

Like, Retweet, Repeat: Social Media's Impact on Real Estate Marketing

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This is dedicated to:

My parents, Mark and Ann, whose constant love and support carried me through

My grandparents, Ivan and Gloria, who taught me the value of work

Andrea and Liz, who inspired me to follow in their footsteps

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Abstract

With the advent of Facebook and Twitter, people from all walks of life in all parts of the world have the ability to connect electronically, impersonally, and constantly. Small businesses are just beginning to unlock the power of social media marketing, specifically real estate professionals. Shelly Chaiken created the Heuristic Systematic Model of persuasion, the descendant of the Elaboration Likelihood Model. This study applies the tenets of Chaiken's HSM to the methods of persuasion employed by real estate agents via Facebook and Twitter. Fifty participants were surveyed by the researcher in order to gauge their activity, interest level, and motivation for processing posts by real estate professionals on Facebook and Twitter. Their corresponding data was analyzed for answers to three specific research questions. The researcher's findings suggest that the average Facebook and Twitter user is not the same as the real estate agent's target client. The findings from this study also suggest that current levels of real estate marketing via these social networking sites do not engage users enough to call their sufficiency threshold into question, thereby never motivating them to concurrently or systematically process the information. Limitations of the present study and recommendations for future research are also provided.

Key Words: Facebook, Twitter, Heuristic Systematic Model, Chaiken, Sufficiency Threshold, Social Media Marketing, Real Estate, Real Estate Agent

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

When the prolific bank criminal William Sutton was asked why he robbed banks, he replied, “That’s where the money is” (Giamanco and Gregoir 90). And although social media is a far cry from a “stick-em-up,” Sutton’s mentality could well be adopted by businesses who realize the same truth: social media is where they will find the customers and, undoubtedly, the money.

Online customers represent the changing face of marketing and sales. Much of this online activity is linked to social media. For the purposes of this study, the term “social media” refers specifically to social networking sites. The researcher chose only to investigate Facebook and Twitter, so the phrase “social media” will generally refer to those two mediums.

This new realm brings its own challenges and many are slow to change with the trend. In a survey of business-to-business marketers, only 5% reported that social media marketing was “fairly mature and well optimized” into their sales plan. Fifty-eight percent of the same survey participants indicated that their social media channels were only “in the early stages” and 17% admitted that they did not use it at all (Giamanco and Gregoir 90). Although large corporations such as Coca-Cola and Old Spice are well-represented via social networking sites (SNS), small businesses who have fewer resources also have quite a capacity to be a success story.

Louise Tanguay and Matt Anderson are one such example. Married with children, the couple owns an online business titled The Sleep Store. In 2010, they began using social media networks, starting with a Facebook page, to build their store’s reputation. Within a short amount of time, their gross profits doubled and they were able to hire three more staff members to account for the resulting increase in business (Hopkins 11). As their social media reach grew, so did their store. Louise and Matt are just one example of the vast power available for harness to those who reach out and try it.

The real estate market is one known for extraordinary interpersonal contact. Real estate agents and brokers are commission-based and people-oriented. Their sales are the results of face-to-face relationships that lead to successful business transactions. Although online immediacy is a new concept for some, it does not drastically differ from their traditional and typical forms of networking. Linday Day Harrison, founder of theBrokerList and a Certified Commercial Investment Member, has begun giving guidance to property managers attempting to take their business online. She explains that social media is both indispensable and a natural result of already-existing client-broker relations. Said Harrison, "It's like writing a letter or an e-mail to a client: you just don't say anything inappropriate. For some reason, many people are afraid of social media, but they're [sic] today's form of communication" (Dobrian 58).

When doing research to begin this study, the researcher found that one problem plaguing real estate professions is the belief that anything they post on social media sites to promote their small business is a good business decision. Agents are not alone in this assumption; studies like this one in 2011 are partially responsible. *The Journal of Marketing Research* reported that nearly nine in ten real estate professionals use social media to sell homes ("Real" 4). Seventy-nine percent reported using Facebook to promote listings, 48% reported using Twitter, and 29% reported LinkedIn use. However, because a post is put on social media does not mean that it is necessarily useful or beneficial to the agent or broker. The very term "social media use" is vague at best and can cover a multitude of marketing sins at worst. Logging into Facebook once a week could be one real estate agent's definition of "using social media" while her colleague also reports selling via social media, although she utilizes HootSuite to schedule posts across multiple channels, multiple times per day. Each of these real estate agents represents a different mindset and technique.

Social media marketing in the real estate community is not always a recipe for success. Like any other tools, it has to be carefully honed, practiced, and planned for. When Facebook and Twitter first were lauded as successful, helpful, and the way of the future, many companies jumped at the opportunity for seeming expansion, only to run into difficulties. In 2010, Choke Design Co. of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania was featured in a local real estate periodical due to the company's use of a social media strategist, Jonas Hair (Myers 28). Choke Design Co. hired Hair to work for their company as a consultant while also living in their ultra-modern lofts downtown. Hair created a Twitter account, named for the lofts, and tweeted his life as a resident. Initially a novel idea, a few months after the article was published, Hair stopped tweeting. Today, his account is dead on Twitter, the last update published in late 2010. The Facebook page for Choke Design Co. has not been updated for more than a year. What happened? Why did this "modern, progressive way" of selling end for this seemingly-innovative company (Myers 29)?

There are multiple reasons why attempts to grow via social media do not come to fruition as planned, but the researcher supposes that many real estate agent professionals do not adequately understand how their audience uses Facebook and Twitter. Communication scholars have spent years analyzing how people relate to, communicate with, and understand one another. The resulting theories have provided the academic world with hundreds of ways with which to view their surroundings better understand themselves as well as their fellow man. Although the jump to digital communication is a fairly recent one and is not as well-understood as traditional avenues of communication, people have not changed.

It is the opinion of the researcher that communication theory provides the knowledge and understanding to enable its scholars to properly harness the power of social networking. In that vein, the researcher believes that real estate agents and brokers will more successfully promote

their business by understanding how their intended audience processes their posts on Twitter and Facebook. In order to accomplish that goal, the present study utilizes the Heuristic Systematic Model as posited by Shelly Chaiken to better discover the reasons behind Facebook and Twitter users' preference or dislike for real estate-focused posts.

The Heuristic Systematic Model (HSM) is built upon the idea that individuals process ideas and thoughts in two different ways. The first and most simple form of processing is referred to as "heuristic" or "peripheral." Simply put, heuristic processing involves using surface-level cues to make a quick judgment about an idea. Oppositely, cognitive processing represents deep, critical analysis. The difference between the two may be seen in an individual looking at a car for sale. Peripheral processing is seen in the statement, "That car's headlights are an odd shape and I don't care for the color. I won't buy it." If the person were to say, "This car is the wrong color, but the engine speed and power are exactly what I'm looking for. They have it priced at \$23,000 and I only have \$2,000 to put down as a deposit. That may mean that I cannot afford the monthly payments I would have to make on this car," they are clearly thinking critically and cognitively about the potential purchase. It is important to note that the HSM posits that individuals can concurrently process, meaning that they engage in heuristic and cognitive processing simultaneously.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

RQ1: To what degree do home buyers heuristically process real estate posts on the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter?

RQ2: To what degree do home buyers systematically process real estate posts on the social media networking sites Facebook and Twitter?

RQ3: Do posts on the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter cross the sufficiency threshold, motivating home buyers to process them either systematically or concurrently?

The following chapters will systematically guide the reader through the research process. Chapter two discusses the literature surrounding the Heuristic Systematic Model as well as studies that have previously been done on real estate marketing via social media. Chapter three details the researcher's methodology. The fourth chapter gives the results and places them within a discussion-oriented format. The fifth and final chapter explains limitations of the study as well as gives recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Everyone needs a place to lay their head at night. No one expressly desires to be homeless; shelter is listed at the most basic tier of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Many people, especially in western culture, not only work for the practical necessities of a house but also take pride in its appearance, amenities, and design. No two homes are exactly identical and there are positives and negatives to each.

The housing market has been slowly but surely experiencing upward mobility since its rapid decline in 2005 when bank lenders became increasingly more stringent. J. Andrew Hansz of the Gazarian Real Estate Center of California State University predicts a full recovery, but says that the market will take a long time to return to its former peak (Kissell). As it builds, it seems that there are new opportunities available for real estate marketing. Concurrently, social media have continued to grow and expand at an astounding pace. Many companies and individuals advertise their businesses on Facebook and Twitter, although there is little information regarding how real estate marketing is represented on these sites. In 2005, when home sales drastically declined, Facebook was only one year old.

In the years since Facebook's inception in 2004, it has grown rapidly. On average, American Internet users currently spend more time per day on Facebook than on Google, Yahoo, YouTube, Microsoft, Wikipedia, and Amazon combined (Parr). There are over one billion Facebook users worldwide and two out of three Americans have Facebook profiles (Smith). Twitter, another social media giant, averaged 241 million members worldwide in December 2013 (Shih). It is commonly agreed that social networking sites have changed the way individuals build relationships and maintain contact with others (Lichy 101). Academics and common discourse espouse the idea that the Internet is a cost-effective channel of communication and spans all previously-held global boundaries. According to Lichy, global

trends can be seen in Internet behavior among generation Y users. Twitter and Facebook are two powerhouses in the social media world, and any investigation into social network user behaviors begs their inclusion.

In 2012, commercial real estate expert Robert J. Pliska authored an article in *Real Estate Issues* detailing why he considers social media interaction to be a necessity for successful professionals. He explained his perspective by using a quote from Wayne Gretzky, who said, “A good player plays where the puck is. A great player plays where the puck is going to be” (48). In real estate, or in any business, Pliska believes that social media is “where the puck is going to be.” He mentioned that 83 percent of all decision making now starts with a Google search. If a business does not establish an online presence (in addition to having a website), they are severely limited as compared to competitors.

Pliska’s article stood out among others because he admitted from the start that he was skeptical to join the social media “bandwagon.” At first, he assumed it was a fad that would soon cease to exist. However, he quickly realized that consumer decisions were being made based on Twitter, YouTube, and Google searches to name a few. Pliska stated:

I was able to expand my horizons in not only identifying future work but completing that work with the help of social media. One example of this was that a client asked me to sell his company, not just his commercial real estate. With the help of LinkedIn, I was able to find more than 400 potential buyers of that company by working with the M&A LinkedIn group sites and other social media.

(49)

Is his account unique? Real estate, traditionally a reputation-based career grown by recommendations and word-of-mouth, is relatively a newcomer to the social media game.

Obviously, it can meet with great success. The real question is: specifically, how do social media influence potential buyers and sellers? That answer may be found using tools created to study persuasion.

The Heuristic-Systematic Model of information processing was first postulated by Shelly Chaiken in response to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Whaley). It identifies two coexistent, but qualitatively different, means by which receivers of persuasive messages process them. Chaiken agreed with the ELM that there are two routes by which individuals process information, the cognitive and the heuristic (or peripheral). However, unlike ELM, the Heuristic-Systematic Model states that people can process via both routes simultaneously. Anyone utilizing the Heuristic Systematic Model is trying to assign truth and validity to a particular point or view. People process information almost constantly and can choose to reject or accept what they are told. Many of these choices are not conscious, minor in nature, and do not stand out as major decisions. However, that does not negate the nature of information messages. They are inherently acceptable to the hearer or are rejected.

