

Hicks, Hillbillies, and Rednecks: Addressing Stereotypes of the Appalachian Region

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Abstract

The Appalachian region of the U.S. has been widely stereotyped as a poverty-stricken place filled with “backwards” people and practices (Wood & Hendricks, 2009, p. 1). News and entertainment media in the United States have done little to improve or diminish these stereotypes as times have changed and have often perpetuated them. This thesis examines recent portrayals of Appalachia in media to identify shortcomings and misrepresentations and review methods for diminishing stereotypes that have been successful. From this review, elements of different approaches are evaluated and combined to develop a proposed social media campaign oriented toward changing public perception of Appalachia and its people.

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Appalachia is a land known for its rich natural resources, breathtaking beauty, and nonurban environment. Its people, however, are often not treated so kindly, associated with labels such as “white trash,” “redneck,” or “hillbilly” (Harkins, 2004, p. 5). Their ways have been called backward, and have often been treated with confusion at best (and contempt at worst) from outsiders. Rather than dispel these myths, the media has by and large amplified them through stereotypic characters in entertainment, poor coverage of the region, and a lack of understanding of its culture. The perpetuation of such stereotypes is detrimental to the people of Appalachia, the credibility of the media industry, and the public at large as it furthers misunderstandings and divisions. The shortcomings of the media industry to recognize the validity of this people and region should not go unaddressed. Conversations surrounding the realities of Appalachia versus its stereotypes can be facilitated even before the media changes its ways, by taking initiative to inform people and utilizing the ever-advancing technology of the day.

Stereotyping in Media

Stereotyping is prevalent in mass media, despite the advancements in technology and access to information that have been made since mass media’s start. Mass media, as defined by Britannica Encyclopedia includes “print, radio, television, film, video, audio recording, and the Internet—in particular, the World Wide Web and Internet-based social media” (Duignan, 2022, para. 1). Stereotypes easily find their way into these mediums, whether purposely by the hand of the creator or unintentionally as a result of the creator’s own implicit biases, cultural perceptions, and personal blind spots. Even content creators’ best attempts to be fair and unbiased can still perpetuate negative stereotypes about people, groups, or cultures. One of the most common ways

this happens in news media is found in exemplification, “using individual cases to personalize a news story” (Wang, 2020, p. 1034). In 2020, a study was conducted to examine the impact of the use of exemplification in news stories that mentioned depression on the stigmatization of people who had depression. The study found that when exemplars of people with depression were used in stories, those news stories tended to convey stereotypical information more often than stories that did not use exemplars (Wang, 2020). In other types of media, stereotyping is often seen in the use of caricatures in works of fiction, which act as exaggerated representations of the stereotypic beliefs held by the creator and/or public at large.

In all these situations, stereotyping frequently impacts the readers/viewers beyond just their interpretation of that piece of media. Stereotypes that are portrayed as fact, even in fictional or imaginative works, have the tendency to color the consumer’s view of the thing being stereotyped. The more people consume media content that implicitly or explicitly affirms stereotypes about a certain subject, the more likely it is that the consumer will adopt those stereotypes into his or her personal view of and behavior toward the subject. A 2011 study examined the effects of stereotypical and counter-stereotypical media portrayals on people’s real-life attitudes and behaviors toward people of a marginalized racial group (specifically, African Americans). The study affirmed what previous research in the field suggested—that exposure to stereotypical portrayals of people from a certain group in media influence the real-world beliefs of the people who consume that media and are not part of the given group (Ramasubramanian, 2011). According to Ramasubramanian (2011), “even subtle racial cues in the media are sufficient to activate racial attitudes that influence decision-making without requiring conscious effort” (p. 499). A similar study, focused on the portrayal of older workers, suggested “that exposure to such media stereotypes leads to a bias in perceptions and selection of

older workers” (Kroon et al., 2019, p. 109). Both studies join a significant body of research affirming the concept that media portrayal of stereotypes does affect the propensity of media consumers to adopt stereotypical views and behaviors in their own lives.

When the creators of media content are careless in their handling of commonly stereotyped groups, those on the receiving end of stereotypical portrayal can suffer negative impacts. Ramasubramanian’s (2011) study found that an increase in seeing negative stereotypical representation of African Americans was correlated with “greater stereotypical beliefs, more internal attributions, increased hostile feelings, and an overall lack of support for affirmative action policies” (Ramasubramanian, 2011, p. 509). In 2022, a group of researchers studied the effects of images of “slum tourism” (where wealthy people vacation in locations with disadvantaged populations) posted online on the perceptions of the people who inhabit such locations (Crapolicchio et al., 2022, p. 97). The research indicated that images of slum tourism posted online have a high potential to perpetuate negative stereotypes of the regions in question by portraying poverty as an attraction and showing “infringements to moral foundations (e.g., dirt, lack of care for children)” (Crapolicchio et al., 2022, p. 99). Furthermore, the researchers suggested that the perpetuation of such stereotypical portrayal of these sites on social media could in turn prompt locals to engage in self-stereotypization processes as they “attempt to show that ‘authenticity’ required by tourists,” thus rooting themselves more firmly in such stereotypes (Crapolicchio et al., 2022, p. 99). The impacts of stereotyping on the individuals of a stereotyped group can be far reaching in their lives and last far longer than the piece (or pieces) of media through which the stereotypical views were perpetrated. One example of a group that has experienced such long-lasting stereotyping is found in the people of Appalachia.

