
ARTICLES

Spirituality in Advertising: A New Theoretical Approach

Galit Marmor-Lavie, Patricia A. Stout, and Wei-Na Lee
The University of Texas at Austin

Current directions in advertising practice point to the use of more spiritual themes in advertising. Yet the concept of spirituality has not received enough attention in advertising research. We argue that spirituality is a crucial dimension in the human experience with theoretical implications for the field of advertising. In this paper, we first define and translate spirituality based on holistic and eclectic approaches so it is suitable for research in advertising. We propose a new theoretical framework—The Spirituality in Advertising Framework (SAF), which delineates 16 core ideas that are characteristics of spiritual people and spiritual messages—for use as a platform for future research of spirituality and advertising. Second, we offer a qualitative analysis of television ads that illustrates how the SAF can be used to interpret spirituality in advertising messages. Finally, we discuss the role of spirituality in advertising research while suggesting an agenda for future exploration.

If we omit spiritual realities from our account of human behavior, it won't matter what we keep in, because we will have omitted the most fundamental aspect of human behavior. (Bergin, 1997, p. xi, cited in Emmons, 2006, p. 77)

Studies, national polls, and social change specialists report an increased need for spirituality among the population (Couchman, 2005; Drumheller, 2005; Kale, 2004; Rickard, 1994; Smith, 2003). The Yankelovich MONITOR has tracked the growing belief in spiritualism—from 12% in 1976 to 52% in 1998 (Smith, 2003, p. 52); researchers comment on a generation of “seekers” who search for meaning (Roof, 1993). According to Couchman (2005), people today seek community and insist that they are ‘spiritual’ but not ‘religious,’ are concerned about tolerance

Correspondence should be sent to Galit Marmor-Lavie, Department of Advertising, The University of Texas at Austin, 1 University Station A1200, Austin, TX 78712. E-mail: galit_ml@mail.utexas.edu

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and that they are 'post-Christian.' Young people these days care greatly about the environment, globalization, ethical issues, and self growth (Couchman, 2005; Tinic, 1997). They adopt values that mesh with the principles of spirituality and seek to fulfill their spiritual values in various realms of life. Spirituality is a core value in our society today and is increasingly evident in decisions in day-to-day living, including product consumption and brand relationships.

As a core value in society, spirituality becomes a central concern for marketers and consumer researchers attempting to determine how the 'needs,' that is, "a state of felt deprivation of some basic satisfaction" (Kotler, 1991, p. 5), and characteristics of spiritually inclined consumers should be addressed through advertising messages. Recent examples of commercials appealing to the spiritual dimension of human nature are plentiful. Honda Accord ads portray a Zen-like moment of peaceful "simplicity," while MasterCard presents the card as a connection to priceless things that money can't buy (Smith, 2003). Ameriprise Financial commercials demonstrate how every dream can turn into a reality if you set your mind to it. The Ameriprise Financial ads appeal to spiritual audiences or the "seekers" (Roof, 1993), those who are spiritual but not religious, perhaps are former hippies, and those who practice new age philosophies. These commercials emphasize concepts such as nature, relationships, personal/individual lifestyle, and limitless dreams that come true (see <http://www.ameriprise.com/amp/global/about-ameriprise/commercials.asp>). These examples demonstrate how advertisers are becoming increasingly attentive to individuals' spiritual needs.

Growing recognition by advertising and communication practitioners of the importance of spirituality to consumers is reflected in comments in the trade press heralding that "new promises, new benefits, and new services will be needed to satisfy a more spiritually inclined customer . . ." (Smith, 2003, p. 52) and that "we are going to see more and more spiritual themes in advertising" (Cohen, quoted in Rickard, 1994, p. S-1). Yet, in the nearly 20 years since Belk and colleagues (1989) examined the sacred and the profane in consumer behavior, there has been limited research linking this theoretical concept to audience needs and advertising messages. Our search of the literature revealed several studies that examine the nature of religion and/or spirituality in the media and in advertising. However, there is a dearth of focus on the theoretical development of the construct of spirituality suitable for systematic application to the study of the characteristics of spiritually inclined consumers and spiritual advertising messages. Moreover, most of the attempts to define spirituality within studies of media and advertising have yielded construct definitions that are general and vague. In this article, we offer a simple yet detailed and rigorous theoretical framework of spirituality in advertising. We contend that spirituality is an important concept with theoretical implications for the field of mass communication and advertising and that it should be a priority on the agenda for communication researchers.