The goal of this study is to utilize the Heuristic Systematic Model to explain how Facebook and Twitter users process and respond to real estate marketing on their social media accounts. Ultimately, all advertisements are attempts at persuasion, and social media users are a sought-after audience. Real estate is an arena that has only begun to integrate itself with the modern social networking world. In order to properly investigate how real estate marketing is perceived and received on Facebook and Twitter, a review of the current bodies of literature on these subjects is necessary. First, this study will review the origins of the Heuristic Systematic Model of persuasion and studies that have successfully utilized it in previous years. Second, will be the literature review on social media use both among Generation Y and in business marketing.

Review of Literature on Heuristic Systematic Processing

The heuristic systematic model of persuasion is similar to the elaboration likelihood model; both maintain that there are two mental paths that people follow to make a decision. These “dual process theories” are means of evaluating the human response to persuasive messaging (Whaley). The peripheral route is the initial observation that does not require as much consideration. To focus peripherally on something is to take in its superficial characteristics. The opposite is the central or systematic route of processing, which accounts for all details of the subject. Central processing represents a thorough processing and evaluation, taking into account attributes that are not immediately obvious (Gilovich, Keltner, and Nisbett).

The heuristic side of the processing model relies heavily on surface-level cues and judgments. Todorov, Chaiken, and Henderson explain it well:

If people are not sufficiently motivated or do not have sufficient cognitive resources, they can engage in superficial or heuristic processing of available information. In a heuristic mode, people consider a few informational cues--or even a single informational cue--and form a judgment based on these cues. For instance, such cues may be the source of the message or the length of the message. That is, people use a simple decision rule such as "Experts can be trusted" to arrive at a conclusion instead of scrutinizing the quality of persuasive arguments. (198)

One major premise of heuristic processing rests on the idea that the individual will only use the subset of information available to him, instead of investigating and searching for further indicators (Whaley). The second premise postulates exertion of only the most limited cognitive effort. The receiver of the persuasive message may not realize he or she is actively choosing only

to exert minimal effort. However, as soon as he or she arrives at a conclusion based on the information available to them, their heuristic mode of processing will require that they enact that decision with no further thought to possible alternatives. Finally, the heuristic processor employs relatively simple decision rules called schemata or cognitive heuristics that are mostly shaped from their experiences in life until that point.

Heuristics are generally seen altogether as structures that generate information on which a decision about acceptance or rejection can be made (Maheswaran, Mackie, and Chaiken 319). In many ways, these heuristic structures represent learned associations between the persuasive situation they are presented with and the probable validity of the position advocated. In the study by Maheswaran, Mackie, and Chaiken, the researchers believed that brand names affect people's processing regarding the product's validity. They suggested that brand name information be considered a knowledge structure that operates as a judgmental heuristic. In such an instance, knowledge structures may include associations between a particular name, good or bad quality, etc. If brand names were a judgmental heuristic, they posited that it would enable consumers to make purchasing decisions with little to no cognitive effort as the buyer would instead rely on his or her heuristic judgment (Maheswaran, Mackie, and Chaiken 318).

It has been suggested, and widely agreed with, that both heuristic cues and a message's arguments both represent persuasive evidence (Kruglanski and Thompson). Another way to describe heuristic processing would be to classify the processing as "if-then" statements (.e.g., if the speaker is an expert, then agree with him or her) (Chaiken, Duckworth, and Darke 121). Many of these "if-then" decision-making schemas are representative of the individual's background and life experiences. Past experience is influential, as it is commonly seen, for better or for worse, as an accurate predictor of the future. Furthermore, Chaiken, Duckworth, and

Darke infer that decisions made with less systematic processing are more likely to rest upon stereotypes, which are also part of the individual's "past experience" schema. Stereotypic judgment links a current situation to ingrained schema, making stereotypical judgments more likely when systematic processing is minimal or non-existent (Chaiken, Duckworth, and Darke 120).

That is not to say that all heuristically-processed judgments are stereotypical or racist in nature. Indeed, personal experience will always influence an individual's knowledge structures and not always for the worse. However, because those knowledge structures are largely subjective and unique to the individual, making heuristic judgments based upon said schema does not typically result in necessarily sound reasoning, as it is fundamentally, formulaically different from cognitive processing.

People are known to use several cues in applying heuristics to persuasive messages. These are communicator cues, context cues, and message cues (Littlejohn and Foss 91; Whaley 2009). Communicator cues may lead people to consider statements by experts as more valid than those by non-experts. Other examples of communicator cues may include liking or non-liking, or other subjective criteria that people use to decide whether or not a speaker is valid (e.g. "She is difficult to get along with so what she is saying must be false").

Contextual cues involve the situation that the receiver finds himself or herself in. If a receiver overhears another audience member's criticism or approval of a message, they may align themselves with that same position, merely out of convenience and contextual ease. Finally, message cues also influence heuristic processing. According to Chaiken and colleagues, people may have experienced situations where strong, convincing messages were comprised at length, comprised of many arguments, and were sound to the receiver. This indicates a heuristic

known as “length implies strength” or “more arguments are better arguments” (Whaley 2009). These are rules based on the receiver’s past experience, integrated with cues from the current message. In the absence of systematically applied thought processes, people tend to employ heuristic rules such as these when they are presented with message cues. Rarely do message cues and derived rules result in careful examination of the quality of the given argument(s), but rather they sway people toward agreeing with messages containing numerous arguments, with messages that are of considerable length, statistically laden messages, or with messages attributed to expert sources (Whaley 2009). It is important to note that, for instance, “statistically laden” refers to the inclusion of statistics but does nothing to indicate that these statistics are accurate or correctly applied.

Opposite of heuristic processing, systematic criticism requires a person to consider all relevant pieces of information, elaborate on these pieces, and form a judgment based on said elaborations (Todorov, Chaiken, and Henderson 196). They note in the same article, “In a systematic mode, people scrutinize available persuasion information for its relevance to their task...persuasion in a systematic mode is mediated by the person's understanding and cognitive elaboration of the persuasion message” (197). Systematic processing can be thought of as entailing, to some degree, analytic and comprehensive treatment of judgment-relevant information (Chaiken et al., 1989; Chaiken, Duckworth, and Darke 120).

The nature of systematic processing reflects a trade-off between minimizing cognitive effort while maximizing judgmental confidence (Chen, Shechter, and Chaiken 262, Chaiken et al., 1989). When systematic processing is engaged, it reflects sufficient motivation on the part of the receiver to interact with the persuasive material beyond surface-level, innate judgments based

off of personal knowledge structures. Littlejohn and Foss laid out their description of the sufficiency principle as follows:

A balance between motivation and effort will determine in part which route is taken, as people want to achieve some sort of balance between assurance and effort. When motivation is high and the communicator has the knowledge and ability to evaluate the information carefully, he or she will be more systematic in evaluation information, even when more effort is required. (90)

The cognitive side of the heuristic-systematic model must include sufficient motivation for the individual to use systematic processing. When cognitive processing is engaged, the individual's threshold for quality analysis has been crossed. If they cannot obtain a "sufficient degree of assurance" that they have satisfactorily obtained their message processing goals, then heuristic cues are brought into alignment with systematic processing (Whaley 2009). Since that threshold is subjective to every individual's knowledge structures and personality features, there cannot be a rule dictating when or if a person will engage in heuristic or systematic processing. Chen and Chaiken wrote this on the subject:

For any given judgment, the sufficiency principle proposes a continuum of judgmental confidence, along which two critical points lie: one designating the perceivers' level of actual confidence, and the other designating their level of desired confidence, or sufficiency threshold. Perceivers will exert cognitive effort until their level of actual confidence reaches (if it can) their sufficiency threshold, thereby closing the gap between actual and desired levels of confidence (74).

There are three noted motivations for systematic processing as it is described by Chaiken. The sufficiency threshold is one factor, while the second is the individual's level of internal

motivation. People are economy-minded and want to exert effort in correspondence with the reward they are seeking (Dash, Meeten, and Davey 1049). The first of these is accuracy motivation. People have an inherent need to form accurate attitudes or, in other words, they have a desire to hold the “right” position on an issue (Chaiken, Liberman, and Eagly 212). They also posit that people are motivated by a “desire to form or to defend particular attitudinal positions” (Chaiken, Liberman, and Eagly 234). The third and final entry in this category is impression motivation, or the need to express attitudes that are acceptable to social evaluators, whether those evaluators are literal or perceived (Chaiken, Liberman, and Eagly 234). When individuals are impression-motivated, their goal in processing information is to determine whether or not one stance is more socially acceptable to other people than another.

Although the two modes of processing have been defined at length as separate entities, they can and do coexist. Indeed, dual-processing is what makes the heuristic-systematic model markedly separate from the elaboration likelihood model. Chaiken, Liberman, and Eagly defined this as concurrent processing (1989). Littlejohn and Foss give the example of a professor who is positively systematically evaluated by a student. Because the systematic evaluation of the professor’s arguments was favorable, the student could have their heuristic evaluation bolstered as well in regard to the professor’s high credibility (90). Similarly, a positive systematic examination combined with the knowledge that other students also like the professor is another example of concurrent systematic and heuristic processing.

However, the defining feature of concurrent processing is whether or not the two modes and evaluations agree with each other. One interactive effect of concurrent processing is attenuation. After initially processing both heuristically and systematically, the individual may find that the results from both of these contradict each other. Systematic processing typically

provides more judgment-relevant information than do heuristic cues, leading to the conclusion that heuristic cues do not make a discernable impact on judgmental decisions. However, attenuation will be most noticeable when systematic processing reveals information blatantly contradicting any heuristically-reached conclusions (Maheswaran, Mackie, and Chaiken 322).

However, heuristic and systematic do not always find themselves in opposing positions. When the two modes do not yield very contradictory information, it is referred to as the additivity effect (Maheswaran, Mackie, and Chaiken 322). When expectations based on heuristic cues are confirmed by systematic processing, consumers form attitude judgments based on both the heuristic cues as well as the communication content. In this way, the heuristic-systematic model provides a framework for determining when judgments will be determined by heuristic processing alone, systematic processing alone, or the output of both heuristic and systematic processing (Chaiken et al. 1989, Maheswaran and Chaiken 1991).

Research Utilizing the Heuristic-Systematic Model

The first, most substantial description of heuristic-systematic processing was given by Shelly Chaiken and others in 1989. Since then, Chaiken has continue to publish and contribute to studies utilizing the HSM. This study seeks to review the literature as put forth by Chaiken and colleagues in the early part of the nineties, while the latter half focuses on recent studies that have utilized the HSM as a “lens” with which they have framed their research.

In 1992, Maheswaran, Mackie, and Chaiken performed a study on how brand name heuristics affect consumer judgments. Their subjects read a message that portrayed a product as possessing important or unimportant attributes and was also associated with either a favorable or unfavorable brand name. They found that brand name does act as a heuristic cue and engaged the HSM to explain these results (330). Simple cues, such as product unavailability and perceived

disregard for their individual opinion, influenced the subjects to only engage heuristically. Oppositely, when they felt that their opinions were important and that they would have a chance to buy the product locally, they were motivated to engage in systematic processing (330). Previously, brand name effects were not reported uniformly in research and Maheswaran, Mackie, and Chaiken found that much of the previous research was heuristically mediated (e.g. “if the brand name has a good reputation then people will assume that it is of good quality”). However, that premise assumes that the individual is not going to be sufficiently motivated to cross the sufficiency threshold, which may be inaccurate.