Appalachian Stereotypes in Media

Caricatures of Appalachia have long persisted in American news and entertainment media (Rigg & Prater, 2020). From more than a century, American media has been fixated on a representation of Appalachia that is laden with stereotypes and often contains more fiction than fact. In the introduction for their *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* (2006), Abramson and Haskell write:

In the twenty-first century, as it has been for a hundred years, the region continues to be laden with mythology, subjected to recurring debate, and held up as one of America's enduring social and economic "problems." Beginning in the late nineteenth century, novelists, educators, and big-city journalists created a dominant image of the central Appalachians as a hinterland populated by a backward people left behind, more or less suspended in time as the rest of America modernized and prospered. (p. xix)

The early 1900s saw a birth of academic interest in Appalachia from those within the region itself, and it was soon accompanied by outsiders' personal interpretations of the culture and issues of the region. The English historian Arnold J. Toynbee's *A Study of History* (1947) made strong assertions on the "culture of poverty" in Appalachia and stated that Appalachians were "no better than barbarians" who presented "the melancholy spectacle of a people who have acquired civilization and then lost it," among other blatantly derogatory claims (Toynbee, 1947 as cited in Abramson & Haskell, 2006, p. xix). In 1964, CBS released a half-hour news special entitled "Christmas in Appalachia," in which journalist Charles Kuralt showed the large viewing audience the tarpaper and pine "shacks" that were home to "a million permanently poor" across the region, trapped in their "sad way of living" (WYMT Television, 2014). That news special was credited by some as a key component in the U.S. launching its War on Poverty in the 1960s (Harkins et al., 2006a). TV shows capitalizing on Appalachian stereotypes were popular in the

1950s, 60s, and 70s, including such shows as *The Real McCoys*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, and *The Beverly Hillbillies*. In 1999, President Bill Clinton made Appalachia the focus of his renewed emphasis on poverty in America and reinforced an image of Appalachia that had already been cemented in American's minds from years of "images of regionwide poverty, created and perpetuated by the news media, movies, television novels, and works of fiction" (Harkins et al., 2006b, p. 1679).

Moving into the twenty-first century, much of mass media began to move in a different (though no less stereotypical) direction. In a 2009 *20/20* documentary about the children of rural Appalachia, reporter Diane Sawyer intended to bring a nuanced perspective of the region that moved "beyond the stereotypes that often infect the information delivered to national audiences about Central Appalachia" (Cross, 2009, p. 31). Sawyer's reporting was admittedly nuanced, but her inclusion of a story about alleged incest within the family of one of the subjects sparked the ire and frustration of many in the region (Cross, 2009). A 2009 examination of the content of major U.S. newspapers (including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today*) found that the publications were more likely to link poverty in Appalachia to the culture itself compared to articles dealing with poverty in other regions, "including articles referring to a region that has historically had higher poverty rates than Central Appalachia" (Wood & Hendricks, 2009, p. 22). The 2010s saw a significant rise in media coverage (both news reporting and entertainment) of the opioid crisis in Appalachia. From documentaries like Netflix's *Recovery Boys* to dramas like Hulu's *Dopesick*, the media market has been flooded with depictions of the opioid crisis and the people it affects, often portraying Appalachia as a region torn apart and thrown into destitution by the ravages of drug abuse. There remains today little, if any, popular media content that portrays the Appalachian region beyond the shadow of its

hardships. Even attempts to show a different angle of Appalachia have often fallen flat, such as the 2019 documentary *Hillbilly* which many reviewers criticized as being an overly political message disguised as an attempt at representation (IMDb, n.d.).

Regardless of the medium or format, there is a lengthy history that shows consistent media portrayal of Appalachia “as backwards and its people as intellectually challenged, morally destitute, and culturally inferior” (Wood & Hendricks, 2009, p. 1). In *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes*, Katherine Ledford asserts that the Appalachian stereotype may find its earliest roots in the exploration and travel narratives of people who encountered the Appalachian region and its people in the colonial, early Republic, and Antebellum periods in the U.S. These narratives were written by outsiders who traversed the mountains for various reasons, and whose concerns with changing social and economic dynamics significantly influenced their interpretation and literary representation of the people and places they encountered. From analyzing writings from the mid-1600s through the mid-1800s, Ledford asserts that the first narrative representations of the inhabitants of Appalachia depended on the desires and fears of the authors. For those that viewed the landscape as “a valuable commodity” to be seized and the settlers as a “potential barrier” to their objectives, “the mountains became beautiful and desirable while the inhabitants became adversarial, unnatural, and out of control” (Billings et al., 1999, p. 49). These accounts, colored by the struggles over land, money, and class, paved the way for the formation of the hillbilly stereotype in the yellow journalism and local color movements of the mid- to late-nineteenth century (Billings et al., 1999). According to Ronald L. Lewis, a scholar of Appalachian studies, local color writers invented “Appalachia” through “the caricatures and atmospheric landscapes of the escapist fiction they penned to entertain the emergent urban middle class” (Billings et al., 1999, p. 21). These writings “generated little or no critical

evaluation of their characterizations of either mountain people or the landscape itself,” allowing imaginative interpretations of the region and its people to root themselves as fact in the readers’ minds (Billings et al., 1999, p. 21). The popularity of the local color movement, and of the Appalachian caricatures many of its works contained, cemented the stereotypes as fact in the public’s eye and gave permission for mass media to continue to present such interpretations of Appalachia moving forward.

Appalachians are not the only group of people who have a history of being mischaracterized by mass media, but the mass media has been much quicker to change its treatment of many of these groups. In a 1973 article, David Whisnant pointed out the apparent hypocrisy of television networks removing programs with racist and/or sexist representations while continuing to run shows such as *Hee Haw*, *Green Acres*, and *The Beverly Hillbillies* (Whisnant, 1973, as cited in Speer, 1993). One researcher in the Appalachian studies movement argued that part of the blame for unjust representation may lie with Appalachians themselves, and the lack of coordinated activism to change media portrayal. While other minority groups have organized widespread action against media companies to change their portrayal, Appalachia has done nothing to put itself “on the national media agenda” and thus remains “the most maligned group in the media” (Speer, 1993, p. 17). Regardless of whether the blame for misrepresentation lies with the misrepresented in this case, many scholars agree that members of the media are responsible for how they choose to represent people. Whisnant asserted that the media, through their “gross insensitivity to the feelings of Appalachian people...have been agents of a broader pattern of cultural imperialism,” continually reinforcing the “otherness” of the people of Appalachia through the perpetuation of inaccurate stereotypes (Whisnant, 1973, as cited in Speer, 1993, p. 13).

