profile"). While this and the other two instances described above demonstrate the presence of elements of US national identity and civil religion within Ford's communicated corporate identity, these references are not dominant in that identity.

The 'Warriors in Pink' initiative is the only corporate social responsibility program highlighted on Ford's website. It refers to the fight against breast cancer and features a number of ways in which visitors of the website can donate to the program. However, once more, it does not significantly use elements of American national identity or civil religion or refer the US in any explicit manner.

Although Ford's website has references to its American heritage and uses several elements of US national identity and American civil religion in certain specific contexts, they account for a small portion of the website's content. Overall, Ford's communicated corporate identity provides a moderate sense of American national identity or civil religion.

Toyota

Toyota Motor Corporation is a Japanese auto manufacturer that maintains extensive international operations. The exact legal structure of the parent company and its subsidiaries is unclear from the website; however, each is held under the common name, Toyota.

Its US site, Toyota.com, is tailored to the company's American clientele. The site is primarily informational and assists customers interested in making a purchase to gather information about its products and "find a dealer". Toyota's website is clean, modern, sleek, and invokes a sense of American community. Toyota.com boasts an extensive website, providing a great deal of information, of which only a marginal part deals with sales or promotion of specific products.

Although Toyota is a Japanese automaker that maintains extensive international operations, it has formulated mission and vision statements especially for its US operations. The Toyota Motor Sales U.S.A., Inc. mission and vision statements are as follows:

Mission Statement: "To attract and attain customers with high-valued products and services and the most satisfying ownership experience in America."
Vision Statement: "To be the most successful and respected car company in America." ("The Toyota Story: More Than Great Cars and Trucks").

Toyota makes sure the consumer is informed about its historic involvement in the US. They present a narrative of Toyota's history in the US. The "Our Story" section emphasizes Toyota as a part of America and American life, "We've been part of life in America for over 50 years. And while we're passionate about making great cars and trucks, our story is about much more than our vehicles." ("The Toyota Story: More Than Great Cars and Trucks"). There is a link to a more complete timeline that includes Toyota's overseas accomplishments; however, even this timeline continues to focus on the company's US accomplishments. While most Americans are likely very aware that Toyota is a foreigner owed company, this would not be immediately clear from the website.

In addition to highlighting its past in the US, the website also places great emphasis on its current commitments. Toyota discusses its extensive programs within the US and its partnerships with American organizations. At the top of a page about "Diversity and Inclusion", there is a picture of and quote from Jim Lentz, the CEO of Toyota Motor North America. Lentz says:

There is a simple truth behind our approach to diversity & inclusion: if we want to build great cars and trucks for the way our customers live, Toyota will strive to be a reflection of the America in which we live. ("Toyota's Diverse Workforce: Great Employees Build Great Cars").

Not only does this statement directly mention the US, but it also emphasizes that the US is a diverse country, acknowledging the American civil religious values of diversity, multiculturalism, and pluralism.

On a page outlining Toyota's operations, focus is placed on how vehicles for sale in the US are largely researched, designed, and manufactured by American employees. It goes on to say the following:

> It just makes sense: vehicles destined for American drivers and roads should be shaped by the people who know them best. That's why so much of what rolls off our assembly lines here is imagined here. We have world-class design, research and development facilities throughout the U.S., from Virginia to Michigan, Arizona to California. And thousands of the brightest thinkers from all across America who call those facilities home. Check out what they're doing to put more inspiration, intelligence and fun into every mile. ("Toyota Operations: Hundreds of Thousands of Americans Hard at Work").

Again, Toyota is focusing on its American operations and the good it is doing for Americans. The website uses informal language and builds up its American employees. Unemployment has been an important political issue for Americans, especially since the 2008 market crash. Throughout the page, there are many pictures of "Americans" working.

This use of language and imagery continues on the "Career" pages. Toyota's military hiring program is highlighted at the top of the page, titled "Hiring Our Heroes". It states, "We're proud to partner with Medal of Honor recipient Sgt. Dakota Meyer and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation on their Hiring Our Heroes program which assists veterans with finding work after service." ("Toyota Careers: We're Looking for the Brightest People"). Not only does this show Toyota's support for American military veterans, but also its cooperation and partnership with a veteran organization and the US government (see appendix I5).

In addition, the website offers a large amount of information about the company's various corporate social responsibility initiatives in the US. It does not provide any information about Toyota's overseas social responsibility efforts, although as an international company Toyota maintains corporate social responsibility efforts around the world. The majority of efforts focus on supporting existing programs in the

US, rather than creating new, independent Toyota operated programs. These programs and initiatives are briefly elaborated on, using very inclusive language. "Let's support a cleaner road ahead", "Let's build a safe world together" ("Toyota: Supporting Our Communities"). The use of "let's" further supports the image of Toyota being a part of the American community. Likewise, Toyota.com consistently refers to the US as "the country" or "this nation". This reaffirms the image that Toyota is talking to America and that it shares a meaningful connection or relationship with the US and Americans. The website generally places its sustainability efforts inside the US. However, the use of "North America", which appears in other places on the website, is somewhat confusing as it takes away from the clear focus on the US.

On a subsequent page, Toyota shares the mission of its grants program, in which it states, "We […] have a strong commitment to strengthening opportunities for diverse and underserved populations, helping during times of disaster, and supporting organizations that meet the needs of local communities across the U.S." ("Toyota: Supporting Our Communities").

Taken together, the strong presence of numerous elements of US national identity and American civil religion contribute to Toyota's communicated corporate identity. Toyota.com gives almost no indication that the company is Japanese. To the contrary, the website goes to great lengths to identify itself with the US. The company's dotcom website alludes to the US on nearly every page. It communicates a mission statement specific to its US operations, it continuously highlights its extensive initiatives within the US and partnerships with American organizations, and reports an abundance of corporate social responsibility initiatives in an American context. Further, it presents results mainly on US efforts, excluding worldwide statistics. Overall, the prevalence and frequency of national identity and civil religion in Toyota's communicated corporate identity is high. This could be a reflection of a foreign company operating in the American market.

Comparison of Automakers

General Motors, Ford, and Toyota's communicated corporate identities, as they are presented on the companies' American websites, represent very different approaches to embracing elements of US national identity and American civil religion.

As highlighted above, GM does not utilize many elements of US national identity and American civil religion within its communicated corporate identity. The few times that GM recognizes its American heritage or corporate social responsibility efforts in the US, it continues to distance itself from the US through its use of language. In contrast, Toyota continuously frames itself as a part of the American community through its language, imagery, and extensive references to elements of US national identity and American civil religion.

Alternatively, Ford falls somewhere in the middle of Toyota and GM in its employment of these elements. Although Ford recognizes its American heritage and references some elements of US national identity and American civil religion, the references are infrequent and not dominantly communicated within its corporate identity.