Other work on heuristic cues by Chaiken and colleagues included a study on mood variation and heuristic processing (Bohner, Chaiken, and Hunyadi 207). People in a sad state of mind were found to process ambiguous messages utilizing heuristic cues. Sad individuals were more influenced by variations in message content than those in happy moods (218). Their data indicated that negative mood at the time of message processing may lead to analogous biasing effects of heuristic cues. Concurrently, in 1996 Chen, Shechter, and Chaiken found that people showed a “go along to get along” heuristic tendency. Impression-motivated individuals tended to agree with their partners in order for things to flow more smoothly, without actually systematically encountering the other person’s argument or position on a matter (272).

One intriguing study by Luo, Zhang, Burd, and Seazzu focused on determining how people are persuaded to process heuristically or systematically in the face of a possible threat. Phishing is a serious threat to information security and it often is found in the form of e-mail messages. To that extent, Luo et al. developed an e-mail and corresponding survey that was designed to look as though it was official university correspondence. Although the researchers did not record or file the information that participants reported, they sent out a false e-mail that,

when students clicked on the embedded link, took them to a website that mimicked UNM and required the students to enter their username and password information. Luo et al. developed six hypotheses about how people would respond to the falsified e-mail. Although the study was cut short when an administrative office alerted the students to a possible phishing attempt, the data already collected indicated that high-quality messages simultaneously engage and deflect systematic processing (36). Message recipients with a high level of need cognition were less likely to be victimized and messages with a high level of genre conformity were more likely to engage victims (36).

And just as detailed analytic processing was linked to a better deception detection by Luo et al., so systematic processing was also linked to chronic worrying. The same analytical tendencies described by Chen, Shechter, and Chaiken as “comprehensive analysis of judgement-relevant information” that is helpful in self-protection, can also lead to obsessive evaluation. Dash, Meeten, and Davey found similar brain characteristics when comparing systematic processing and worrying (1050). The researchers noted that systematic processing and worrying share many factors, but are qualitatively different processes. Systematic processing is deployed in a broad range of judgment tasks that have social significance both personally and socially, while worrying is solely personal and typically has internal significance (1051).

Edwards and Edwards (2013) performed an online study via a popular website frequented by students, ratemyprofessor.com. This study was similar to the current one; both investigate how online communication influences individuals to engage their heuristic and systematic processing capabilities. Edwards and Edwards focused on positive and negative word of mouth messages and ratings, noting that word of mouth referred to computer mediated textual exchanges. They found that unanimous positive reviews of a professor encouraged readers to use

only heuristic processing, giving credence to accuracy and impression motivations. These individuals based their ratings on word of mouth referrals, rather than an objective evaluation of the performance itself (421). Interestingly, overwhelmingly negative reviews prompted systematic processing of the professor's performance. The study demonstrated a significant variance in student perceptions of their professor's credibility, capability, and attractiveness and the student's learning and motivation, indicating that the latter are attributable to factors outside of the instructor's actual performance. The students tended to trust one another's expertise on the professor's credibility, considering their peers' unanimous decision an indication of good opinion.

Another study in 2013 indicated a heuristic tendency toward processing that people may employ if they feel that they are already an expert. Smith, et al. discovered that people high in awareness about a topic are less likely to accept information on it (862). This may be due to the fact that people well-versed on a particular topic feel that they have already systematically engaged with the subject enough to eliminate heuristic cues and are therefore only interested in select, seemingly worthwhile information about it. In October of 2013, the HSM was utilized to determine whether or not individuals have a preference for verbal or visual processing.

Townsend and Kahn found that respondents indicated a strong preference, even an overuse, of the visual preference heuristic (1006). They also found that in situations where the choice sets are familiar, visual assortments and choices are preferable. However, in large or unknown choice sets, verbal depiction was preferable (1009).

Review of the Heuristic-Systematic Model and Real Estate

The decision process that ensues when buying a home relies heavily on persuasion. Real estate agents and sellers try to gauge what elements influence buyers the most and how much

their suggestions and arguments will affect the sale. Buyers can either choose to process these cues systematically or heuristically. Both heuristic systematic processing and real estate sales beg investigation in order to determine if the theory and subject are compatible. This requires a review of research on real estate's place in social media, the psychology of buying and selling, and the applications of the heuristic systematic approach.

Dion and Notarantonio surveyed seventy-four real estate agents who worked between 21 and 30 hours a week and had been with the company for 19 to 24 months. They questioned the respondents on how important they perceived communication style to be, whether or not the agents' altered their communication styles with various sales prospects, etc. The results linked closely to their predictions: most sales people agreed that communication style was important to their careers, some of them agreed that it could be manipulated, and majority of them reported changing their communication style based upon the client they were interacting with.

However, in spite of these self-reported results, communication style did not appear to have a significant impact on any of the sales performance measures. Communication image and income were not found to be significantly correlated. To explain these results, the authors referenced the elaboration likelihood model, which is the parent theory behind the heuristic systematic model used in this study. ELM says that when a product has high personal relevance, the prospective buyer is motivated to apply cognitive effort to analyzing the purchase. However, if they are not extremely interested or invested in the purchase, they will make an initial decision based on the agent's sales pitch and its verbal and nonverbal qualities. Since the ELM differs from the heuristic model in its claim that people can only process one route (cognitive or peripheral) at one time, the deeply interested buyer would not be immediately put off by a lack of communication skills because he/she is analyzing the actual purchase.

In addition to interviewing the real estate agents, Dion and Notarantonio recruited other participants to watch a taped interaction between a sales person and client. Their goal was to determine whether or not friendliness had an effect on whether or not the buyer had a positive reaction to the sales person. Their results indicated that although an agent could be very precise in his communication skills, the effect was severely nulled if there was a lack of friendliness. A friendly real estate agent was much more successful in cracking the door to a transaction. If the agent was precise, to use the study's terms, in his/her communication style it did not affect the buyer if they could not get past the lack of friendliness (74). These results can be explained with the elaboration likelihood model or the heuristic-systematic progression. If the peripheral route was not initially stimulated, then the cognitive may not engage. The initial meet-and-greet in a sales transaction is the peripheral point of interest; a real estate agent or broker's use of advertising, speech, and friendliness all combine to form the peripheral impressions. Cognitive evaluation, such as assessing the price, location and agent's commission is secondary. That is where the decision to buy or sell will be made.

This aforementioned study raises the theory, and many of the same ideas, that are addressed in this paper. The heuristic model of persuasion pertains to the same two routes: cognitive and peripheral, as does the ELM. However, it differs in its claim that people process both routes at once, making them of equal importance (O'Keefe). ELM instead treats the peripheral as a gateway to the cognitive, allowing users only to access one at a time.

Heuristic cues are the subject of the conference papers from the 2009 International Communication Association's annual gathering. Brandon Van Der Heide wrote a summary of the discussion that centered around whether or not computer-mediated communication (CMC) affected the heuristic-systematic model of persuasion. Over time, written communication has

repeatedly indicated a lack of compatibility with the heuristic system, indicating that oral and visual cues hold greater room for interpretation in that context (8).

However, because of the internet's interpersonal nature, the heuristic model is more easily adaptable to online communication. Social media adds a new dimension, allowing people to communicate similarly to how they would when face-to-face. As a result, Van Der Heide wrote three hypotheses:

H1: Greater exposure to positive or negative credibility cues produces more extreme a) judgments of source credibility and b) message consistent attitudes in directions consistent with valence of those cues.

H2: As the number of source credibility cues increases, heuristic processing increases.

H3: The relationship between the number of credibility cues in a computer-mediated message and message-consistent attitudes is mediated by judgments of the sender's credibility (9).

H1 and H3 were both supported, although H2 was not. Credibility and online communication are strongly correlated and internet users use both peripheral and cognitive pathways to determine speaker integrity. As real estate and social media continue to fuse into a greater internet presence, heuristic systematic processing leaves the door open for future research in that arena.

An article by Chen, Duckworth, and Chaiken discusses the heuristic processing motivations that drive individuals to choose their mode of persuasion. First, the *level* of motivation is the term used to indicate whether or not a person will choose the heuristic (peripheral) route or the cognitive one. Second, the type of motivation predicts the nature of the cognitive decision or what direction it will take. The levels of motivation include accuracy,

defense and impression motivations. Each one of those influences which route the individual will take; for example, they say, “The impression sufficiency threshold refers to that point of processing at which perceivers feel sufficiently confident that their judgments will satisfy their social motives. Heuristic processing should confer sufficient confidence in situations that elicit minimal impression motivation” (46). In keeping with that description, there are various faces of motivated heuristic processing as well, although not as definitively listed in their article.

Real estate agents and brokers represent a business that has proven itself resilient in the midst of changing social, business, and technological norms. However, as technology changes, so do business growth methods. Social media continues to be an advantageous way to grow businesses, although it is not as simple as “one-size fits all.” The communication theories and methods that explain interpersonal interactions have new, varied applications for LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, etc. Many of these studies have not yet been written, opening the door for new studies and research.

The question remains: what are the convincing, deciding factors that “seal the deal” in home buyers’ minds? Agent approachability, financial constraints, social media presence, reputation, and countless factors have a role in the decision. No one study is completely comprehensive; necessitating further review and compilation of the information already present.

Heuristic systematic processing is the lens through which real estate’s future in social media will be viewed in this author’s study. By acknowledging that audiences can simultaneously pursue two decision-making tracks at once – heuristic and cognitive – the question regarding which path social media influences people to pursue is raised. Although this is a broad topic with multiple interpretations, this study’s focus is narrowed to the initial application of Twitter and Facebook to real estate.

The Literature on Social Media and Real Estate

When the Internet was invented, it began to change the way that people buy and sell. Real estate is no exception, although it is admittedly not as easily sold as an ottoman on Amazon.com. In 1998, as the Internet began to exert its vast selling powers, Kelvin Childs wrote an article discussing the difficulties of converting classified advertisements from paper to web. For years, newspapers had been publishing real estate advertisements. Toward the end of the 1990's, newspapers began their slow decline and internet searches became more common and popular. However, the language used in print advertisements was drastically different from what was needed to be picked up by internet search engines.

Terminology was the largest difficulty and biggest area for change, according to Childs. Newspaper publishers had to identify a set of standards for online classified ads. Once those were in place, search engines would pick up the listing more easily and people would be more likely to access the kind of real estate they were looking for. Thus began the initial transition from print to screen, from traditional to modern. Although social media had yet to arrive, Childs identified a lag between how real estate agents were marketing and what was actually working.

More recently, Benn Rosales and Lani-Anglin Rosales, two real estate agents who aggressively use social media, have made national headlines (Hudson 2008). They started their own online real estate magazine titled *Agent Genius*. Lockett chronicles the lack of social media presence in many cases, but also mentions that the number of blogs put forth by real estate businesses doubled in one year. In 2007 only four percent of realtors ran a blog and by 2008, it had risen to eight percent. The National Association of Realtors expected that number to rapidly rise in coming years.

Of course, communication and social media experts often do not fit the typical real estate profile. The business has long relied on referrals and nominations. It is interesting then to note that the Rosales' online efforts drew attention from a communication industry expert.