The media's perpetuation of negative Appalachian stereotypes has far-reaching consequences that deeply impact the region and its people, both directly and indirectly. On an individual level, the widespread acceptance of these stereotypes could greatly influence Appalachians' self-esteem and identity. Research has shown that group identity can significantly impact people's health, education, and economic opportunities and that this sense of group identity is often shaped by outsiders' views of the group (Foster et al., 2021). In 2021, researchers conducted a study focusing on Appalachian group identity, the existence of which is subject to extensive debate (Foster et al.). Within the study, researchers found that Appalachian identity is highly tied to negative stereotypes, possibly prompting the hesitancy of some in the region to identify as such (Foster et al., 2021). Specifically, the study noted:

The reluctance to identify as Appalachian may have negative consequences on the overall well-being of inhabitants of the region. On the individual level, a person may not gain access to community resources needed due to their disengagement from the community. In turn, the community may suffer because there is no united group of community members to speak up about the disadvantages they experience or the resources they need. (p. 222-223)

As the Appalachian region continues to be consistently portrayed negatively by the media, this reluctance to adopt group identity (and the subsequent negative consequences) will likely only worsen. Additionally, some researchers have drawn a correlation between the stigmas against Appalachians and the economic and social ills that plague the region. Buer et al. (2021) asserted that negative stigmas attached to the region "have produced interpersonal violence within medical, social service, and legal systems" (p. 89). This violence, they argued, manifests itself

“within policies that negatively affect the health, economic opportunities, and family life of many Appalachians who are poor” (Buer et al., 2021, p. 89).

Not only are Appalachians widely reluctant to adopt a group identity, but what group identity does exist is disagreed upon and debated among the region’s people. This disagreement further hinders Appalachians’ ability to adequately address and combat the misrepresentations of the media as they are unable to come to a consensus on how the region should be defined even among themselves. Media produced by insiders of Appalachian communities is often incongruous and contradictory across the region, leading to further disagreement internally and a lack of popular material externally to dispel the myths about Appalachian culture. For example, one of the most popular recent books about Appalachia written by a cultural insider is J. D. Vance’s *Hillbilly Elegy*. In the book, Vance characterized the people of the region as well-meaning, but hindered by an inherited mindset that their choices don’t matter and there is no point to trying to change their lives. In the book’s introduction, Vance asserted that Appalachians are plagued by “a feeling that you have little control over your life and a willingness to blame everyone but yourself,” distinctly different from the overall American attitude (Vance, 2018, p. 7). But his interpretation of the region (widely read across the country) was met with backlash from others in the region who felt he took too harsh of a view of his own people. It sparked a wave of media in response, such as the book *Appalachian Reckoning: A Region Responds to Hillbilly Elegy*, which was received by some as “a necessary counter to both Vance’s oversimplified narrative, and to the rampant stereotypes about Appalachian people that his narrative girds up” (Avashia, 2022, *Appalachian Reckoning*, para. 10).

As media continues to present mischaracterizations of Appalachia, people outside of the region become further enmeshed in an incorrect understanding of its people, with consequences

that are sometimes directly antagonistic. As previously discussed, the stereotyping of certain groups in media can change viewers' attitudes and behaviors toward the people of that group, even to the extent of their support for public policies that affect that group (Ramasubramanian, 2011). This has been the case for the Appalachian region as well, as its people and its culture have received much criticism because of policy decisions made with Appalachian interests in mind. For example, in 2021 U.S. Senator for West Virginia Joe Manchin voted against a massive spending bill on the basis that it would work against his constituents. In response, actress and singer Bette Midler made a post on Twitter (now called X) calling West Virginia a "backward" state and its inhabitants "poor, illiterate and strung out" (Midler, 2021). Midler quickly issued an apology to West Virginians, but still expressed her disappointment that Manchin was "the best WV has to offer" (Midler, 2021, as cited in Segarra, 2021, para. 7). This mindset has been demonstrated time and again by outsiders to the Appalachian region, indicating a larger national view that has been informed by the stereotypes of mass media. When faced with the evidence of the negative impacts of stereotyping, it becomes clear that Appalachian stereotypes in media should be addressed.

Methods of Changing Stereotypes

Within the field of psychology, there is an extensive body of research that indicates people's internalization of stereotypes can be influenced and changed, which holds encouraging implications for the prospect of changing the stereotypic beliefs of both media creators and media consumers. This research has produced multiple strategies for changing people's minds in this way. One such strategy was the subject of a study from 2000, in which researchers examined the effect of stereotype negation training on the automatic activation of stereotypes in the brain. The researchers compared the automatic stereotype activation exhibited by participants who had

received stereotype negation training against members of a control group. In this case, the negation training involved having participants respond “no” when they saw pictures of people from a social category presented with traits stereotypic of that category and respond “yes” when they saw people from a social category paired with nonstereotypic traits (Kawakami et al., 2000, p. 873). The results of the study supported the researchers’ hypothesis that “repeatedly negating [stereotypic] associations and simultaneously pairing other ‘new’ characteristics with these categories can reduce the likelihood of automatic activation” (Kawakami et al., 2000, p. 872). In a similar study, participants in two groups were primed to focus on either the similarities or differences between members of a social category and the stereotypic traits associated with that category, and then placed in a scenario that tested their behavior toward a member of that stereotyped group. The results indicated that participants who had been primed to focus on differences exhibited less stereotyping in their behavior toward members of a stereotyped group than those who were primed to focus on similarities (Corcoran et al., 2009). Both stereotype negation training and comparative thinking with a focus on differences are relatively simple strategies that hold the potential for great effectiveness when changing individuals’ stereotypic beliefs.

These principles, if applied in the practices of the media industry and in the minds of its consumers, could be significantly impactful for lessening the perpetuation of malignant stereotypes through mass media. For example, if media professionals were motivated to minimize the stereotypic associations in their own beliefs (such as through engaging in stereotype negation training), it is feasible to assume that this would minimize the stereotypic associations in their content caused by their subconscious beliefs. Training people to focus on differences rather than similarities when using comparative thinking has been demonstrated to be

as simple as asking them to spot the difference between two images (Corcoran et al., 2009). If journalists motivated to minimize stereotyping applied this principle in their reporting, this comparative thinking model could be applied in how they present the news, drawing readers' attention to differences rather than similarities. But between the theorizing of these concepts and their application in is a crucial step—convincing the media industry and the public at large that it is both worthwhile and necessary to pursue change.