When compared, Toyota's communicated corporate identity clearly encompasses the highest degree of elements of US national identity and American civil religion. This is interesting as it is the only one of the three companies examined that is not American owned and was not founded in the US. It is likely that most Americans are aware that GM and Ford share a long history with the US and Toyota is Japanese, or at least a foreign manufacturer. It is possible that the high frequency and prevalence of elements of US national identity and American civil religion in Toyota's communicated corporate identity are attributed to Toyota wanting to appeal to more ethnocentric consumers.

In addition, growth and prosperity were highlighted in all three of the companies. This could suggest its importance to the industry at large. If so, it is possible that the automaker industry is referencing boundless growth and prosperity as a response to its recovery from the 2008 crisis.

Comparison across Industries

This subsection compares the findings across the three industries examined; mass merchants and food retailers, department stores, and automakers. In doing so, it aims to provide an answer to the following sub research question: How does the presence of elements of US national identity and American civil religion incorporated into companies' communicated corporate identities compare *across* industries in the US? This section compares the individual findings of each company and industry. In addition, it considers other variables that could account for the diversity in findings.

No significant differences were observed between the industries themselves. Although the purchase frequency and products vary greatly, reflecting possible differences in corporate communication methods, no specific dissimilarities could be found. Rather, each industry houses companies that engage both high and low frequency and prevalence of elements of US national identity and civil religion within their communicated corporate identities as presented on their American websites. The scatter plot chart below demonstrates this diversity within and across these industries by categorizing, or 'plotting', each company by the high and low frequency, prevalence, and emphasis of elements of US national identity and American civil religion incorporated into each company's communicated corporate identity.

The chart considers the frequency, prevalence, and emphasis of elements of US national identity and American civil religion into the companies' communicated corporate identities. In doing so, it reports the findings of the discourse analysis conducted on each company as presented above. As stated, discourse analysis examines each company's communicated corporate identity from the perspective of an American consumer.

For example, Macy's is categorized as having a high frequency of elements incorporated into its communicated corporate identity. As described in the analysis of Macy's provided above, Macy's fully embraces and incorporates aspects of US national identity and civil religion into the core of its communicated corporate identity. Conversely, Sears' communicated corporate identity presented a distinct lack of elements of US national identity and civil religion, thus it is categorized as low.

The chart is not intended to provide a definitive understanding of each company's communicated corporate identity in this regard, but rather aims to provide the reader with a simplistic, clear representation of each company in comparison to the others. Because the chart is intended for comparison, rather than strictly labeling each company, the information is presented in a scatter plot and not a bar graph or other visual representation.

Figure 2, a scatter plot comparing the high, moderate, and low use of elements of civil religion and national identity within the communicated corporate identities within and across industries.

The methodological approach to choosing which companies to include in this research did not consider companies' origins. As it happens, Toyota is the only non-American company included in this research. While Toyota maintains a high incorporation of US national identity and American civil religion in its communicated corporate identity in the US, it is not possible to establish a relationship from the analysis of one company. Further, because GM and Ford maintain low and moderate reflections of US national identity and civil religion within their communicated corporate identities, and this range exists in other industries, it is difficult to speculate how Toyota's incorporation of these might be a response to its competition.

Nevertheless, it is intriguing that the only foreign company in this study displayed high incorporation of elements of US national identity and civil religion in its

communicated corporate identity, especially when compared to the US companies. It could be hypothesized that Toyota engages more of these elements because it is a foreign company hoping to appeal to the American consumer. However, future research is necessary to make any conclusory remarks.

Aside from Toyota, all of the companies analyzed are headquartered in the American Midwest and South. Macy's was the only company founded in a different state than its current headquarters; Macy's was founded in New York City and has since moved to Ohio. In addition, there was not a strong relationship between a company maintaining international operations and high or low incorporation of US national identity and American civil religion into companies' communicated corporate identities.

There is not a strong relationship between the age of a company and its incorporation of elements of US national identity and American civil religion. For example, both Macy's and Kroger were established in the 1800s and have integrated US national identity and American civil religion into the core of their communicated corporate identities. However, Sears was also established in the 1800s, within a few years of Kroger, and maintains a significant lack of elements of US national identity and civil religion within its communicated corporate identity. Further, Toyota, GM and Ford were all established in the early 1900s, within thirty years of each other; however, they also represent vastly different levels of incorporation of US national identity and civil religion in their communicated corporate identities.

This subsection examines elements of American national identity and civil religion across three industries. The following section will discuss the employment of specific elements of US national identity and civil religion found during research. It will further discuss why some elements were more predominant than others were.

Discussion of Elements

This section addresses the following sub research question: What elements of US national identity and American civil religion are present in companies' communicated corporate identities? It discusses the use and possible meaning of the elements of American civil religion and national identity found in the communicated corporate

identities of the companies analyzed in this study. First, this section discusses each element individually. Second, it briefly compares the frequency and significance of the incorporation of different elements.

Discussion of Individual Elements

Employment of biblical archetypes in reference to the US or the American people

The 'employment of biblical archetypes in reference to the US or the American people' was generated from a literature review. Both Cherry (1998) and Bellah (1967) discussed the importance of the new and old testament for interpreting the American experience in American civil religion. The importance of religious archetypes was also reflected in Wilson's (2011) work on American national identity.

Although biblical archetypes were highlighted through the literature review of American civil religion and national identity, their importance was not communicated in the companies' corporate identities. This element was not apparent in any of the communicated corporate identities of the companies' websites. This could be related to the general lack of political or religious discourses throughout the communicated corporate identities.

Companies' aversion to incorporating overly political or religious elements into their communications could reflect their attention to the diversity of the US and American civil religion and national identity's values of multiculturalism and pluralism. For example, companies could reason that explicitly referencing the New Testament would alienate some of their customers by making them feel the company was being exclusory or inappropriately interjecting religion into the public sphere.

Displaying images of national figures

'Displaying images of national figures' was derived from the literature review. Bellah (1967; 1992) and others, highlight the importance of national figures as symbols for different aspects of American civil religion. Alongside symbolizing specific aspects of civil religion or national identity, such as Obama representing internationalism and cultural tolerance (Gardella 2014a), national figures are also interpreted through a biblical lens. As such, these figures are assigned the roles of prophets, martyrs, heroes, and so on.

There were no prominent images of national figures displayed on any of the companies' websites. While it is possible that, like suggested above with the element of 'employment of biblical archetypes', companies do not display images of national figures, specifically modern and living persons as they could alienate customers and their identities are still forming, it is less obvious.

There are many national figures that do not receive a consistent response across the US, such as President Barack Obama who is often esteemed by members of the Democratic Party and derided by members of the Republican Party. Again, this speaks to the diversity of the nation. However, there are some national figures that invoke a consistent reaction throughout the general public of the US. For example, John F. Kennedy remains a favorite amongst Americans. He is constantly ranked amongst the best president in US history and has reached a status of sainthood within American civil religion (Matthews 2013).