Connie Reece, founder of Austin social media consortium Every Dot Connects, said Agent Genius provides a valuable service in their industry. The Rosaleses "are doing a remarkable thing in helping to share the new tools and tech with those in the real estate business," Reece said. "They're getting discussions going on among brokers and agents, and kind of pooling their resources." The industry at large still has catching up to do, she said. "I frankly have been surprised that I have not seen more real estate brokers and agents use social media." (Hudson 2008)

The Rosaleses' account corroborates with Louise Tanguay and Matt Anderson's story. The husband-and-wife team own a business called The Sleep Store, which started off as a website run out of their home (Hopkins 11). Their business caters to helping children from infancy to six years old sleep well. In 2010, the couple began to use social media to communicate with their customers and found themselves surprised by the resulting explosive growth their business experienced. They promoted their Facebook page as part of an online community for parents and children, launching competitions for the most "likes" and put advertising banners for Facebook on their homepage and on all staff e-mail signatures. Louise reports currently spending approximately half of her work day on their social media accounts, largely because their Facebook page led to doubling their gross sales and led to the (positive) need for three additional staff members to support The Sleep Store's increased business (10).

These types of small-business success stories, centrally focused on social media reach, are testimonies to the power of properly-harnessed social media marketing.

By April of 2011, smart phones became a commonality for many. The iPhone introduced the world to “apps,” the technology lingo for applications (programs) that are downloadable to phones. Many businesses have developed apps in order to further integrate with customers. Jones Lang LaSalle, a leader in commercial real estate, put an app out in spring of 2011 and PRNewswire reported on the changing face of the market (“New”). Their Chief Information Officer, David Johnson, said it was only the latest in their effort to become more prominent in user-friendly media:

Creating an app for iPhone is an important step in our ongoing efforts to lead the conversation on commercial real estate trends. In recent years, we have expanded our channels of communication to encompass LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, complementing our online presence at www.joneslanglasalle.com and our media outreach, which can be found in our Press Room. (“New”)

At any rate, some individuals and corporations in the business have begun to realize the potential that lies in social media. But just because the market is changing does not necessarily mean that people are not persuaded in the same manner that they always have been. Those selling will always wonder what will be the deciding factor for their buyers, always trying to anticipate how they can best appeal.

The Literature on Social Media Users

Understanding the social media user was essential in creating a meaningful study that effectively worked to reveal new truths about social media and real estate marketing. Studies have been done that effectively emphasize the importance of visualizing and mapping the social

ties of user profiles. Many truths about social media are inherently understood but are difficult to prove. For instance, individual profiles are commonly thought to be strongly influenced by user ties to other social profiles, but capturing that information in social data systems proves difficult; a French university posited a map in 2012 that was the first of its kind in its scientific detail and tracking of social network ties (Tchuente et al. 2012). Similarly, another recent study examined word of mouth and internet buzz over product diffusion, attempting to link social networking chatter to verifiable analysis (Lee et al. 2012).

As such information is yet forthcoming on social media use in the real estate market, it is prudent for the current study to examine Twitter and Facebook use among American adopters. Older adults, those aged fifty and over, were the focus of extensive Pew Research in 2010 (Madden). As of 2010, social networking use (inclusive of all social sites, including but not limited to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.) was growing across all age groups, although the most significant adoption remained among users age 18-29 at 86%.

Only one in ten online adults ages 50-64 and one in twenty ages 65 and older reported using Twitter or another service to share status updates about themselves (Madden). However, although the user percentage was low, the rate of growth among older adults was faster than in other categories. Adults aged 74 and older quadrupled their social media use from 4% to 16% between 2008 and 2010 (Zickuhr). 61% of adults aged 30-49 (or Generation X) reported using social media regularly (Madden). Obviously, there is a wide gap between the media used by young people and media use by older individuals and the elderly (Lenhart 2009).

Building on this research, a study published in January 2013 surveyed 124 internet-using older adults aged 60-90 (Braun). They hypothesized that older adults' perceived usefulness of social networking sites (SNS) would positively relate to their intention to use SNS, that perceived ease of use of websites would positively relate to their intention to use SNS, and that social pressures from friends and family would positively relate to their intention to use SNS (Braun 674). Initial support was provided for all three hypotheses, indicating that these pressures are sufficient motivators for older adults to use SNS. Although the heuristic-systematic model was not expressly used in their analysis of the results, the motivators that the study identified as positively influencing older adults to use SNS were similar to the motivators that influence people to systematically process information. They study found that the relationship between trust in technology or SNS and older adult's intention to use SNS may reflect their concern that SNS involves social uncertainty and risk (677).

Additionally, Anadarajan et al. found similar tendencies and traits in Gen Y (2010). They also predicted that perceived usefulness would have a positive effect on use richness, along with hypotheses on ease of use and social usefulness. These were supported, indicating that Gen Y is

also motivated to utilize SNS based on perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and perceived social usefulness (137).

A sizeable body of literature recognizes that four dominant generations currently exist: traditionalists (born in 1922-45), baby boomers (born in 1946-64), generation X (born 1965-75), and Generation Y (born 1976-94) (Lichy 102). These generational definitions are not just textbook material but represent fundamental thought differences regarding many facets of social integration, not the least of which are SNS. Boyd (2010) believed that one of the main differences between generations X and Y lies in their motivation. Generation X (Gen X) represents astute pragmatists “whose focus is on self rather than society” (645) while Generation Y (Gen Y) tends to “evinced a myopic tendency toward self-gratification, while in other situations they trumpet the supremacy of social betterment” (469).

One of the largest, most defining factors in the generation gap between Gen Y and Gen X reflects the proliferation of technology in recent years. Gen Y grew up surrounded by not only television and radio, as their parents and grandparents did, but with growing access to a variety of tools that enabled communication as never seen before (Lichy 102). Gen Y has come to expect digital technologies to be a component of their life and they approach learning and work in fundamentally different ways than did previous generations. It is also interesting to note that older people and educators have tended to be more open and interested in new technologies when they observe younger people successfully using them (Lichy 103).

Furthermore, a 2009 study found that digital literacy accounts for a large portion of older adult involvement with new technologies (Eshet-Alkalai and Chajut 178). They believed that experience with technology is responsible for changes over time in digital literacy skills, regardless of the individual’s literal age (178). Younger participants in their study performed

better than older ones, largely due to their familiarity with technology. However, it was also found that older adults have more developed cognitive tools so that when a task calls for creative and critically-demanding skills, they are more equipped to properly respond than are their younger cohorts (Eshet-Alkalai and Chajut 178). Younger people know the digital technologies well, but do not have the cognitive framework necessary to make sophisticated use of them.

Furthermore, the young SNS user typically shows increased signs of narcissism in the content that they generate online (Leung 997). Those holding stronger narcissistic tendencies typically report a greater number of friends and wall-posts are likely will frequently post pictures of themselves (998). Leung presupposed that the more gratification internet users find in social media, the more they will use said media. The Net Generation (Gen Y) has been tagged as a generation that grew up with such technology and now view sit as part of their lives (Leung 999). Leung found no significant link between narcissistic personality traits and a specific social media use for the Gen Y subjects. However, he did find that Baby Boomers frequently use forums and blogs to seek gratification. Gen Y users use Facebook in a similar way to seek gratification, while Baby Boomers on Facebook preferred to create content that exploited and manipulated other people (1003). The study concluded that there are significant generational differences in social media use but it remains a good platform for narcissists to self-regulate and control their self-presentation by displaying attractive and positive information about themselves (1004).

Gen Y is perpetually “switched on” and these electronic effects are compounded by American cultural norms, such as small family size and consumer-based lifestyles (Downey 4). These younger users feel the need to stay connected constantly, leading some to term them “Gen Me” (4).

Upon reviewing the literature, the researcher formulated a new, specific methodology for studying the effects of social media marketing upon the real estate industry. The following chapter explains the chosen methods and how they were carried out.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Introduction and Research Questions

Businesses have increasingly realized the power of social media in customer gain and retention, but this form of marketing is anything but “one-size-fits-all.” Each industry represents a different facet of the economy with different niches, needs, and hallmarks. The real estate market is no exception, with thousands of free agents and brokers representing the commission-based business, each with different reputations, leads, and areas of expertise.

Because the market is so varied, is representative of many different demographics, and is largely made up of independent contractors, it can be difficult to make generalizations about the industry. There are strong indicators for the success of social media in real estate, but little research has been done outside of real estate agents’ personal success or failure stories.

It was the goal of this research study to discover how social media consumers, specifically recent home buyers, are encouraged or dissuaded to engage heuristically and systematically via real estate agents’ posts on Facebook or updates on Twitter. The research this study is based on includes a more expansive definition of “social media,” but present methodology was limited out of necessity.

Real estate agents’ goal is to engage the customers systematically, since buying a home is representative of that level of analytic, critical processing. The researcher hopes to achieve clarity in this rather unknown territory, determining both real estate agents can best systematically engage social media users and what kinds of posts best achieve that goal. These considerations led to the following research questions:

RQ1: To what degree do home buyers heuristically process real estate posts on the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter?

RQ2: To what degree do home buyers systematically process real estate posts on the social media networking sites Facebook and Twitter?

RQ3: Do posts on the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter cross the sufficiency threshold, motivating home buyers to process them either systematically or concurrently?

Researcher credibility

Since the nature of this study is largely qualitative, the researcher has a key role as a data collector. Qualitative research is largely held to be rather subjective, it is imperative that researcher bias, assumptions, and personal values be clearly defined. While pursuing a Master of Arts in the communication field, the researcher found that social media marketing was an area for growth and development in many industries. Her specific interest in real estate was piqued by a class taken in preparation for a national real estate agent licensure exam.

Many real estate agents who are in the prime of their careers are accustomed to using classified advertisements, lawn signage, print advertising, and word of mouth referrals. Neither they nor their customers are accustomed to communication regarding real estate via social media. The researcher began to form a personal, casual hypothesis that there was a yet-untouched market available to agents who were willing to make the effort to expand their business using SNS.

While researching this idea, the researcher attempted to maintain objectivity and acknowledge personal limitations. The researcher has engaged in personal social media consumption for approximately eight years, although her experiences on social media are acknowledged to be different from others and are not representative of social media practices

across the proverbial board. The researcher holds the assumption that social media increases heuristic processing. The researcher also holds the assumption that increased social media consumption leads to a greater sufficiency principle or threshold, meaning that motivation to process a position systematically will have to be greater as the user is accustomed to heuristically (passively) processing Twitter and Facebook feeds.

Research Design

The researcher wanted to gain an analysis of home buyers' experiences using social media, specifically, in regard to how they viewed social media posts by real estate agents. The goal was for participants to, as accurately as possible, self-report their social media use, habits, and how they process posts on social media. A study in 1995 written by Heppner et al. created an instrument called the Elaboration Likelihood Model Survey. It was used as part of a larger, five-part study conducted by those researchers on rape prevention. Although the scope of this study is quite smaller and not so quantitatively grounded, the present researcher obtained the original ELM questionnaire from Dr. Mary Heppner of the University of Missouri. The original document was only twelve questions long, so the researcher reformatted the survey to fit her purposes while keeping the essence of the survey's purpose (to decipher heuristic and systematic processing tendencies of the participants) the same.

The questions on the survey utilized in this study attempted to obtain two things: first, they sought to measure the impact of social media on the individual participant and second, to measure the degree to which social media posts systematically and/or heuristically influence the participant's processing.

Data Collecting

Survey-takers were asked for demographic data regarding their gender, age, and whether or not they had bought a home within the past five years. Although only home owners were asked to take the survey, participants were not limited to those who bought a home within that timeframe. After establishing those preliminary factors, participants were asked questions regarding their daily social media use on both Facebook and Twitter. They were asked to give a qualitative, textual description of how they met their real estate agent, if they used one. Subsequent questions regarding social media use were rated on a five-point Likert scale. Further textual answers were asked for when participants had to respond to questions regarding previous interactions with businesses or business representatives on Facebook or Twitter. The remaining questions gauged the participant's motivation level for systematically processing posts on Facebook and Twitter, their level of heuristic processing regarding posts on Facebook and Twitter, and what their experience with real estate agents on social media has been like.