Social Media and Changing Stereotypes/Stigmas

Social marketing campaigns have gained prominence in recent years as an increasingly effective tool to stir up public support for a social cause and as a rallying call for change. Social marketing campaigns are aimed at “enabling, encouraging and supporting behavioral changes among target audiences,” typically through the conjoined use of “mass media channels, social media and social contact events” (Sampogna et al., 2017, p. 116). Recent studies have shown the significant impact anti-stigma social marketing campaigns have had, both nationally and internationally, especially in the realm of reducing the stigma attached to mental illness. One such study examined the effectiveness of “the most comprehensive mental illness stigma and discrimination reduction campaign ever conducted in the United States,” which began in 2013 (Collins et al., 2019, p. S228). The research indicated that campaign may have prompted California adults experiencing symptoms of mental illness to pursue treatment and furthered “a belief that recovery from mental illness is possible” (Collins et al., 2019, p. S231). In a similar study, researchers evaluated the efficacy of England’s “Time to Change” social marketing campaign, which ran from 2009-2014 and sought to diminish negative stigma attached to mental health issues (Sampogna et al., 2017, p. 116). Researchers found that participants’ awareness of

the campaign “was associated with more positive attitudes towards people with mental illness” (Sampogna et al., 2017, p. 120).

Often, social media is a major component in these campaigns, used to spread the message to large audiences and spark grassroots movements. Social media’s capacity to reach large audiences is unmatched by any other medium in the current age. From 2008 to 2021, the percentage of U.S. adults who use social media jumped from 10% to 82% (Dixon, 2022). While young adults hold the highest percentage of users, the majority of adults ages 30-64 are active on social media, and 45% of adults aged 65 or older are also involved (Pew Research Center, 2021). Social media platforms stand out from other forms of mass media “in that they enable people to be actively involved in the communication process and stay connected with other,” especially for sites such as Facebook and Twitter/X which give users the opportunity to constantly post their opinions (Sampogna et al., 2017, p. 116). In the case of England’s mental health anti-stigma initiative, social media was shown to be one of the most vital components of the campaign, as it “[increased] awareness on the targeted topic and [motivated] people to change their behavior” (Sampogna et al., 2017, p. 120). Another study from 2020 looked at the effectiveness of social media in three different social marketing campaigns to reach large audiences with messages relating to health promotion. Researchers concluded that using social media in such campaigns is distinctly impactful due to the round-the-clock access to content and the tendency of one post to “[spark] an interest in someone who follows his/her close one's activities” (Latha et al., 2020, p. 4).

Given the widely demonstrated capabilities of social media to prompt larger social movements and increase public support for a cause, it is one of the best arenas from which to begin to change the stereotyping of Appalachians in media. A well-planned and well-executed

social media campaign could be the catalyst for changing Appalachian stereotypes, by beginning with educating the public on the reality of negative Appalachian stereotypes in media and providing more accurate and nuanced portrayals of people from the region. Appalachian scholar Jean Haskell Speer asserted in a 1993 article that Appalachians have remained neglected by mass media because they lack the kind of targeted, large-scale advocacy that other such groups have had that have stirred up public support and demanded media accountability. Social media could be a major missing component in garnering the support needed to prompt media channels to change their representation of the people of Appalachia. This thesis proposes a social media campaign built around tested strategies for combatting stereotypes with methods of producing content that have been proven effective and are widely utilized in the industry. Such an endeavor could be a first and impactful step in redirecting the conversations around stereotyping Appalachia and ultimately in working toward changing the portrayal and perception of Appalachians in the public arena.

There are, however, limitations to such a campaign. First, this strategy would be a first step in the right direction, not an ultimate fix. Though studies have affirmed the effectiveness of social media in reaching wide audiences with messages, it is difficult to quantify the success of such campaigns in producing behavioral changes in their audiences. Latha et al., asserted in their 2020 study that while social media can be incredibly effective “in spreading awareness and education of various socially relevant concepts,” it “cannot be the sole solution for changing behaviors” (p. 4). Therefore, this social media campaign will be distinctly focused on educating and increasing the awareness of media consumers about Appalachia, its incorrect stereotypes, and the realities of the region. Additionally, such a campaign would be limited in its effectiveness due to scale constraints. Both the “Time to Change” social marketing campaign in

England and California's mental health stigma campaign (previously discussed in this paper) were noted to be massive in scale, utilizing several areas of the public sphere over the course of multiple years and being funded by the government (Sampogna et al, 2017; Collins et al., 2019). The proposed campaign is on a much smaller scale and is thus limited by its size; however, if it were to be implemented, those doing so would be wise to consider funding and how to increase the scale of the material itself—such as branching out to other platforms and more arenas of media. This campaign is designed on the assumption that financial and scale needs would be able to be met were it to be implemented.

The following pages will outline the various psychological and marketing theories that will guide this campaign, expound upon the practical application of these theories in the social media realm, and create a road map for the conceptualization and execution of such a campaign.

A Social Media Campaign for Addressing Appalachian Stereotypes

Social Media Campaign Strategy

The first step in making a strategy for the proposed social media campaign is to identify the target audience. The broad target audience is people of the public who ascribe to negative Appalachian stereotypes. More specifically, however, the target audience of this campaign will focus geographically on the people of the Appalachian region and its surrounding areas—primarily consisting of the East Coast and parts of the Midwest. The campaign will focus specifically on this portion of the U.S. rather than the entire country because it is designed to be a first step in addressing stereotypes. It will be most impactful to start with those closest to the region of Appalachia, as they are much more likely to interact with Appalachia in real life than others. Additionally, given the demographic diversity found across the U.S., targeting a smaller geographic region allows for the content to be tailored more personally to the audience. Within

this area, the campaign will especially be aiming to engage people aged 18-29 with content. This age group, according to statistics from Pew Research Center, is the most likely to get involved with activism on social media, comprising almost the majority of social media users involved with social media activism (Pew Research Center, 2020). Targeting a narrower group at the start will encourage this campaign's success as a first step in the effort to change Appalachian stereotypes in media.