Nevertheless, it is possible that companies, despite some figures inspiring a consistent feeling across the vast majority of the public, do not want to link themselves to another person's image. For example, although John F. Kennedy remains beloved by the American people and is a symbol for equality and sacrifice, he notoriously had many affairs and made decisions during presidency that are heavily criticized today (Matthews 2013).

Self-identification with the US or labeling values, beliefs, actions, or things as "American".

Self-Identification of the company, its products, or its actions to the US was originally included on the deductive list of elements of American civil religion and national identity. It was not directly constructed from the literature review, but rather comes from a practical and logical extension of the of the literature; by framing their corporate identities as American, companies often conjure images of the US and by extension national identity and, to a lesser degree, civil religion. This was observed many times throughout some companies' communicated corporate identities.

Several companies extensively qualified their products, designers, production processes, themselves, and so on as 'American'. As mentioned in the previous section,

this was also true of Toyota, a Japanese car manufacturer. It is possible that companies identifying as 'American' in a positive manner resonates with consumers as it calls forth, for most Americans, positive feelings of national identity and patriotism. For example, it is possible that consumers associate making purchases of American-made products from American companies as supporting the US economy, supporting job growth, and general acts of patriotism.[5] As such, companies' self-identification with America can be seen as an act of civil religion in that it could function to maintain and support the American economy and other American institutions.

Replication of American values, beliefs, and ideals

This category was constructed from a literature review. American civil religion and national identity maintain its own values and ideals (Bellah 1967). Throughout the analysis, several dominant American beliefs, values, and ideals supported through civil religion were found in the communicated corporate identities of most companies. However, these elements were so distinct and pervasive that they are discussed independently below. They include being a 'good neighbor', diversity and inclusion, and growth and prosperity. Outside of these elements, no significant allusions to other American values, beliefs, or ideals were found.

It is likely that these three values, beliefs and ideals were highlighted because they are easily incorporated into the context of communicated corporate identity. For example, most companies discuss employment opportunities and hiring practices on their websites. As such, it is expected that they include their support and interest in diversity as it is both a common practice to do so and a fundamental belief in American national identity and civil religion.

It is also possible that other American values, beliefs, and ideals were not highlighted as most websites do not feature a platform that demands or allows for their inclusion. For example, the belief that America maintains a relationship with a divine spirit would likely feel out of place in a company's communicated corporate identity.

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[5] See Lee, Hong, and Lee (2003) for a discussion of consumer ethnocentrism in the United States and its strength across different demographics.

Displays of support for the American military, or reference to the military in a positive manner

The military represents both the strength of the US and its sacrifice (Bellah 1967). Support for the American military, veterans, and military families was highlighted throughout most of the companies' websites analyzed in this research. Many of the companies' websites incorporated their support for the troops, veterans, and their families through corporate social responsibility programs. Often, companies employed this element in their hiring practices, offering or guaranteeing jobs to American military service men and women, veterans, and their families.

Showing support of the military, specifically the men and women serving, is seen throughout the United States on everything from t-shirts and bumper stickers, yellow ribbon magnets, banners, in public debates, in churches, in advertisements and so on (Stahl 2014). The inclusion of this support for the troops on these companies' websites reflects this larger public discourse. Phrases, such as 'support our troops' are common in public discourse in the US. This is not often interpreted as a political statement, as many groups have appropriated the term in phrases such as 'support the troops, not the war' (Stahl 2014).[6] Rather, support for the troops embodies civil religion and national identity beyond the politics of the day.

In addition, this strong presence of support for the military likely reflects the time of year this research was completed. Memorial Day is a commemorative American holiday dedicated to celebrating all of the men and women who have died in military service to the US. It is held annually on the last Monday in May. As such, Memorial Day took place during the height of this research and could have spurred companies to highlight their initiatives for supporting the troops that are otherwise not as emphasized in the companies' communicated corporate identities. Nevertheless, many companies continued to promote programs for supporting the military, veterans, and their families on their websites after Memorial Day.

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[6] See Sthal (2014) for a full discussion of the use of 'supports our troops' and similar rhetoric by different groups in public discourses in the US.

References to sacred American events

Sacred American events function to continue, support, and integrate civil religion in the community and the family, the private and public spheres in the US (Smith 2000; Bellah 1967). As mentioned above, Memorial Day took place during the span of this research. As such, most companies referred to Memorial Day.[7] In part, this reflects the use of American "bank holidays", national holidays during which all government and most private sector employers are closed, in marketing. However, it also supports the function of these sacred events by demonstrating their importance and deep connection to society in having permeated one of the 'most secular' spheres of public life – economics and 'big' business.

Adoption of sacred national or civil religious symbols, particularly the use of the American flag or its colors

The adoption or use of symbols of American national identity or civil religion was taken from the literature review. Bellah (1967) specifically described the American flag as being a deeply sacred symbol of American civil religion and a symbol of the US. The US flag and stylized representations of the stars and stripes were found throughout many of the companies' websites. Further, the flags colors of red, white and blue, were used throughout the websites to call less directly upon the flag and its symbolism.

In addition to the flag and its colors, the bald eagle was displayed as a symbol for a corporate social responsibility initiative focused on preserving America's environment. The bald eagle is a symbol for the US (Lawrence 1990). It is the national bird of the country and appears on most official seals of the US government, including the presidential seal and in the logos of many US federal agencies (Lawrence 1990). No other sacred national or civil religious symbols were noticeably incorporated into the companies' websites.

The extensive use of the American flag, its colors, and stylized representations of the stars and stripes provides strong indication of a company's integration of American civil religion and national identity into its communicated corporate identity. Unlike some

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[7] It is not possible to know with certainty if companies researched after Memorial Day referenced the holiday or to what extent.

other elements of American civil religion and national identity, such as the bald eagle, visual references to the American flag are generally striking and explicit in their reference to the US. While the bald eagle is an important, sacred symbol in American national identity and civil religion, it does not inspire the same 'knee-jerk' reaction as the flag. It is possible that the strength of the American flag as a symbol for the US makes it preferable to other symbols, in that it provides a clearer message to customers.

References to sacred or iconic American places

The sacredness of places in the US was deduced from the literature review (See Bellah 1967). Alongside their importance in referencing the US and conjuring feelings of national identity, sacred places can serve as symbols of other aspects of civil religion (Bellah 1967). There were several displays of images of iconic places in the US; however, it was not a strong element on any of the individual companies' websites. References to sacred or iconic American places included photos of the Golden Gate Bridge, various city skylines including New York City and Detroit, and iconic Midwestern fields and countryside.

In addition, there were many images of places across America that held significance for the company, but are not significant in American civil religion or national identity. For example, GM displayed many pictures of their offices in Detroit. Although most Americans would not recognize the GM offices, anyone who had visited the city would likely recognize them, as they are large and distinct buildings in Detroit.