Because this study was qualitative in nature, several questions asked for open-ended, text-based answers. On multiple choice questions, participants were given the option to specify "other" and enter in textual information to explain their choice. The remaining questions, in keeping with Heppner et al.'s style, were arranged on a five-point Likert scale. All questions arranged on the Likert scale were focused on determining the individual's level of engagement in both heuristic and systematic processing. All questions asked of the participants are listed in Appendix A.

Participants

There were two main criteria that participants in this study had to meet. The first was that they were over the age of eighteen, largely because one is not legally able to purchase a home before that point. Second, the researcher specifically needed home buyers from within the past

five years. The second criterion was developed in response to the “boom” in social media use within the past five years. Although it is possible that people who bought homes before 2009 used Facebook or Twitter to communicate with their real estate agent, it is unlikely. The rise in social media marketing has largely been very recent.

The Pew Research Center released statistics in September of 2013 detailing social networking site use in American adults from 2005-2013. In April of 2009, only 43% of adults aged 30-49 utilized SNS. However, in September 2013, that number had risen to 78%. The highest level of use is seen by people in the 18-29 age bracket, although their rate of growth between 2009 and 2013 was slower; approximately 76% of young adults were on social media sites in 2009 while 90% reported consistent use in 2013.

Although younger users have been active on SNS since the 2009, it is doubtful that many real estate agents were. Agents who are established in their real estate business are likely to fall in the 30-49 age group or older and that population was not well-represented on SNS until recent years. In light of these factors, the researcher decided it was most prudent to pursue survey participants who had purchased homes within the past five years, although other home owners (who had not bought within the past five years) were also given access to the survey and their answers recorded separately.

Participants were recruited via e-mail through referral, the snowball method, and via Survey Monkey. Those participants contacted by the researcher were sent a recruitment letter, which can be seen in Appendix B. They also were given an informed consent document, which can be seen in Appendix C. The recruitment letter contained a link to an electronic survey, hosted via SurveyMonkey.com. By following the embedded link, participants were able to complete the survey at their leisure and in complete anonymity. There was no obligation to the

survey participant and they were free to discontinue taking the survey whenever they wished to do so, if they wished to do so.

E-mails were sent to both individuals that the researcher had a personal relationship with as well as recent home buyers who were referred via acquaintances of the researcher. However, although the researcher offered a \$50 Wal-Mart gift card drawing incentive for anyone who completed the survey, there were very few respondents. In order to gain more participants, the researcher paid SurveyMonkey.com to find survey –takers over the age of eighteen and who owned their own home. The participants recruited by Survey Monkey were completely anonymous and the researcher did not and could not contact them personally. Survey Monkey recruits survey participants on behalf of researchers who pay Survey Monkey a fee, but their recruited participants do not receive direct monetary compensation. They are rewarded in other ways, primarily by being entered in sweepstake competitions.

In total, sixty-two adults completed the survey. Twenty-three participants owned their own home and had purchased it within the past five years. The remaining thirty-nine participants owned their homes, but stated that they had not bought it or any other residential real estate within the past five years. Out of those, only twenty-seven surveys were completed and usable. Of the fifty usable surveys, twenty-four were male and twenty-six were female, granting the survey results a nearly equal representation of both genders.

Ethical Considerations

Because this study involved human participants, a request for approval was sent to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University. The recruitment letter sent to participants was crafted in accordance with a specific template set forth by the IRB. Accordingly, the informed consent document was also written in keeping with the IRB's template for

participant documents. The survey questions, methods of collecting data, recruiting participants, and method of recording said data were all submitted as part of full study disclosure to the IRB. On February 4, 2014, the researcher received permission to proceed with her study (see Appendix D).

A full disclaimer of the nature of the study and the data to be analyzed was made available to all participants via the recruitment letter and informed consent document. They were assured that their participation would be completely anonymous. If the participant so wished, he or she was invited to e-mail the researcher at the completion of the survey to have their name entered in a drawing for a gift card. This allowed the researcher to offer an incentive to the survey-takers while also allowing them to remain anonymous; their e-mails were not linked to their specific survey results, keeping all answers separate from possible identifiers. The researcher did not compromise anyone's identities in the data collection and analysis process and all respondents were unidentifiable to the researcher, save for gender and age.

Scope of Study

The scope of this study was limited to self-reporting by recent home buyers. It did not involve such qualitative methods such as interviews, but instead asked qualitatively-based survey questions. The researcher was limited to whatever information the participant chose to give and was not able to ask for further clarification beyond what was indicated on the anonymous survey. This protected the participants but limited the study's ability to identify and expound on specific facets of survey results. The researcher had hoped to achieve at least fifty participants who had purchased a home within the past five years, but the study was limited to the audience available. While sixty-two home buyers were found, the lack of recent home buyer participants did have a limiting effect on the results and only fifty-five surveys were useable.

Methodology Conclusion

This study is the first of its kind. There is a large body of research, still growing, regarding the effects of social media on business and sales. What is less defined is how social media advertising or marketing specifically intertwines with the real estate market. The purpose of this study is to gain an overall understanding of how real estate agents and brokers can best systemically engage their customers and ultimately persuade them to use their services when buying or selling a home. Through these research methods, it is the researcher's goal to add to the growing body of literature on social media marketing.

Chapter 4 – Results

Survey Results

The following chapter reports the researcher's results after surveying fifty participants regarding their use of social media and how they process real estate-focused posts. In order to provide clarity and organize the findings, the research questions given via survey will be repeated here with the corresponding responses. Following the survey listing, the researcher will examine how the findings answered the research questions within the framework of the HSM model.

Fifty participants completed the survey. Twenty-four were male and twenty-six were female. Their ages ranged from eighteen to sixty-sixty or older. Twenty-three of the fifty total participants had bought residential real estate within the past five calendar years, while twenty-seven were home owners but had not made a residential purchase within the past five years.

The first questions focused demographic information: gender, age, and time of home purchase. Out of the remaining 23 questions, 9 were aimed at determining the respondent's level of involvement with SNS. The other 14 questions were crafted with the intent of deciphering the level of heuristic and systematic processing that the participant engages in while on SNS. The survey questions and responses are listed as follows.

After identifying gender, the participants were asked to identify their age. Only one respondent, or 2%, indicated that they were between the ages of 18-25. Twenty-two percent of respondents were 26-35, 8% were 36-45, 20% were 46-55, 32% were 56-65, and 15% were 66 or older. Among the home owners who did not purchase within the past five years, 81% were over the age of 45. The participants who indicated they had bought residential real estate within the

past five years were more evenly distributed, with 55% over the age of 45. The largest majority within the recent home buyer sample was 26-35 or 35% of respondents.

The next question focused on determining how home owners had purchased their home. A real estate agent is not necessary for an individual to purchase residential real estate, so the question asked participants to explain how they met their agent or, if they did not use one, to articulate why they chose not to do so. Below is a chart indicating the participants' responses. The two groups of participants are marked and their textual responses were coded for common themes. Only three, or 13% of participants who had recently bought homes did not use agents. The remaining 87% of recent home buyers used a real estate agent. The overwhelming majority of previous, older home buyers did not use a real estate agent (77%).

How they met agent	Within past 5 years	Other home owners
Family or Friends	11	3
Internet	4	0
Business or referral	5	3
Did not use an agent	3	21

The next question asked participants to rate on a five-point Likert scale how important social media was to their daily life. The option ranged from 1 or “of no importance” to 5, “vitaly important.” The averages between the two groups were virtually identical after accounting for standard deviation. Their average ratings fell somewhere between “little importance” and “some importance. Participants who had bought within the past five years had an average answer of

2.74, a median of 3, mode of 3, and standard deviation of .86. Previous home buyers had an average of 2.56, median of 3, mode of 3, and standard deviation of .89.

	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Within 5 years	2.74	3	3	.86
Other home owners	2.56	3	3	.89

Participants were asked to identify how frequently they access both Facebook and Twitter on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 or “never” to 5 or “multiple times a day.” Many participants indicated frequent Facebook use in both groups. In response to the question pertaining to Facebook, recent home buyers answered with an average of 3.70, a median of 4, mode of 5, and a standard deviation of 1.43. Previous home buyers indicated an average of 3.19, median of 3, mode of 5, and standard deviation of 1.55.

Facebook Use

	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Within 5 years	3.70	4	5	1.43
Other home owners	3.19	3	5	1.55

Twitter Use

	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Within 5 years	1.65	1	1	1.18
Other home owners	1.29	1	1	1.17

In response to the question about their Twitter usage, recent home buyers had an average response of 1.65, median of 1, mode of 1, and a standard deviation of 1.18. Previous home buyers had an average of 1.29, median of 1, mode of 1, and a standard deviation of 1.17.

Question seven on the survey used by the researcher asked participants to indicate whether or not they had ever liked a page on Facebook that promoted a specific business or business person. Seventy percent of recent home buyers indicated “yes” and 56% of older home buyers also answered in the affirmative. In total, 62% of all home buyers surveyed have liked business-oriented profile or page on Facebook. Alternately, only 8% of home buyers, both recent and past indicated that they had ever followed an account on Twitter that promoted a specific business or business person. There was virtually no difference between recent home buyers and older home buyers, as 91% of recent home buyers answered negatively to the question and 93% of older home buyers said the same.

When asked to give a qualitative, textual description of a past interaction with a business or business representative on Facebook, only 17% of those who had recently bought real estate had an example to give. One participant said, “I have contacted restaurants and stores with questions or comments,” while another said they had contacted the customer service department for a t-shirt company via their Facebook page. Two others said they had used Facebook to garner business recommendations and one individual reported contacting “A comic store to find out if they had something I was looking for in stock.”

The results for home owners who had not purchased their homes within the past five years were very similar to those listed above. Fourteen percent gave descriptions and examples of interactions on Facebook with business pages or representatives, including “I contacted [my] daughter’s dance studio for information,” “Contacted a photographer for an event,” and “A coffee company.” All other answers indicated that participants either did not have a Facebook account or had never had that type of interaction.

Similarly, participants were then asked to give a written example of how they had previously interacted with a business or business representative on Twitter. Out of the fifty participants, including both recent and previous home buyers, only 2% indicated that they had ever had such an interaction on Twitter. That lone participant (one out of fifty) said they had contacted a clothing company to find out details about the company’s merchandise. That participant was one of the recent home buyers; all of the home owners who had purchased in previous years indicated that they either do not use Twitter or have never engaged in such an interaction.

The survey participants were then asked to indicate how useful they find posts on SNS that promote a particular product or person using a 5-point Likert scale, 5 indicating “Extremely

useful” and 1 representing “Of no use.” The average participant in both groups indicated that it was, at most of “Some use.” Home buyers within the past five years answered with an average of 2.04, median of 2, mode of 2, and a standard deviation of .98. Previous home buyers had an average answer of 2.11, median of 2, mode of 2, and a standard deviation of 1.05.

Usefulness of Products that Promote a Business or Business Representative

	Mean Usefulness	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Within 5 years	2.04	2	2	.98
Other home owners	2.11	2	2	1.05

The next question asked participants to indicate whether they had ever followed or interacted with a real estate agent or agency on SNS. Thirteen percent of recent home buyers answered positively and 87% said no. Alternately, 7% of previous home owners said they did follow or interact with an agent of agency while 93% had not.