When considering social media marketing, the most successful campaigns rely on well-planned strategies. Often, these campaigns are built around brands trying to sell some new product to the consumer. Other times, these campaigns revolve around social policy and garnering support from viewers on a much more personal level, as demonstrated in some of the examples discussed previously. For this campaign, which seeks to educate and increase awareness about the realities and myths surrounding Appalachian culture, a good strategy should take elements from both types of campaigns to provide a fuller approach to accomplishing its objectives.

Researchers in the field of psychology have evaluated and documented some of the most effective campaigns targeting stigma change, especially targeting stigma about mental health. Patrick Corrigan created a model for Strategic Stigma Change (SSC) that combined the most effective components in changing mental health stigma, observed in several initiatives over the past several years, emphasizing contact as the most important element of a successful effort to reduce stigma among target groups (2011). Contact, as defined in his article, "involves planned interactions between people with mental illness and key groups" (Corrigan, 2011, p. 824). The contact, in order to be most effective, must be targeted, local, credible, and continuous. It is important to note that in this case, Corrigan is mostly focused on face-to-face contact between

target groups (employers, health care providers, etc.) and people under the targeted stigma (people with mental illness that demonstrate positive capabilities counter to the negative stereotypes). Though this principle of contact cannot be emulated to the fullest extent without face-to-face contact, it can still be replicated in social media with success to a certain degree. In advertising, the principle of contact falls under the overarching strategy of storytelling—using narratives, both fictional and nonfictional, to connect the audience to the brand on a more emotional level. Writing for *Forbes*, a business-focused publication, Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) at Keysight Technologies Marie Hattar wrote that storytelling “creates an emotional connection between a company, its product, and its customers” (Hattar, 2022, para. 3). Storytelling as a strategy is widely utilized in the field of marketing, often with great efficacy. Examples of successful storytelling campaigns include Chick-Fil-A’s ongoing “The Little Things” campaign, AirBnB’s “Made Possible by Hosts” 2021 campaign, and Nike’s “Find Your Greatness” campaign from 2012.

Combining both of these principles (from the psychological and marketing fields of study), this campaign strategy will emphasize storytelling, with storytellers (i.e., contacts) that are credible, relate directly to the target audience demographically, and are local to the audience as much as can be determined. Additionally, this campaign strategy will prioritize a diversity of stories/contacts. According to Corrigan’s SSC model, “a one-time contact may have some positive effects, but the effects are likely to be fleeting. Multiple contacts should occur, and the quality of the contact should vary over time” (2011, p. 826).

This campaign has an element of persuasion in its focus to educate and increase awareness of negative Appalachian stereotypes; therefore, persuasive marketing techniques will also be incorporated into its strategy. Such techniques, widely used in the advertising industry,

include using one message per advertisement (or post in this case), second person verbiage, call-to-action, celebrity association, emotional appeal, humor, and repetition. The coordinated use of these techniques aims to lend ethos (credibility), logos (reason), and pathos (emotion) to the content being shared and convince audiences to believe the content's message (Indeed Editorial Team, 2024).

The Digital Marketing Institute, which offers courses and resources in digital marketing and is partnered with the American Marketing Association (AMA), identified the following hallmarks of a brand social marketing campaign: setting business goals, identifying the target audience, researching the target audience, researching competitors, and choosing social media platforms, (O'Brien, 2022). As the goal of this campaign has already been established, the target audience has been identified, and there are no competitors to research (since this is not a brand or product campaign), the next step is to identify which social media platforms will be used to spread its content. The proposed social media campaign will be conducted across Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter/X, and YouTube. According to Pew Research Center, Facebook and Instagram are the most popular social media platforms among U.S. adults aged 18-49, excluding YouTube which is the most popular platform among all U.S. adults (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Snapchat and TikTok are the next most popular among 18–29-year-olds, while Twitter/X is the next most popular among 30-49-year-olds (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). All five of these platforms are incredibly visual, with two being solely dedicated to video content (TikTok and YouTube). These platforms also allow for viewers to engage in conversations about content with others across the platform through commenting, sharing, re-posting, etc. (especially Twitter/X and Facebook).

All five of these social media platforms will be used in conjunction with one another for the execution of the campaign, but they will not be used for the same content. Short-form videos (including clips from longer videos) will be posted to Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok but not YouTube and very rarely on Twitter/X. YouTube will be reserved for long-form videos only; thus, it will have the least amount of content compared to the other platforms for this campaign. Twitter/X will be reserved for content specifically targeted at starting conversations, which may or may not include videos, photos, and graphics. For example, if a graphic asks viewers to share their own experiences, it would be shared on Twitter/X in addition to Facebook and Instagram. Content that consists of still photos and graphics will primarily be posted on Facebook and Instagram, as well as interactive content, such as quizzes on Instagram and Facebook Stories. All content (with few exceptions) will be posted primarily on Instagram and Facebook. Additionally, the campaign will have a website to act as a central hub where people can find information on the campaign's mission, resources about Appalachian culture, stories, and stereotypes, blog posts linked in social media posts, and access to all the content across the social media accounts.

Before implementing the marketing strategy, this campaign also needs a content strategy. Social media marketing strategies and content strategies differ but work together to accomplish campaign goals. According to Clodagh O'Brien of the Digital Marketing Institute, marketing strategy focuses on "audience research, persona building, choosing the social media platform, and much more," whereas content strategy is concerned with "content formats and outputs...[looking] at the creation of content, messaging and tone, content scheduling, etc." (O'Brien, 2022, paras. 13-14). O'Brien suggests that when planning a content strategy, the creator should use "content buckets" to categorize the different types of material to be posted (O'Brien, 2022, para. 43). This campaign will pull from three different content buckets: myth-

busting, storytelling, and conversations. Each category will be distinct in its tone and style but will still blend well with the other categories to create a homogenous approach for the overall campaign.

The myth-busting category will serve as the most overt force for carrying out the mission of the campaign to educate and increase the awareness of the audience. It will most explicitly address the disparity between stereotypical media portrayals and the realities of the Appalachian region. Content from this bucket might include “myth-busting” graphics (displaying a common misconception and then the reality), interactive quizzes about Appalachia (testing participants’ understanding of the region and showing them the fallacies in their own beliefs), man on the street (M.O.S.) interviews, etc. The messages conveyed through this content will focus on promoting true understandings of the region and illuminating the contrast between media representation of Appalachia and its reality. The tone of this category will aim to be educational and uplifting and will steer away from condemning either the media or audience members for the perpetuation of incorrect stereotypes. Most of the non-video content for this campaign will be concentrated in the myth-busting category, so this category will mostly be posted to Facebook and Instagram.