It is possible that references to sacred or iconic American places are a weak element as these references are strongly associated with regional areas of the US. This is especially salient when considering that all of the companies analyzed operate nationally. For example, the Golden Gate Bridge is recognizably American, but does not hold significance for most Americans and is often associated with San Francisco and California over the US. It is likely that the majority of Americans have not visited the Golden Gate Bridge. Further, strongly identifying with one region of the US could appear exclusory or encourage consumers to associate the stereotypes of that region with the company.

Mimicry or sacred rites and rituals

Mimicry of sacred rites and rituals was included as an element because of their great significance in maintaining American civil religion and furthering national identity (Bellah 1967; Cherry 1998). However, no sacred American rites or rituals were predominantly displayed, adapted to the company, or significantly referenced in the communicated corporate identities of the companies analyzed. It is possible that company websites do not provide a platform for referencing the sacred rite and rituals of civil religion.

References to the American Dream

The American Dream was not originally identified as an element of civil religion or national identity, but was identified inductively throughout the research process. Literature supports the inclusion of the American Dream as an element of American national identity and civil religion as it provides an important narrative of success, derived from the belief that anyone, despite class, religion, race, or ethnicity, can make great achievements through hard work, risk-taking, sacrifice, and innovation (Rhodes 2010). Further, like other elements of national identity and civil religion related to economic success, it positively reflects the US's dedication to capitalism (Warshauer, "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire: Changing Conceptions of the American Dream").

Several companies contextualized their history within the framework of the American Dream by highlighting their humble beginnings and success through hard work and innovation. Innovation was referenced throughout several companies' websites as a key characteristic of the company. In addition, some companies referenced the American Dream through biographies of their employees who started in low-level positions within the company, but were able to build their careers through hard work, rising to top positions. References to the American Dream are common in marketing and are considered a core marketing strategy by corporate America (Samuel 2012).

By referencing the American Dream through key words like 'innovation', and more so by framing the company's history in this narrative, companies call upon powerful beliefs and images in American civil religion and national identity. It is possible that many consumers feel more supportive of large successful corporations when their

success is framed in the American Dream and attributed to one or two founders. The American Dream might also be seen as a way to humanize the company. For example, although Sam Walton is deceased, the consumer can associate Walmart with the nice, honest, hardworking man that started the company with one store in Arkansas. This invokes feelings of support for the success of a man, and deflects discourses about the harms to the US economy and the employees attributed to the practices of large multi-national corporations.

Allusions to the US through sports references

Sports are often employed as stages for celebrating and reaffirming beliefs and symbols of American civil religion (Butterworth 2008). There were few references to the US through sports on the companies' websites; however, these references were clear and powerful. For example, Macy's website features fathers and their children dressed in New York Yankees and Los Angeles Dodgers' shirts and hats. Most Americans would immediately recognize these teams by their logos as professional baseball teams.

It is possible that references to sports on companies' websites are seasonal, with Football being dominant in the fall and baseball being popular in the summer. Further, references to specific teams may not be used as they can be seen as company supporting a specific city or region. American fans are often extremely loyal to their teams and might be deterred from buying products from a company supporting their team's competition. Additionally, professional and college teams' logos are often legally protected property and cannot be used without the consent of the team, which can be expensive for companies.

References to "diversity"

American national identity and civil religion celebrate diversity, multiculturalism, and pluralism. This stems from the fundamental value that all men are created equal, a strong support for immigrants, and the belief that the US is the 'land of opportunity' (Murray 2008; Bellah 1992). Almost every company analyzed referenced their support for diversity. As mentioned above, most companies' websites feature employment opportunities and hiring practices. As such, it is reasonable and anticipated that they

include their support and desire for diversity as it is both a common practice to do so in the US and a fundamental belief in American national identity and civil religion.

This is such common practice in the US, that customers viewing these websites' might not consciously take note of their support for diversity. Nevertheless, the companies are promoting and supporting diversity and a culture of inclusion. In doing so, they are communicating the underlying beliefs, values, and ideals in American civil religion and national identity, from which they stem.

References to 'growth and prosperity'

The belief that the possibility of economic growth is available to everyone without limits to its potential is sacred in American civil religion (Robbins 1981). Most companies had references to growth and prosperity throughout their websites. While this is a strong element because of the high frequency at which it appears in the companies' communicated corporate identities, it is not as clear and striking as other elements, such as the American flag.

References to growth and prosperity were extended to include individuals, the companies, and the US economy and other markets. It was often referenced in discussions about creating jobs in America, opportunities within the company for employees, the anticipated success of the company's growth, and company investments in the US. Different references inspire different feelings in the customer. However, general references to growth and prosperity were likely to be received in two ways. First, many companies promoted the idea that investing in, buying from, or working for them supports the nation's economy through job growth and so on. Second, many companies suggested that buying from the company might aid the consumer themselves to grow and prosper.

References to being a 'good neighbor'

Being a good neighbor by 'loving thy neighbor' and working to support the community is a fundamental value of American civil religion. Most companies referenced this value through their corporate social responsibility statements. Nearly all of the company's

that referenced this value of charity and giving specifically referred to 'giving back' or 'serving their communities'.

Defining communities as their own invokes a sense of belonging and the image that the companies are a part of the communities. A company going beyond their corporate responsibility and identifying itself as a member of the community could invoke strong positive feelings toward the company in the consumer. This humanizes the company.

Comparison of Elements

Several of the elements deduced from the literature review were not present in the communicated corporate identities of the companies analyzed. In large part, this can likely be attributed to the lack of platform available to employ these elements and fear from companies that references to some elements could be seen as exclusory. In addition, many of the elements not present or less apparent represent strong political or religious discourses, and are not logically extendable to economics and business.

For example, elements of biblical archetypes in reference to the US or American people were not found in the communicated corporate identities of the companies analyzed. However, other references to the old and new testament were. For example, references to 'growth and prosperity' and being a 'good neighbor' were located throughout several of the companies' websites. The noticeable difference between them is the potential directness of the reference to Christian-Judeo traditions. Similar examples of the restrictions of civil religion in different spheres of life are also found in political discourses. For example, Bellah (1967) finds that while every president's inaugural speech has referred to God, none mentions Jesus.

To better exemplify the use of elements within different companies, a simple chart is provided below. The chart evaluates companies independently of each other and reflects the findings of the discourse analysis described in several of the sections above.