Question thirteen on the survey read, “I would prefer to research real estate leads on my own, instead of reading a concise post by a real estate agent on social media.” They rated their answers on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (“Disagree strongly”) to 5 (“Agree strongly”). The average responses were fairly close, with majority of respondents indicating that they had a neutral preference for real estate leads that they found versus ones suggested by a real estate agent. Recent home buyers’ average answer was 3.26, with a median of 3, mode of 3, and a standard deviation of .81. Previous home buyers had an average of 3.52, median of 3, mode of 3, and a standard deviation of .97.

Preference Regarding Researching Real Estate Leads

	Average	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Within 5 years	3.26	3	3	.81
Other owners	3.52	3	3	.97

Similarly, the following question asked how likely individuals are to independently look up an article on preparing their home for winter. They rated their answers from 1 to 5 or from “Very unlikely” to “Very likely.” The chart below recorded the two groups’ answers and corresponding numerical values. Recent home buyers responded with an average of 2.87, a median of 3, mode of 4, and a standard deviation of 1.06. Previous home buyers had an average response of 3.15, median of 3, mode of 2, and standard deviation of 1.29.

Likelihood of Researching an Article

	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Within 5 years	2.87	3	4	1.06
Other home owners	3.15	3	2	1.29

Also attempting to measure motivation and its influence on processing, question fifteen asked “How likely are you to click on and read an article on preparing your home for winter that was posted by a real estate agent?” Participants rated their answers on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 meaning “Very unlikely” and 5 meaning “Very likely.” Those who had purchased a home within the past five years had an average response of 2.78, median of 3, mode of 3, and a

standard deviation of .95. Previous home buyers had an average of 2.63, median of 3, mode of 3, and a standard deviation of .79.

Likelihood of Clicking and Reading Same Article When Posted by Agent

	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Within 5 years	2.78	3	3	.95
Other home owners	2.63	3	3	.79

The following question asked participants to indicate their level of motivation regarding reading a post on social media by a real estate agent about the real estate market. The answers, on a 5-point Likert scale, ranged from “Not motivated” to “Strongly motivated.” Recent home buyers had an average response of 2.26, median of 3, mode of 3, and a standard deviation of 1.0. Previous home buyers had an average response of 2.0, median of 2, mode of 1, and standard deviation of 1.0.

Level of Motivation about Real Estate Agent Posts on SNS

	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Within 5 years	2.26	3	3	1.0
Other home owners	2.0	2	1	1.0

The next question asked the participants to indicate their preference about how they read real estate listings. In response to the prompt, “I prefer to...” participants were given three choices: “Research and read real estate listings independently (on my own),” “Read real estate listings that have been posted on social media by an agent,” or “I have no preference.”

Approximately 61% of the recent home buyer sample indicated their preference for researching and reading real estate listings independently and 67% of previous home buyers said the same. Thirteen percent of recent home buyers preferred to read listings posted on social media by an agent, while 26% had no choice. Alternately, 33% of the previous home buyers said they had no preference and no one in that sample preferred to read listings posted on social media by a real estate agent.

Question eighteen read, “What an agent posts on social media regarding the real estate market holds my attention.” Participants could choose to agree to disagree with that statement. Seventy-six percent of recent home buyers indicated that they disagreed and 82% of previous home buyers said the same. In both cases, only a small minority agreed with the statement.

The following question made a statement and again asked participants to either agree, disagree, or indicate “other” with an explanation. The content of the statement was, “I find information about the real estate market (i.e., current market rates, re-sale tips, etc.) difficult to understand.” Recent home buyers disagreed for the majority, with 95% answering negatively. One textual answer stated, “I find articles difficult to understand when specific technical terms are used.” In the previous home buyer results, 69% of participants disagreed with the statement and 31% agreed. One participant wrote, “I do not read any.”

Question twenty of the twenty-six question survey read, “I am more likely to read articles about the real estate market when they are posted by an agent on social media than research those articles myself.” Sixty-five percent of recent home buyers disagreed and 35% agreed with the statement. Out of the previous home buyers, 69% disagreed and 31% agreed. One person, a previous home buyer, left the comment, “Neither; I do not use or research such articles.”

The following question stated, “I am motivated to read posts and updates on social media regarding local real estate.” Sixty-one percent of recent home buyer participants disagreed, while 39% agreed. Previous home buyers were more drastically split, with 85% answering negatively and 15% in the affirmative. Although participants were given the option to answer “other” and explain, none did so.

Next, question twenty-two was framed in the form of a statement. Participants could choose one of four responses. The statement read, “My real estate agent posts statuses and updates that make good points.” The participants could either agree, disagree, say “my real estate agent is not on social media,” or indicate “other” and explain. Four recent home buyers agreed, three disagreed, eleven indicated they do not have a presence on social networking sites, and five answered “other.” Out of the previous home buyers, one agreed, ten disagreed, nine were not on social networking sites, and seven answered with “other.”

Agreement or Disagreement on Quality of Agent’s Statuses

	Agree	Disagree	Not on SNS	Other
Recent home buyers	4	3	11	5
Previous home buyers	1	10	9	7

The common theme in the comments was, “I don’t know,” or “I don’t have one.” There were four comments from recent home buyers and seven from previous home buyers. No comment said anything other than “I do not have an agent” or “I do not know if they are on social media.”

The following question asked how much effort participants exerted to evaluate information posted by real estate agents or companies. Participants ranked their answers on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (“No effort”) to 5 (“As much effort as possible”). The recent home buyers nearly averaged perfectly at “Very little effort.” Previous home buyers indicated even less effort, falling more toward “No effort.” No participant indicated a number higher than three, which represented “Some effort.” The average response from recent home buyers was 1.96, with a median of 2, mode of 1, and standard deviation of .98. Previous home buyers had an average response of 1.56, median of 1, mode of 1, and a standard deviation of .64.

Effort Exerted to Evaluate Information Posted by Agents

	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Within 5 years	1.96	2	1	.98
Other home owners	1.56	1	1	.64

Question twenty-four asked, “To what extent do you find information about the housing market and real estate options easy to follow?” Again, participants ranked their answers on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (“Not at all”) to 5 (“Extremely easy”). The average response from recent home buyers was 3.04 with a median of 3, mode of 3, and a standard deviation of .76.

Previous home buyers had an average answer of 2.69 with a median of 2.5, mode of 2, and a standard deviation of .76.

Level of Ease in Following Information about the Housing Market

	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Within 5 years	3.04	3	3	.76
Other home owners	2.69	2.5	2	.76

The recent home buyers indicated that they found it moderately easy to follow information on the housing market, while previous home owners rated it as slightly less easy.

Question twenty-five asked participants a similar question, “To what extent do you find it difficult to focus while reading real estate listings?” On the 5-point Likert scale, 1 represented “Not at all,” while 5 represented “Extremely difficult.” Recent home buyers had an average response of 4 with a median of 4, mode of 4, and a standard deviation of .85. Previous home buyers had an average response of 3.69 with a median of 3.5, mode of 3, and a standard deviation of 1.02.

Level of Difficulty Focusing While Reading Listings

	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Within 5 years	4.0	4	4	.85
Other home owners	3.69	3.5	3	1.02

The final question in the survey read, “To what extent do you find it difficult to focus on reading articles about the housing market?” The Likert scale was the same as in the previous question, running from 1 (“Not at all”) to 5 (“Extremely”). Recent home buyers had an average answer of 3.61 with a median of 4, mode of 3, and standard deviation of .89. Previous home buyers had an average of 3.43, a median of 4, mode of 3, and standard deviation of 1.02.

Level of Difficulty Focusing While Reading Listings about the Housing Market

	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Within 5 years	3.61	4	3	.89
Other home owners	3.43	3	3	1.02

Discussion

Response to RQ1: To what degree do home buyers heuristically process real estate posts on the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter?

According to Todorov, Chaiken, and Henderson, the heuristic side of the HSM relies heavily on surface-level cues and judgments. Those researchers said that people rely on these cues because they either are not sufficiently motivated to process the information systematically or they do not have the cognitive framework necessary to take the information, sort out what they have been given, and make logical connections and inferences (198). They either lack the capacity to understand, do not care enough to try to understand, or their heuristic processing is a result of the combination of the two factors.

When recounting the results, the researcher looked for themes of insufficient motivation. Insufficient motivation would encourage heuristic processing in a participant, and would indicate a tendency toward heuristic processing.

Upon analyzing the results for question fifteen, the researcher noted that both groups of participants had very similar responses. Both samples indicated that they were between “Unlikely” and “Somewhat likely” to click on and read an article about preparing their home for winter that had been posted by an agent. This type of answer indicates that there is a lack of necessary impetus in this scenario. The social media user may believe that the topic is dull, that the article is a “spam” of sorts on their news feed, or that the agent is using it a way to sell the user something.

Alternately, it may be that the “branding” of a post by a real estate agent is not sufficient enough to engage the “authority” or “expert” communicator cues. Chaiken et al. (1989) stated that people have been conditioned to align themselves with others who are perceived as experts. These communicator cues and their impact fluctuate from person to person. Life experience shapes one’s perception of an expert. What one individual considers to be qualified “expertise” on a subject may not be considered credible by another evaluator. Communicator cues include

liking and non-liking or other subjective criteria, which are largely applicable to the real estate agent business (Whaley 2009). Individuals who are buying or selling homes decide to pick their agent based upon many factors, which are subjective, but include likeability.

In the study by Maheswaran, Mackie, and Chaiken, the researchers proved their hypothesis that brand names influence people's heuristic processing capabilities (318). A good brand is significant enough to activate heuristics pertaining to likeability and expertise, allowing users to make a non-cognitive decision about the product. It is possible, from looking at survey participants' results, that they do not recognize and give credence to the known "branding" of real estate agents on Facebook and Twitter. These are, after all, relatively new mediums. Although it would seem possible that previous buyers would be more reluctant to use Facebook and Twitter, there were no significant differences between the recent home buyers and their counterparts.

However, the new medium could have nothing to do with users' reluctance. Question seventeen on the survey found, on average, that two thirds of participants preferred to research and read real estate listings on their own, rather than looking at ones that had been posted on SNS by real estate agents. This was a self-reporting study, so the researcher is dependent on accurate reports from the participants. It may be that they click on such links more than they realize or admit. However, it also may indicate a severe lack of branding on the part of real estate agents. The Journal of Marketing Research indicated that nine out of ten agents are using social media in 2011 (4). This statistic would be high in 2014, but is unusually high for 2011. It possibly indicates an over-generalization of social media presence by real estate agents.

Seeing as many agents are representative of Generation X, they are not as familiar with digital tools as is Generation Y. The agents who are putting their profiles and businesses on

Facebook and Twitter are more than likely misrepresenting their actual, successful social media use in studies such as the one in *The Journal of Marketing Research*. Under-developed profiles, few log-ins, and poorly designed posts are all indicative of a lack of education regarding how to properly utilize social media marketing.

If this is indeed the case, then it would clearly explain why the posts by social media agents are seemingly engaging heuristic processing. According to Whaley in 2009, individuals primarily rely on heuristic processing in order to move through their daily life. Routines and decisions are made regularly that use surface-level cues in order to make quick judgments. The only reason that heuristic processing is disengaged, according to Whaley, is when the individual cannot obtain a sufficient degree of assurance that they have obtained their message processing goals. In other words, when a message recipient cannot be confident that he is making a completely accurate decision via his heuristic processing capabilities, he will simultaneously engage in both heuristic and systematic processing in order to achieve his need for accuracy and impression, or the need to express attitudes acceptable to other social evaluators (Chaiken, Liberman, and Eagly 234).