The storytelling category will focus primarily on increasing the audience’s understanding of Appalachia, aiming to evoke emotion and interest in Appalachian culture and thus diminish stereotypic associations in viewers’ minds. Interviews about various topics with Appalachians (such as challenges and perks of growing up in the region, regional pride and identity, challenges in leaving the region, etc.), cultural showcases (showing viewers unique elements/practices of Appalachian culture), photo essays and stories from the region, etc. could furnish the category within the campaign. The tone for storytelling content will often be more meaningful and

pensive than the rest, though still prioritizing keeping an inspiring undercurrent throughout much of its content. This category will likely find its way onto all social media platforms involved in this campaign, especially Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

Content from the conversations category will be the least aimed at persuasion compared to the other two categories, concentrating mainly on showing audiences possible blind spots and misconceptions in their own belief systems. This type of content will often be more fun and lighthearted in its tone—though sometimes carrying a more thoughtful manner—with the goal of prompting people to ask questions about their understanding. Examples of content that might fall into this category include M.O.S. (man on the street) interviews with Appalachians, M.O.S. interviews with non-Appalachians, and discussion segments—a recurring series consisting of brief conversations between people from two different backgrounds (such as an Appalachian and a non-Appalachian, someone who was raised in Appalachia and someone who moved there later in life, etc.). This content will primarily be in video format, allowing the people viewing on social media to see real people interacting and engaging on these topics. Additionally, since these posts will aim to create conversations among viewers, they will be specially tailored for the conversation platforms Twitter/X and Facebook.

After determining the types of content that will be posted and which platforms will be used, the social media strategy should be visualized by creating a general content calendar or schedule for posting content to the different social media platforms. Creating a content calendar helps social media campaigns keep consistency across social media accounts, minimizes the chance of accidentally posting too much or too little in a given time, and helps ensure that all content drives the mission of the campaign (Newberry & Wood, 2022). Data from Hootsuite, a social media management platform that partners with businesses worldwide, shows that the best

times to post content to social media are typically in the morning on weekdays, with some exceptions. More specifically, Facebook posts do best on Mondays and Tuesdays at 9 AM PST; Instagram posts do best on Mondays at 9 AM PST and Thursdays at 8 AM PST; Twitter/X posts do best later in the week on Thursdays at 11 AM PST and Fridays and 9 AM PST; and TikTok posts do best on Thursdays at 7 PM PST, Saturdays at 9 AM PST, and Sundays at 1 PM PST (Kutuchief et al., 2023). These times of best engagement are not universal for every social media campaign, however. In an article about the best times for social media engagement, Hootsuite writers suggested that brands begin with these universal best times as a starting point, but to “[post] often and [measure] performance as you go” in order to determine the best time to post for each brand and each platform (Kutuchief et al., 2023, para. 4). Eileen Kwok, a social marketing coordinator at Hootsuite, also advised that businesses should begin “by posting in the morning, afternoon, and at night and see which times tend to pick up,” and then adjusting the social media content calendar according to the engagement those posts receive (Kutuchief et al., 2023, para. 6).

The social media content calendar for this campaign will be informed by these guidelines, with a period for evaluation and adjustment planned for one month into the campaign. The suggested content posting schedule for the first month of the campaign is shown in Figure 1. In order for this campaign to be as successful as possible, content schedules will be planned out a month in advance to allow time for preparation of the content and to track its success. After the first month, the schedule should be reevaluated based on social media analytics—tracking the interactions posts received on different platforms—and adjusted accordingly. This content schedule serves as a jumping-off point to kickstart the campaign.

Figure 1

Month 1 Content Calendar for “Introducing Appalachia” Campaign

| Sun. | Mon. | Tues. | Wed. | Thurs. | Fri. | Sat. |
|------|---|---|--|--|---|---|
| | 1 M.O.S. Video "What area does the Appalachian region cover?" <i>Insta, FB, TikTok</i> | 2 <i>Repost M.O.S. on Twitter/X</i> | 3 Myth-Buster Appalachian Incest <i>Instagram, FB</i> | 4 Twitter/X Poll How often do you see Appalachia in the news? | 5 Instagram/FB Stories Reposting the week's content | 6 <i>Scenery video on TikTok</i> Blog Post Series: "Faces of Appalachia" <i>Post on Insta & FB, link to website</i> |
| 7 | 8 M.O.S. Video "What do you think of when you hear the word 'Appalachia?'" <i>Insta, FB, TikTok</i> | 9 <i>Repost M.O.S. on Twitter/X</i> | 10 Myth-Buster Appalachian Diversity <i>Instagram, FB</i> | 11 Video Cultural Showcase Glass Blowing <i>Insta., FB, TikTok, YouTube,</i> | 12 Instagram/FB Stories Quiz: How many states in Appalachia? | 13 <i>Post clip from video on TikTok</i> Photo Essay History of the Appalachian Trail <i>Insta & FB</i> |
| 14 | 15 M.O.S. Video "Do you consider yourself to be Appalachian?" <i>Insta, FB, TikTok</i> | 16 <i>Repost M.O.S. on Twitter/X</i> | 17 Myth-Buster Education Rates: college <i>Instagram, FB</i> | 18 Twitter/X Poll Do you consider yourself to be Appalachian? | 19 Instagram/FB Stories Reposting the week's content | 20 <i>Scenery video on TikTok</i> Blog Post Series: "Faces of Appalachia" <i>Post on Insta & FB, link to website</i> |
| 21 | 22 M.O.S. Video "What do you like about living in Appalachia?" <i>Insta, FB, TikTok</i> | 23 <i>Repost M.O.S. on Twitter/X</i> | 24 Myth-Buster Poverty Rates: Regional Comparison <i>Instagram, FB</i> | 25 Video Interview with an Appalachian: Living in Appalachia <i>Insta, FB, TikTok, YouTube</i> | 26 Instagram/FB Stories Poll: What defines Appalachia? | 27 <i>Post clip from video on TikTok</i> Photo Essay Coal: The Fuel of Appalachia <i>Insta & FB</i> |
| 28 | 29 M.O.S. Video "Would you live in Appalachia?" <i>Insta, FB, TikTok</i> | 30 <i>Repost M.O.S. on Twitter/X</i> | 31 Myth-Buster Appalachian History <i>Instagram, FB</i> | | | |