	Mass Merchants and Food Retailers			Department Stores			Automakers		
	WM	KR	TA	MA	KO	SE	FO	GM	TO
Employment of biblical archetypes in reference to the US or the American people	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
Displaying images of national figures	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
Self-identification with the US or labeling values, beliefs, actions, or things as "American".	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green
Replication of American values, beliefs, and ideals	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Red	Yellow	Red	Red	Green
Displays of support for the American military, or reference to the military in a positive manner	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green
References to sacred American events	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red
Adoption of sacred national or civil religious symbols, the use of the American flag or its colors	Green	Green	Red	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
References to sacred and iconic American places	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Yellow
Mimicry of sacred rites and rituals	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
References to the American Dream	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Red
Allusions to the US through sports references	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Yellow
References to 'diversity and inclusion'	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Red	Red	Green
References to 'growth and prosperity'	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Green
References to being a 'good neighbor'	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green	Yellow	Red	Red	Green

Table 2, prevalence and frequency of elements of American national identity and civil religion within and across companies and industries
Colors indicate the prevalence and frequency of elements of American national identity and civil religion.
Red: Little to none, Yellow: Moderate, Green: High.
WM – Walmart, KR – Kroger, TA – Target, MA – Macy's, KO – Kohl's, SE – Sears, FO – Ford, GM – GM, TO – Toyota

The section, *Findings and Analysis*, discussed the findings of the discourse analysis of elements of American civil religion and national identity employed in the communicated corporate identities of nine companies across three industries. First, it presented and discussed the analysis of each company individually and within each industry. Second, it compared these findings across industries. Last, it provided a discussion of the analysis of elements of America national identity and civil religion employed in the

communicated corporate identities. The next section concludes the findings of this thesis, discusses the limitations of this research, and discusses possible avenues for future research in this area.

Conclusion

This thesis employs discourse analysis to analyze the relationship between communicated corporate identity, civil religion, and national identity in the US. It analyses the communicated corporate identities of a variety of industry leading corporations across a wide range of industries, identifying the presence, frequency, and use of elements of national identity and American civil religion. This thesis establishes that corporations, through communicated corporate identity, can act as platforms for national identity and civil religion.

It finds the communicated corporate identities of mass merchants and food retailers share many commonalities and differences. While all companies have included information about their beginnings and ongoing corporate social responsibility efforts, they each do so in distinctly different ways. In these differences, the degrees to which national identity and American civil religion are present vary greatly. Where one company embraces chances to utilize national identity, others do not do so. Differences can be seen in the mass merchants and food retailers industry's treatment of their mission statements and description of core values. Where one company uses its communicated mission statement as a way to refer to its American roots with inclusive language, another does this in a more business oriented manner, and a third does not make any references to the US in explaining its mission or company values.

Similarly, department stores also vary dramatically in their use of elements of US national identity and American civil religion. Where one company prominently incorporated elements of US national identity and civil religion into the core of its communicated corporate identity, another made few references to these elements and a third made almost none. This was highlighted in the promotion of products and in self-descriptions. One company did not explicitly reference the US or allude to elements of national identity and civil religion, showing minimal recognition of the US in their identity.

Automakers' communicated corporate identities also represent several different approaches to embracing elements of US national identity and American civil religion. One company does not utilize elements of US national identity and civil religion within

its communicated corporate identity. The few times that this company referred to the elements of US national identity and civil religion, it continued to distance itself from the US through its use of language. In contrast, another company continuously framed itself as a part of the American community through its language, imagery, and extensive references to elements of US national identity and civil religion.

Despite the limited selection of companies chosen to represent each industry, this thesis shows that the selected industries house companies that engage in **high** frequency and prevalence of elements of US national identity and civil religion within their communicated corporate identities, as well as companies that engage in **low** frequency and prevalence of elements of US national identity and civil religion within their communicated corporate identities.

Further, this thesis finds that certain elements of American civil religion and national identity were expressed more often than others in corporate identity. Some elements identified from the literature as important for maintaining American civil religion and national identity were not found in any of the communicated corporate identities of the companies analyzed. Alternatively, this thesis identifies elements of national identity and civil religion in companies' communicated corporate identities that, although present, were not highlighted throughout academic literature. This demonstrates the dynamic nature of American civil religion in that it is presented differently in companies' communicated corporate identities than other spheres, such as in politics. The presence or lack thereof of specific elements appears to be connected to larger discourses about public and private space, inclusion of different beliefs, multiculturalism, and pluralism.

Limitations

The interpretations made in this analysis do not speak to the intentions of corporations, but rather examine their communicated corporate identities. Ambiguity is possible whenever two interpretations are available. However, the analysis of this thesis would not be discounted if an alternative analysis were also possible. As discussed in the

methodology section, discourse analysis assumes that multiple interpretations are always possible.

One limitation of this research is the number of companies it examines. Although the chosen companies represent vast shares of their respective industries, as they are the top market share leaders from each industry, the thesis lacks the required numbers for quantitative analysis. Thus, this analysis does not allow for statistical generalizations. As such, it lays the groundwork for further research to employ a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. In addition, as the sample size of companies was limited, the comparisons made, specifically with regard to the high, moderate, and low categorizations, are not representative of companies generally. Thus, it is possible that the comparisons and categorizations are somewhat skewed, exaggerated, or minimized.

Further, examining communicated corporate identity through websites is limiting in that websites can change quickly and without warning. While websites are a useful and practical medium for this study, and are a strong representatives of corporations' corporate identities, future research could elect to incorporate other corporate communication mediums.

Suggestions for Further Research

The analysis presented here found the presence of elements of American civil religion and national identity in some, but not all, of the communicated corporate identities of the companies studied. Further research into this relationship is necessary to better understand and explain the possible significance of the presence of civil religion and national identity elements in some communicated corporate identities but not others.

In addition, this initial inquiry into the presence of civil religion and national identity in corporate communications does not address in depth the dynamics of the relationship. Questions such as, is this relationship intentional or accidental remain. Alternatively, what is the relationship between company size or market share and the presence of elements of US national identity and American civil religion?

Although this research has begun the investigation into the presence of elements of US national identity and American civil religion across industries, further investigation is required. Future research could include more companies and industries.

Further, this thesis highlights the complexity of the relationship between national identity, civil religion, and corporate communications. In doing so, it establishes that within this relationship corporations can function as platforms for national identity and civil religion. However, this thesis' findings explore this relationship within the US. As such, it does not fully explore the implications of this relationship internationally. Future research could compare the presence of elements of civil religion and national identity in individual companies' communicated corporate identities, industries, or other measures across different countries or international markets. Doing so would open research in this area to new questions from international relations, cross-culture communications, and other academic fields.

Progressing logically from the findings here, future research should also consider the relationship between corporations functioning as platforms for national identity and civil religion and corporations acting as conduits for or promoting state power. A nation's soft power, the capacity to get what one wants through desirability and attraction rather than through military or economic force, reflects the appeal of its culture, political ethics and policies (Nye 2004). Corporations play an important part in extending the soft power of a nation through the spread of culture and policies (Pariotti 2011). Questions could include, what is the role of multinational corporations in spreading American culture and identity around the world? In what ways do multinational corporations' communication of elements of American civil religion and US national identity contribute to the expansion of America's soft power globally? Research could focus on one industry, or compare different kinds of industries, such as retail and service industries.