If home owners or prospective home buyers are on their personal Facebook and Twitter accounts and come across posts by a real estate agent, their judgments about the posts are important in determining whether or not they will engage with them. The overall impression of real estate agents utilizing social media accounts may not be on a professional, well-developed level that is sufficient enough to motivate users to process and take the information given. In the advent of Web 2.0, the standards for online sharing and communication are higher than 2004, when Facebook began. Businesses on SNS are held to high-quality standards, as the visual cues on the site are oftentimes the only cues available to the user. If real estate agents and agencies

attempting to make their foray into the social media world do so clumsily and poorly in comparison to other small businesses, users will use their heuristic frameworks to evaluate the profile and immediately disregard it because it does not meet the expert standard necessary to engage them systematically.

Response to RQ2: To what degree do home buyers systematically process real estate posts on the social media networking sites Facebook and Twitter?

The material in real estate listings is not cognitively difficult to process or understand, but the data seems to indicate a lack of sufficient motivation to read and process the posts. The participants reported, across both sample groups, that real estate agent posts on social media do not hold their attention. Overall, 86% of the fifty participants indicated their disagreement when asked to respond to the statement, “What an agent posts on social media regarding the real estate market holds my attention.”

Four questions on the twenty-six question survey asked participants to indicate how easy or difficult they found material regarding the real estate market to be. Two questions asked them to indicate how hard they find it to focus on real estate listings and also articles about the housing market. In both sample groups, majority found it only nominally difficult to focus on articles about the housing market, and only 10% of all participants reported it such a task to be very or extremely difficult. Another question asked how easy participants felt it is to follow information about the housing market and real estate options. Of the recent home buyers, majority reported it to be moderately or very easy (83%). Of the previous home buyers, 62% reported it to be moderately to very easy. Although there is a slight difference (not accounting for standard deviation) in how recent and previous home buyers perceive information about the market, majority reported that they do not find such a task to be difficult.

When viewing these results, it may be helpful to consult Littlejohn and Foss and their description of the sufficiency principle. In determining which processing route is taken, it is important to account for the balance between motivation and effort (90). When individuals have to exert much effort in order to process a subject, it is more likely that they will choose the heuristic route. However, the results from the individuals surveyed do not indicate any sign of difficulty when attempting to read and understand real estate market information. None of the four questions aimed at deciphering the effort individuals had to put forth significantly indicated any real challenges.

If this is the case, and it is not difficult subject matter to comprehend, then there really is only one other explanation for these results. Participants can cognitively comprehend the matter, so there is no reason for them to be forced to rely on heuristic cues. They simply are not being adequately motivated to want to process the information. The human being is intrinsically economically-minded, seeking to receive more than they have given. If the argument, which comes as a social media posting in this scenario, is going to cost them more than it will benefit, then there is no motivating factor (Dash, Meeten, and Davey 1049). This is not to say that people always correctly gauge the benefit of any given argument. However, the only deciding factor that truly makes a difference is the perception of use to the receiver. The persuader must indicate, through whatever means available, that their message is valuable and will aid the listener in their life in some way.

The results indicate that the material itself is not difficult, but the audience carries an attitude that forces the persuader to prove their worth for consideration. According to the results garnered by this survey, real estate agents' presence on Facebook and Twitter is dubious at best

and useless at worst. Furthermore, the results strongly indicate a lack of motivation and a satisfied sufficiency principle.

Response to RQ3: Do posts on the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter cross the sufficiency threshold, motivating home buyers to process them either systematically or concurrently?

The sufficiency principle occurs on a judgmental continuum, with two key points: the individual's perceived level of actual confidence in their position and their level of desired confidence, or sufficiency threshold. If there is a gap, the individual will attempt to close the gap until the desired sufficiency threshold is met (Chen and Chaiken 74).

Given this framework, it seems that the results indicate that social media users do not perceive a gap between their actual confidence and their sufficiency threshold. The participants are using social media; sixty-five percent of recent home buyers said it was of at least some importance to their daily life and fifty-nine percent of previous home buyers said the same. However, what they are being offered via real estate agents on Twitter and Facebook is not anything that is proving to be of value to their lives. If it was valuable, according to the theory, they would not be able to dismiss the posts so easily because their systematic processing capabilities would be enticed by a yet-unmet sufficiency threshold.

The results did not indicate a trend toward concurrent processing. Of course, the definition of concurrent processing rests upon the use of both systematic and heuristic processing. To date, there were no indicators of substantial systematic processing among participants in their regard toward real estate marketing on Facebook and Twitter. One question asked participants how motivated they are to read posts on social media regarding the real estate market. On average, the recent home buyers' average rating, 2.26, strongly represented a feeling

of “insufficient motivation.” The previous home buyers’ was similar at 2.00, also indicating they were also insufficiently motivated to read those sorts of posts. This representation of insufficient motivation is not conducive to concurrent processing of any sort. One possible explanation for the lack of engagement by previous home buyers is that they already own their own homes, so they do not have a need to seek out more information about the real estate market.

However, these participants are not totally averse to engaging with a Facebook page that promotes a business page or person. Seventy percent of recent home buyers indicated that they have liked such a page and 56% of previous home buyers have done the same. In each of these individual cases, something persuaded the Facebook user to “like” a page and allow its posts to come up in their news feed. Whatever businesses these were, they represented a sufficiency threshold that the receiver did not think he or she could meet without liking the page. This is important to note because, based on the current study’s findings, it is possible to grow discouraged and believe that Facebook and Twitter users represent an impenetrable force, bound together by indifference to marketing ploys via social networking services.

Although a “like” is not drastic engagement, it represents something that real estate agents and agencies have not been successful in to date. The researcher believes that, given the feedback from the participants of this survey, real estate agents are not posting material that is engaging the average social media user, even those who have a vested interest in the housing market.

The reasons for this apparent lack of engagement are beyond the scope of this study. There are multiple factors at play in online engagement rates. However, what is clear is that the user is not being presented with material that he or she feels is important enough to his or her life to cognitively process. When the average participant in this survey looks at a post about a real

estate listing or associated material, that participant's sufficiency threshold is already met and they do not feel the need to close a gap between their current state and the information given because there is no seeming "gap." The possible reasons are many: they see it as irrelevant to their life, the information does not look trustworthy, they already consider themselves to have a sufficient cognitive structure regarding the matter, or many more.

Other findings

The online success of websites such as *Zillow.com* and *Trulia.com*, commonly used by prospective home buyers to view properties for sale, partially prompted the idea for this study. However, only 17% of surveyed participants found their agent via the Internet, which is interesting given that 90% of real estate sales now start with a Google search, according to the National Association of Realtors (Stone 60). Given the proliferation of the Internet, this information makes sense. It was a bit surprising that so few of the participants indicated that the Internet was part of their search for a real estate agent.

Explanations for this could vary, but the one that strikes the researcher as most probable relates to the age of the participants in this survey. Only one participant out of the fifty home owners surveyed indicated that they were between the ages of 18-25. Furthermore, only 22% of survey-takers were between 26-35. The rest were older than 35 years, which could largely play into the results. Generation Y is only now reaching adulthood. According to Lichy, Generation Y spans 1976-1994, with its youngest members a mere twenty years old. Its oldest members are now thirty-eight years old, at which time they are more likely to be home owners. However, the early half of Generation Y did not grow up with the technology that any of the children of the nineties did. This being the case, it stands to reason that those less familiar with the technology would be more likely to seek out real estate agents through traditional methods. The younger half

of Generation Y is just barely in the first blush of adulthood and it is doubtful that they have the ability and opportunity to purchase residential real estate like their older counterparts do. The lack of response to social media seen in this study is possibly, in large part, a reflection of the sample's age. The recent boom in media and technology growth has been immediate and quick, and children who grew up in the Facebook world are only in their late teens and early twenties, given its inception in 2004. Therefore, many of the results found here are indicative of a study done a few years too soon.

Chapter 5 – Limitations, Recommendations for Future Research, and Conclusion

Limitations

This study was successful in that it found trends in the data that suggest an explanation for human behavior. Little, if any, research has previously been done on real estate marketing via Facebook and Twitter, especially as viewed through the lens of the Heuristic Systematic Model. This study was the first to survey users about their experiences and apply the HSM to their answers. Upon compiling and discussing the results, the researcher believes that further investigation and studies are necessary. The following few pages are purposed with defining the limitations of the current study and proposing recommendations for future research based upon these findings.

Although the findings of this study were interesting and noteworthy, they are not without their inherent limited capabilities. The main limitations are concerned with the pool of participants, the execution of the survey, and the ages of participants.

At the beginning of this research endeavor, the principal investigator set out to find an audience not merely out of convenience, but one of significance. As such, the researcher focused on finding recent home buyers, predicting that they would be the most likely to have utilized social media sites when looking for and buying their homes. Finding these types of participants proved to be the most difficult part of the research. People who have purchased their own homes are independent adults and cannot be enticed with extra credit, as many studies who utilize a pool of convenience (i.e. university students) offer their participants. This study was not funded, meaning that the researcher had limited resources with which to offer rewards and incentives.

In the recruitment e-mail, potential survey-takers were told that, upon the completion of the survey, they may choose to e-mail the principal investigator and have their name entered into

a drawing for a \$50 Wal-Mart gift card. After utilizing the snowball technique, the researcher contacted approximately thirty potential participants. Out of these, only six responded and none e-mailed the researcher to be entered in the drawing. In light of that situation, the researcher decided to purchase survey-takers from SurveyMonkey.com.

This too, provided a limitation. While Survey Monkey does allow for some participant specification, the researcher could only stipulate home ownership as a requirement. It was not possible to specify that all participants must have bought their homes within the past five years. As such, the fifty usable responses garnered were divided into the two groups explained in this study: those who were home owners and had bought within the past five years and those who are home owners, but answered “no” to the question asking if they had purchased within the past five years.

Second, the execution of the survey may have presented some challenges. Many questions focused on asking the participants which situation they would prefer, typically about whether or not they would prefer to research housing information themselves or read a post by a real estate agent. Majority of the participants indicated a low level of value for real estate agents on Facebook and Twitter, although very few participants said that they follow a real estate agent on either of these sites. It may be that the phraseology of the question was in error and framed the question in such a way that participants felt the better, more desirable answer is to look up information without help from anyone else. Other questions that asked for examples of their interactions were limited to whatever experiences the participants could recall while taking the survey, even though they may have had more. Ultimately, the best way to have done this study would have been to measure clicks, views, likes, and shares from Facebook users, but that would have presented other challenges as will be discussed in recommendations for future research.

Finally, this study was limited by the age of its participants. Only 25% of survey participants were under the age of 35. All other participants were Generation X, among whom are many adults that are not nearly as familiar with current technology as are their Gen Y counterparts. In 2013, Farran Powell reported that first time home buyers are waiting longer and longer for their first foray into the housing market, according to realtors and housing experts. Powell cited the National Realty Association when he said that the median age for a first time home buyer in the U.S. has ranged between 30-32 for the past 30 years. However, he reported that Millennials or members of Generation Y are living at home longer, renting longer, and are generally more reluctant to purchase due to crippling student debt.