Homogeneity of content is important for any social media campaign; therefore, this campaign will employ a consistent design style across platforms, using the same color palette, fonts, and photo editing presets. The colors for this campaign are inspired by the Appalachian Mountains and will consist of warm tones such as yellows, oranges, and browns accented by

darker hues of green and blue, as shown in Figure 2. The colors for this palette were pulled directly from images of the Appalachian Mountains. For fonts, it is general practice in the graphic design industry to use two to three different fonts across a brand, and to designate specific purposes for when each font will be used (Jackson, 2020). These fonts should contrast each other (such as pairing a serif font with a sans-serif font), but not be so jarring that they distract the viewer from the message of the content (Jackson, 2020). This campaign will use Playfair Display for headings, subheadings, and emphasized words and Nunito Sans for body text, as shown in Figure 3. The base preset for photos will be a +0.22 exposure, +7 contrast, +28 highlights, -1 shadows, a control point of 50.2, 52.9 on the Tone Curve, and +16 saturation. An example of the application of these presets are shown in Figure 4. Additionally, the campaign will use the name “Introducing Appalachia” across social media platforms to maintain consistency and ensure ease for viewers seeking its content (see Figure 5).

Figure 2

Color Palette with Hex Codes

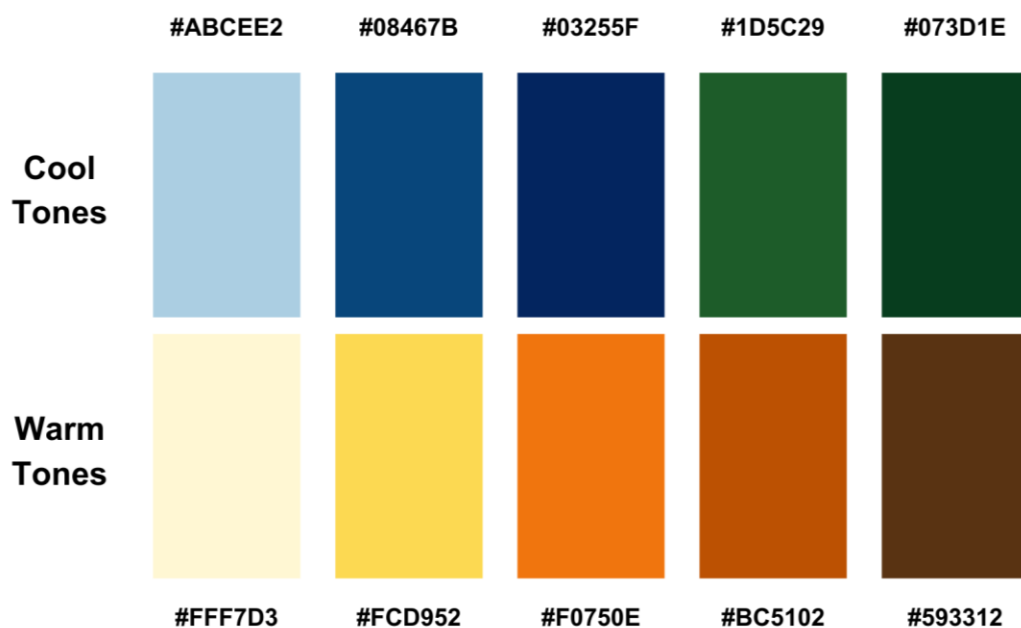


Figure 3

Campaign Fonts—Playfair Display and Nunito Sans

Playfair Display

Playfair Display

Playfair Display

Playfair Display

Playfair Display

Playfair Display

Nunito Sans

Nunito Sans

Nunito Sans

Nunito Sans

Nunito Sans

Nunito Sans

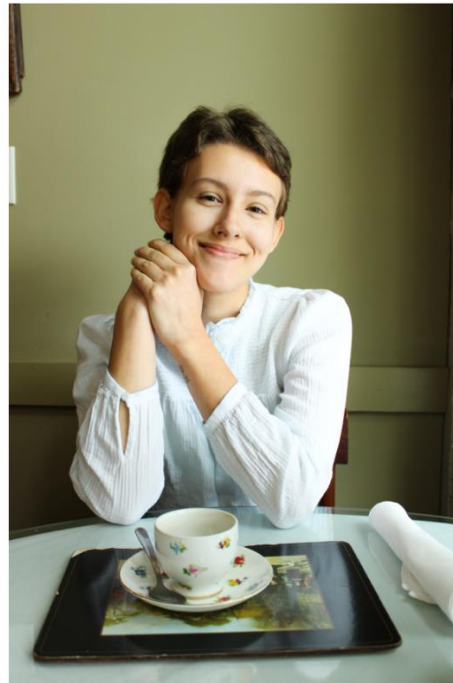
Nunito Sans

Figure 4

Photo Before and After the Application of the Editing Preset



Unedited Photo



Edited Photo

Figure 5*Social Media Profile Photo Mockup***Examples of Content**

The following are examples of what content for the proposed campaign might look like, employing the strategies and design previously discussed. Figure 6 shows a two-page graphic that would be posted to Instagram and Facebook and would fall in the myth-busting content bucket. Figure 7 is an example of the kind of graphic that might be used alongside interactive quizzes, polls, etc. on Facebook and Instagram Stories. Figure 8 is an interactive poll on Twitter/X, designed to prompt conversation among followers on the platform. Figure 9 is an example of a potential cover photo for a short video posted on Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. Figure 10 shows a potential design for the cover photo of YouTube videos for the campaign. All the designs function as templates that can be replicated and used to guide the creation of future content.