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Appendix

A. Walmart

A1. Logo

A2. Walmart.com Homepage
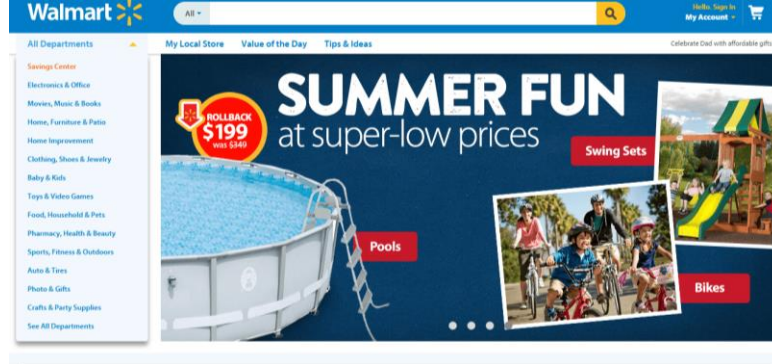
A3. Corporate Homepage

A4. "Our Story" Homepage

Walmart U.S.

Walmart has stores in 50 states and Puerto Rico offering low prices on the broadest assortment of products through a variety of formats.

Walmart International

Walmart operates in 27 countries outside the U.S., offering low prices through retail units under several banners around the globe.

Sam's Club

Sam's Club is a warehouse membership format with locations across the U.S. and around the world.

Walmart Global eCommerce

Based in California's Silicon Valley, Walmart Global eCommerce drives our online, mobile and social innovation, including Walmart.com and @WalmartLabs.

Interactive Map

Where in the world is Walmart? See where we operate and get key data, such as the number of associates and community giving totals by state.

A5. Walmart's "Pillars of Focus" Page Bottom

Hunger Relief & Healthy Eating

In 2010, Walmart and the Walmart Foundation launched "Fighting Hunger Together" – a $2 billion cash and in-kind commitment through 2015 to fight hunger in America.

Sustainability

The Walmart Foundation concentrates on helping people understand how families and communities can live better by using fewer natural resources, as well as growing healthy food in a more sustainable way.

Women's Economic Empowerment

Our Women's Economic Empowerment Initiative will improve the lives of women around the world. We are supporting this initiative with more than $100 million in grants.

Career Opportunity

Living better means greater access to opportunity. We support initiatives that provide opportunities through job training and placement, and greater access to resources that help people become self-sufficient.

Special Interests

We partner with organizations that create opportunities for our nation's heroes and help our communities around the world overcome natural disasters.

A6. Walmart's "Global Responsibility" Page Bottom

A7. Walmart's "US Manufacturing" Link

## A8. Walmart's "Acres for America"

B. Kroger

B.1 Logo

B2. Kroger's Homepage
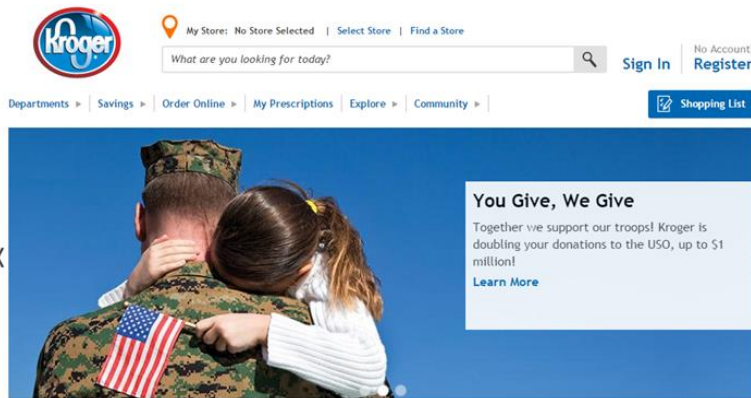
B3. "Honoring Our Heroes"