That said, this study came perhaps a few years too early. Those currently in their thirties are not representative of the Gen Y members who are much more inundated with technology and specifically, social networking. The audience most likely to respond to marketing via Facebook and Twitter is not yet at the place where the housing market is something that is relevant to them. The information posted by real estate agents is largely irrelevant to the users most frequently seen online. As these younger users mature and begin their careers, it is possible that their level of interest will change as they grow.

Recommendations for Future Research

The limitations of the current study were addressed in order to provide clarity for other researchers who may be interested in achieving a deeper understanding of the findings, or perhaps doing their own study in a similar fashion. Recounting the limitations is a natural segue into recommendations for future research, in the hope that future research will account for known limitations and failings in earlier studies.

First, the Facebook “Insights” page was created for purposes such as this. Anyone who manages a page for a business, organization, or entity receives free access to Facebook’s analytic tools. These include number of page views, time of day when the page receives the most traffic, demographics of the typical user, and many others. These are not available to a person holding an individual account. However, Facebook tracks each post made on such a page and uses algorithms to determine how successful the post is in comparison to previous posts and in comparison to other, similar pages.

If the researcher was added as a manager on several Facebook pages, dedicated to the purpose of promoting a real estate agency or agent, he or she could monitor the success of the account without disturbing the page owners or the individual users that interact with their page. The HSM model would still be applicable, but the study would be much more qualitative in nature. If the Facebook managerial approach is employed, the researcher would have to perform a qualitative, textual analysis of each post according to its success rate. In doing so, it is possible that the researcher would find that certain textual themes garner better responses than others, and that other textual themes discourage or, at the very least, do not engage users.

One key theme that seems relevant based upon the results of this study is the problem of self-reporting. This research method is not too difficult to employ and seems like the most direct method of gathering information when searching for why people do that they do. However, people cannot report what they do not know or understand about themselves. They may give the most accurate picture available to them via their self-concept, yet it may not be objectively correct. To thwart this possible problem, the researcher may choose to employ a method that relies heavily on observation instead of self-reporting. The Facebook analysis method via real estate pages is one way to do so.

The second recommendation for future research centers around the problem indicated by the results of this study: real estate agents are not engaging their customers systematically on Facebook. Furthermore, the sufficiency threshold of individual users is not being challenged by the material presented, so there is no reason for them to engage in anything beyond heuristic processing habits. When they feel that a post is applicable, interesting, or indicates something that they do not already have a sufficient knowledge of, the corresponding gap between where they are and where their sufficiency threshold is will be motivation for them to close said gap by increasing what they know.

That begs the question: what will motivate SNS users to engage with the content? That question has been answered by social media experts several times over through books, webinars, blogs, and journal articles, but it still remains that every industry and business is different. Since that is the case, there is no one format that will fit successfully every time. Further research is needed in the realm of real estate marketing over Facebook and Twitter. It is imperative that agents using social media to sell their services and advertise property listings are aware of how their intended audience uses SNS as well as determining what material is applicable and relevant enough that it will incite user motivation to move beyond heuristic processing into concurrent and systematic modes.

A third recommendation would include a study focused on longitudinal results. As mentioned in the section on limitations, the demographic most likely to use social media on a regular basis is very different from the population interested in buying a home. Many Facebook and Twitter users are on the younger end of Generation Y, meaning that their first home purchase is more than likely a few years in the future. Keeping that in mind, it is worthwhile suggesting a study that tracks users' social media accounts over the course of approximately ten

years. The study should examine how many businesses the user “likes” over the course of each year and what types of businesses they interact with most frequently. This would give insightful information in several different areas. First, it would provide clarity about what types of business marketing most appeals to social media users at their varying ages. The content that appeals to a twenty-nine year old female will likely be different than the content that appeals to a twenty-one year old female user, although until such a study is conducted, all the researcher can do is make informed predictions. Secondly, a longitudinal study would reveal whether or not Generation Y uses Facebook and Twitter in a consistent manner as they age. Although they are the largest group of SNS consumers, that may change as they age. Are 18-26 year olds the largest group of social media users because they are most familiar with the technology, or because it is most relevant to them at that age? When they are thirty-four, will they still use Facebook and Twitter in the same manner? A longitudinal study would provide a more accurate picture of users’ actual experience on SNS than punctuated surveys.

Finally, one question that was raised as a result of this study deals with the usefulness of Facebook and Twitter for marketing purposes. Both are social media giants, but they are qualitatively different. Twitter’s short, 140-character messages reflect current, in-the-moment news updates from users and organizations alike. Facebook is a richer medium in some ways, offering picture albums, long wall posts, and status updates of any length. Businesses are encouraged by social media experts to have a presence across SNS, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and more. However, different mediums lead to different patterns of use among individuals. It may be that people prefer Twitter for news and business updates, while Facebook is more personal and representative of their social life. LinkedIn is the only social network specifically geared toward professionals. All other social media platforms can be used

by businesses, but are not designed as professional marketing and networking tools. A study that takes into consideration the vast amount of differences between the major social media networks and watches how users engage with them over a set course of time would be very useful in this area of research. It could either be done as a longitudinal observation or through regular self-reporting by users. The benefit to an observation-based study would be that the user would merely have to consent to allowing the researcher to view their profile. That low-level of commitment to the study would make recruiting participants a bit easier. However, self-reporting may give richer, more meaningful information, particularly if it includes open-ended, qualitative questions.

This area of research is new and burgeoning with questions. There are far more social media users than there are studies to explain how and why these platforms operate the way that they do. By pursuing one or all of the four suggestions for further study, the communication scholar may gain valuable insight into the new world of social networking.

Conclusion

The present study was successful in its goal to further understand how real estate agents can best market their services and properties via Facebook and Twitter. The results of the study indicate that the audience most available through these sites is not the audience most beneficial to real estate professionals. Furthermore, the research gathered also indicates that posts seen on Facebook and Twitter, specifically regarding the real estate market, are not engaging users systematically because their sufficiency threshold is not called into question. Without that motivation, they will likely not feel a need to further process the post and the agent and user are both not connecting with one another.

This study also illustrated how applicable Shelly Chaiken's theory and model of persuasion is when explaining the new and expanding field of social media marketing. Although social media was far from prevalent in 1989, the theory of persuasion is quite applicable to the realm of Facebook and Twitter, as indicated throughout the current study. All forms of advertising and marketing are simply forms of persuasion, meaning that the ELM and HSM are far from irrelevant. Further studies that examine the effectiveness of social media marketing over Facebook and Twitter would do well to build their research upon the foundation laid out by the HSM. A number of recommendations have been made in this study for how to do so in future. Just as Twitter and Facebook continue to grow, so will the budding research opportunities in this field.

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Appendix A

Questions for participants

A few notes on the survey: questions 1-3, 5-8, and 10 are yes/no questions or multiple choice. Questions 4, 9, and 11-23 will all employ the Likert scale. Participants will indicate their response by selecting a number ranging from 1-5 (strongly agree to strongly disagree, etc). This survey will be uploaded to surveymonkey.com upon IRB approval.

1. Are you male or female?
2. Please indicate your age: 18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56-65, 66+
3. Have you made a residential real estate purchase within the past five calendar years?
4. How did you meet your real estate agent? If you did not use an agent, please explain briefly below.
5. How important is social media to your daily life?
6. How often do you access Facebook and Twitter?
 - a. A. A few times a week or less. B. Once a day. C. Multiple times a day
7. Have you ever “liked” a page on Facebook that specifically promotes a business or business person?
8. Have you ever followed an account on Twitter that promotes a specific business or business person?
9. Have you ever interacted with a business or business representative on Facebook? If so, please give one example.
10. Have you ever interacted with a business or business representative on Twitter? If so, please give one example.
11. How useful do you find posts that explain or promote a product/person?
12. Have you ever followed or interacted with a real estate agent or real estate agency on social media?
13. I would prefer to research real estate leads on my own, instead of reading a concise post by a real estate agent on social media.
14. How likely are you to independently look up an article on preparing your home for winter?
15. How likely are you to click on and read an article on preparing your home for winter that was posted by a real estate agent?
16. How motivated are you to read social media posts by a real estate agent regarding the real estate market?
17. I prefer to research real estate listings on my own rather than reading a social media post by a real estate agent.
18. What an agent posts on social media regarding the real estate market holds my attention.
19. I find information about the real estate market (i.e., current market rates, re-sale tips, etc.) difficult to understand.

20. I am more likely to read articles about the real estate market when they are posted by an agent on social media than to do other research.
21. I am motivated to read posts and updates on social media regarding local real estate.
22. My real estate agent posts statuses and updates that make good points.
23. How much effort do you exert to evaluate the information posted by real estate agents/companies?
24. To what extent do you find information about the housing market and real estate options easy to follow?
25. To what extent do you find it difficult to focus while reading real estate listings?
26. To what extent do you find it difficult to focus while reading articles about the housing market?

Appendix B

Email to Survey Participants

Like, Retweet, Repeat: Social Media's Impact on Real Estate Marketing

Emily Kendall

Liberty University

School of Communication and Creative Arts

Home owners!

My name is Emily Kendall and I am pursuing my Master of Arts in Strategic Communication. As a requirement for graduation, I am creating and implementing a research study. This study examines how real estate agents and companies can use Facebook and Twitter to reach their clients and advertise property listings. It also seeks to explain what type of posts by real estate agents people respond to best.

If you choose to participate, you will be answering 26 questions anonymously. It should only take 5-10 minutes. Your survey answers will be anonymous.

After taking the survey, you may choose to e-mail me at ekendall@liberty.edu to have your name entered into a drawing for a \$50 Wal Mart gift card.

To participate, please follow this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/TLT9XPK>

An informed consent document is attached to this e-mail and contains additional information about the research study, including a list of the potential risks and benefits of participating.

Please read the attached informed consent document prior to proceeding to the survey.

Thank you,

Emily Kendall

Appendix C

CONSENT FORM

Like, Retweet, Repeat: Social Media's Impact on Real Estate Marketing

Emily Kendall

Liberty University

School of Communication and Creative Arts

You are invited to be in a research study on social media's part in real estate marketing. You were selected as a possible participant because you have purchased a home within the past five years. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Emily Kendall of Liberty University's School of Communication and Creative Arts.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to determine if social media, specifically Facebook and Twitter, has a place in the field of real estate marketing. Previously, real estate agents relied on word-of-mouth recommendations, print advertisements, and other traditional marketing techniques. As young adults who are active on social media move toward buying homes, it will be helpful to real estate agents and brokers to determine how to best use social media to reach these audiences.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- Follow the link in the e-mail to the online survey and answer all questions given. This should not take you longer than 5-10 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

This study has no greater risks than you would encounter in your day-to-day life.

The benefits to participation are not direct to any one individual, but this will benefit society as a whole by providing a better understanding of how social media is a useful, helpful tool to both those buying homes as well as the agents selling them.

Compensation:

You will not be financially compensated but you may choose to e-mail the researcher after taking the survey in order to be entered into a drawing for a \$50 Wal-Mart gift card.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. The gathered data will be kept in three separate locations, each locked to access other than the researcher.

Each participant's survey results will be completely anonymous to the researcher. You may choose to e-mail the principle investigator at ekendall@liberty.edu upon taking the survey to have your name entered into a drawing for a \$50 Wal-Mart gift card. However, your specific survey answers will not be linked to your name.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Emily Kendall. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ekendall@liberty.edu or the faculty advisor for this project, Dr. Faith Mullen, at fmullen@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researchers, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Appendix D

Dear Emily,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and that no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101 (b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:

(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and that any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption, or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.

Professor, IRB Chair

Counseling