Figure 6

Myth-Buster Graphic for Instagram and Facebook (Two Pages)

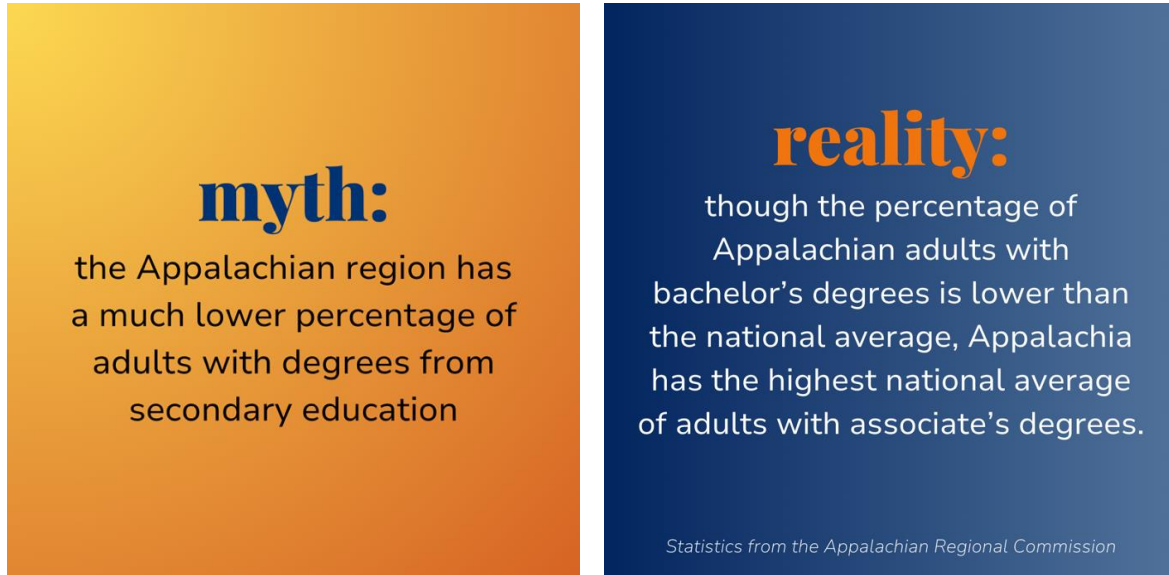


Figure 7

Interactive Facebook/Instagram Story

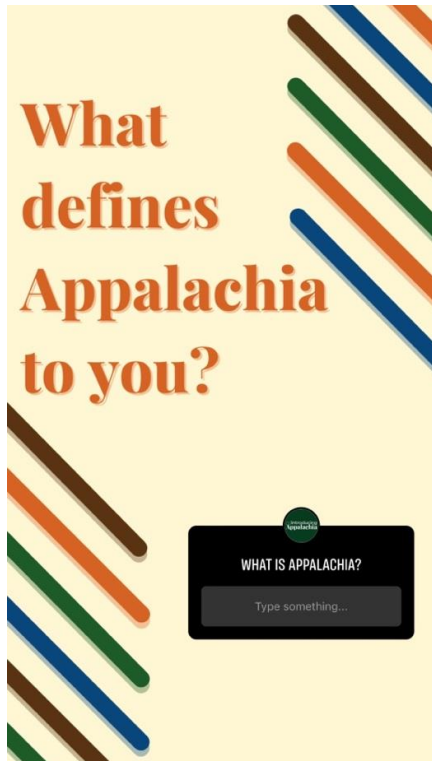


Figure 8

Twitter/X Poll



Figure 9

Instagram Reel Cover Photo Mockup—M.O.S. Interview

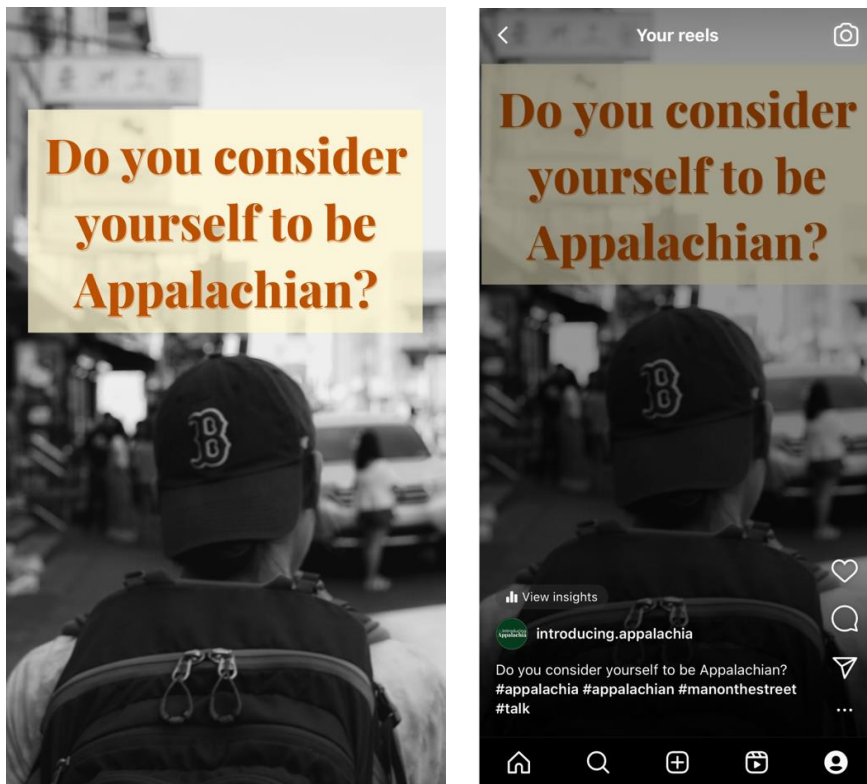


Figure 10

YouTube Video Cover Photo Example—Interview

**Conclusion**

Combining research on stereotyping in media, the Appalachian stereotypes that do exist in media, the methods of changing people's stereotypic beliefs, and the principles of social media marketing and design, this campaign has the potential to impact people's interactions with the Appalachian region and its people. Though a social media campaign cannot be expected to single-handedly reverse deeply held beliefs that have been ingrained in individuals and widely accepted across society, this could be a start to enacting change in this realm. The potential long-term impacts of this effort to reinform people about the realities of Appalachia make this campaign worthwhile endeavor, deserving of consideration.

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