B4. Kroger Homepage
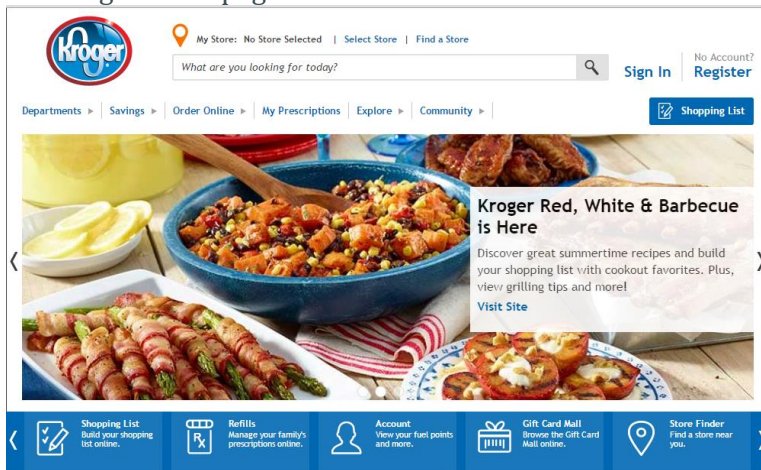
C. Target

C1. Target's Logo

C3. Target's Homepage
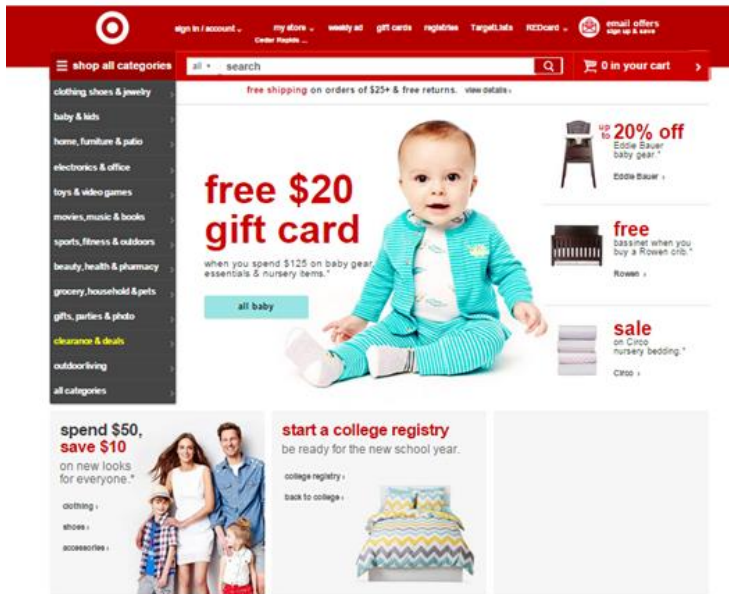
D. Macy's

D1. Macy's Logo

D2. Macy's.com Homepage


D3. Macy's Homepage May

D4. Macy's Homepage May

D5. Macy's Homepage "American" Panel June

D6. Macy's Homepage "American" Panel Top May

D7. Macy's Homepage "American Panel Bottom May

D8. Macy's "What's Happening @ Macy's" Page

D9. Macy's "American Icons" Page

D10. "American Icons" Page Bottom
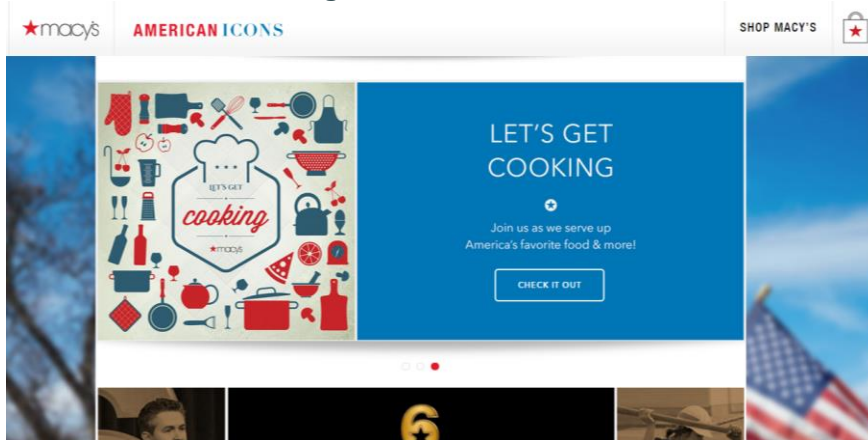
# E. Kohl's

E1. Kohl's Logo

E2. Kohl's Online Jewelry Page

E3. Kohl's Online Home Furnishings Page

E4. Kohl's "Memorial Day Sale" Homepage Advisement

E5. Kohl's Cares Banner on Kohl's Homepage

F. Sears

F1. Sears Logo

F2. Sears' Homepage Top
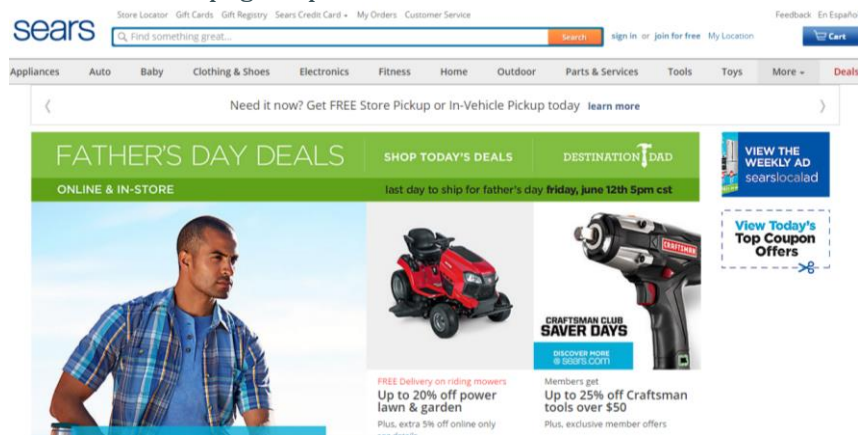
F3. Sears Holdings Corp. "Military Support"

G. General Motors

G1. GM Logo

G2. GM.com Homepage
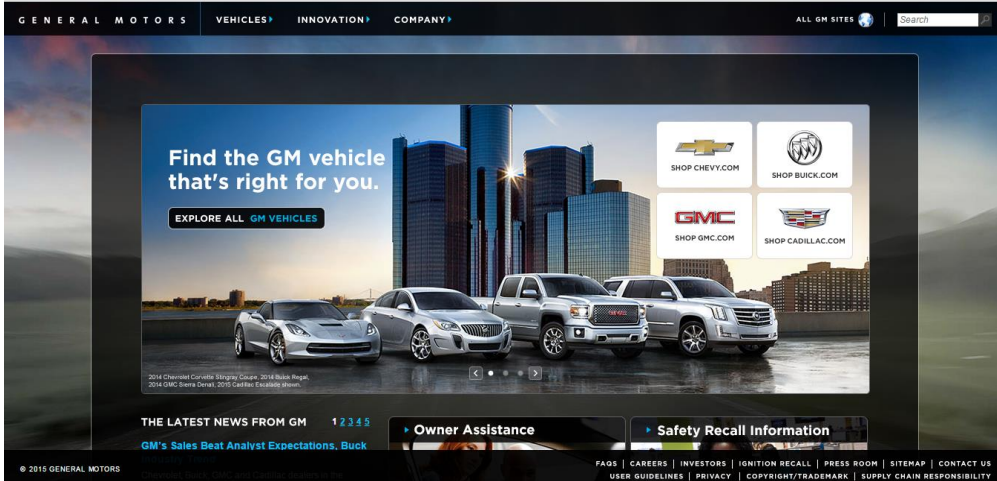
G3. GM.com's links to US vehicle sites
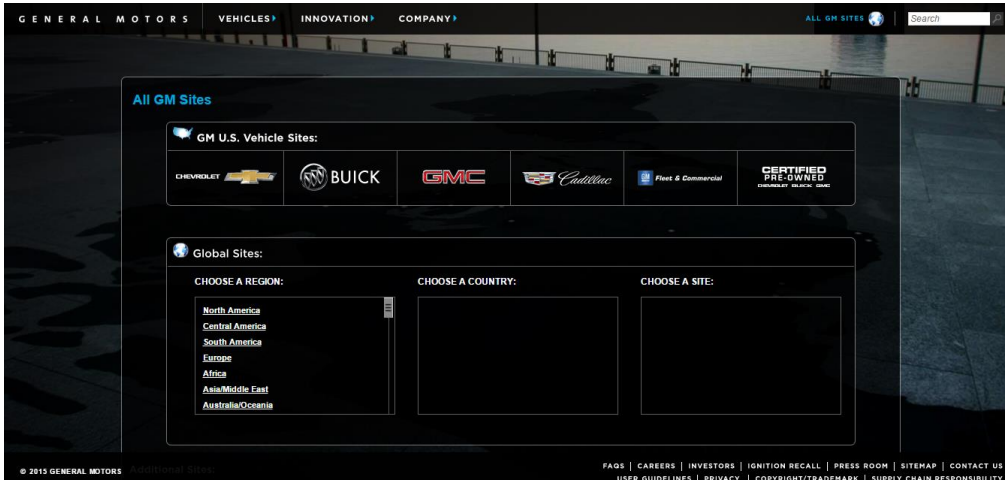
G4. GM's "Diversity" Page with Innovation Tab Open

G5. GM's "About GM: Team GM Cares"
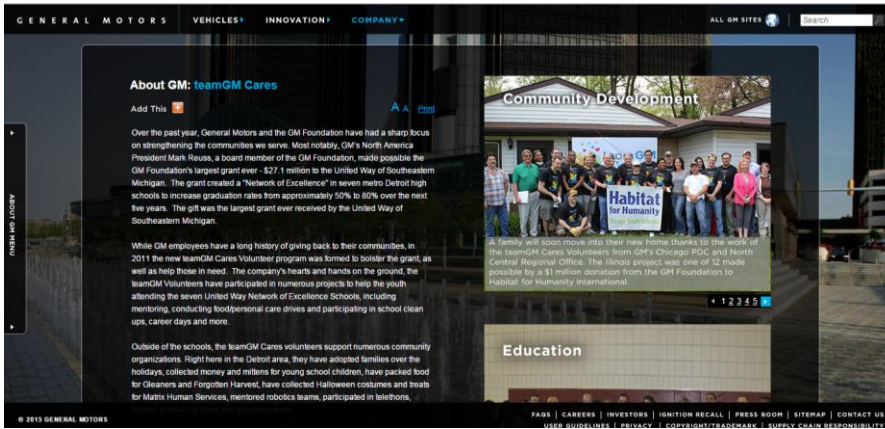
G6. GM's "Innovation: Community and Education" Page
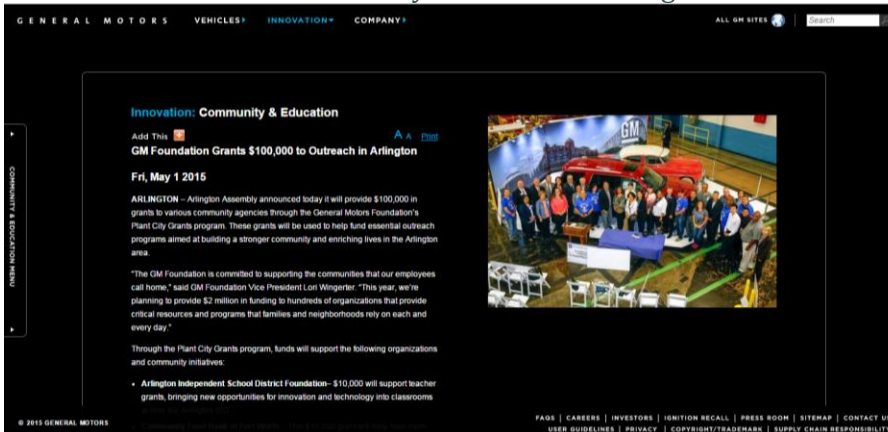
H. Ford

H1. Ford's Logo

H2. Ford's Homepage (Top)
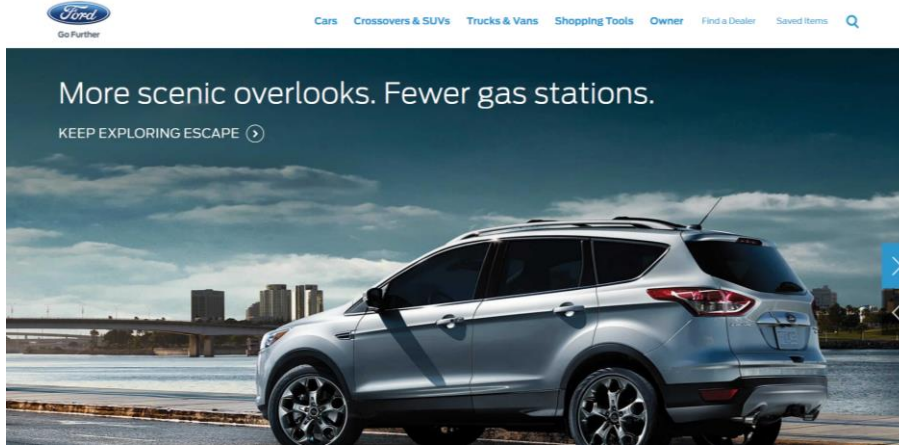
H3. Ford's Homepage "Over a Century of Innovation"

## H4. Ford's Homepage (Middle)

H5. Ford's "Ford Drive U"

H6. Ford's "Ford Drives U" (Carrousel)

I. Toyota

I1. Toyota's Logo

I2. Toyota.com's Homepage

I3. "Diversity" Page

I4. "Operations" Page Top

I5. "Careers" Page

I6. Toyota.com's "Community" Homepage

180,000+ nationwide volunteers for Toyota-sponsored National Public Lands Day in 2013

40,000+ child car seats donated through Buckle Up for Life

over $700 million donated to nonprofits in the U.S. to date

256 Family Literacy Groups funded in the U.S. through a partnership with NCFL*

450,000 volunteer hours by Toyota TogetherGreen participants

$15 Million+ contributed towards U.S. disaster relief since 2001

*National Center for Family Literacy

J. Company Statistics Comparison Chart

The following table provides a quick overview of some of the basic information about the companies analyzed in this thesis. All nine companies are industry and market share leaders in the US; however, their size and other elements vary. The table was created with the intention of aiding in a comparison of companies across industries and to serve the researcher as a quick, organized reference for analysis. However, the information presented in the table represents snapshots of the companies from different years (i.e. 2011, 2013, 2014, and current). In addition, some employees and sales data includes subsidiaries or represent worldwide operateions. However, all specific deviations are indicated in the table's endnotes. All sources are listed below the table.

Company	Founded in	Headquartered in	U.S. Stores/ Dealerships	Employees U.S.	Sales (2014, in billions)	Inter- national
Walmart	1962, Arkansas	Bentonville, AR	4,540	1,300,000[i]	485.65 B	Yes
Kroger	1883, Ohio	Cincinnati, OH	3,900	343,000	108.47 B	No
Target	1962, Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN	1795	347,000	73.94 B	Yes
Macy's	1830, New York	Cincinnati, OH	824	175,000	28.11 B	No
Kohl's	1962, Wisconsin	Menomonee Falls, WI	1,158	137,000	19.02 B	No
Sears	1886, Illinois	Hoffman Estates, IL	759	Unavailable	12.94 B	Yes
Toyota	1937, Japan	Toyota City, Japan	1,500 [ii]	338,875	252.19 B	Yes
GM	1908, Michigan	Detroit, MI	4,355 [iii]	216,000	155.93 B	Yes
Ford	1903, Michigan	Dearborn, MI	3,100 [iv]	187,000	144.08 B	Yes

Sources:
Fact Sheet: Quick Facts About Target. (n.d.). Retrieved June 1, 2015, from http://pressroom.target.com/corporate
The World's Biggest Public Companies. (n.d.). Retrieved June 1, 2015, from http://www.forbes.com/global2000/list
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2013 U.S. Operations Toyota. (n.d.). Retrieved June 1, 2015, from
        http://www.toyota.com/about/images/operations/numbers/TMOB0166_2013_LARGE_BROCHURE_WEB_U
        SE_tiled2.pdf

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[i] Includes information from Walmart's subsidiary, Sam's Club

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[ii] Includes information from Toyota's subsidiaries, Lexus and Scion
[iii] This is information from 2014, prior to a significant reduction in dealerships
[iv] From 2011