In this paper, we choose to focus on the concept of spirituality in a nontraditional manner. Hence, the concept does not necessarily center on the notion of religion or religious experience, but on a much broader, eclectic, and holistic perspective which emphasizes the meaning of life, the highest of human potential and the encounter with suffering during our daily experience. Within the framework of mass communication, we concentrate on synthesizing the core ideas of spirituality from a range of sources on religion and spirituality (i.e., secular and nonsecular) to develop a theoretical framework for addressing how the spiritually inclined consumer is characterized and how spiritual messages in advertising may be characterized. First, we advance a new theoretical framework, the Spirituality in Advertising Framework (SAF), through the

development of 16 core ideas that could be the platform for 1) the characterization of the spiritually inclined consumer and 2) the characterization of spiritual messages in advertising. We believe this allows for future development of the abstract concept of spirituality into the realm of advertising. Next, we offer a qualitative analysis of prime-time television ads that illustrates how the SAF can be used to interpret spirituality in advertising messages. Finally, we underscore the need for advancement in this area in advertising research and provide direction for future research and application of spirituality in advertising.

Before discussing the new theoretical framework, we first acknowledge past conceptualization and research in the field of spirituality and advertising.

SPIRITUALITY IN ADVERTISING: CONCEPTUALIZATION AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Previous research of spirituality in the media and advertising grows from distinct differences in the conceptualization of “religious” and “spiritual.” Some studies focus upon a certain faith or the church or religion as an institution that uses media and/or advertising as a mode of communication (Abelman, 2006; McDaniel, 1986). Others focus on the perception of religious objects (e.g., Guthrie, 2007) or the manifestation or operationalization of religiosity of the church (e.g., the face of Jesus or religious images) (Baker, 2006). Some studies tend toward a broader conceptualization, defining spirituality as a transcendence experience (Elliot, 2005) or a psychoanalytic/psychotherapeutic attitude toward spirituality (Mischoulon & Beresin, 2004) or may tie the definition of spirituality to morality and education (Rossiter, 1999). Kirkwood (1994) defines spirituality in the realm of rhetoric and communication, to denote one’s “ultimate existential aspirations and the means of achieving these aspirations” (p. 16).

The focus of those studies as well as the unit of analysis is determined, in part, by the conceptualization of spirituality and religion. As we elaborate in a later section, our definition of spirituality is broader and more comprehensive than religion per se. We take a holistic and eclectic approach to spirituality that transcends across disciplines from which religious and other approaches to spirituality can draw upon and with which they can identify.

Media Studies

In looking more broadly at mass media, spirituality has been examined primarily within the theoretical framework of uses and gratifications (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). These studies seek to understand how spiritually inclined audiences utilize the media to their own spiritual needs (e.g., Drumheller, 2005; Kline, 2007; Loomis, 2004; Mischoulon & Beresin, 2004; Rossiter, 1999). For example, how do Millennials (the generation after Gen Xers) use spiritual and religious media content (Drumheller, 2005)? Or can *The Matrix* (a film which is embedded with many spiritual messages) be used as a discussion vehicle for psychiatrists and patients that identify with spiritual messages (Mischoulon & Beresin, 2004)? Loomis (2004) reports on six categories of spiritual use of the media by religiously oriented college students. The shared assumption of these studies is that media are to some extent capable and appropriate tools from which to find gratification or satisfaction for spiritually inclined audiences.

These studies conclude that there is a symbiosis between secular (or general) media and spiritual ideas. When spiritual themes are presented in the media, spiritually inclined audiences perceive them in a personal manner (Drumheller, 2005; Loomis, 2004), commonly including perceptions of growth, contemplation, and decision making (Drumheller, 2005; Loomis, 2004).

Research has also examined various media content for religious images and/or characters, most frequently in television entertainment programming (c.f. Clarke, 2005) and music videos (McKee & Pardun, 1996, 1999). While usually descriptive in nature, these studies often attempt to respond to anecdotal evidence of the potential effects of religious content in media. Often, these studies report on the presence/absence or frequency of religious images or icons (e.g., a cross or angel) or religious themes and discuss the potential impact of such content upon viewers (McKee & Pardun, 1996, 1999).

Advertising Studies

The alliance of advertising and religion and spirituality has raised several questions (c.f. Moore, 1994). For example, what changes in the two value systems (advertising and religion) have enabled the marriage between spirituality and advertising; does the reflection of spirituality in current advertising reflect a real awakening of interest in spirituality or is it just a tactic to break through the clutter (Pardun, 2000); and how do consumers react to religious images in ads, in consideration of cultural, sociological and legal implications (McKee, 2000). A different type of research indicates that advertising actually distracts us from real spiritual development (e.g., Hoffman & Hoffman, 2006).

Some research examines advertising as a tool for churches, including how they promote spiritual ideas in a mass media era (e.g., Abelman & Hoover, 1990; Broyles, 2000; Engel, 1993). This includes the savvy use of the Internet and blogs (Baker, 2006) as a means of creating an advertising network to reach and involve younger people (e.g., Generation Y) in the formation of their spiritual beliefs. Some studies have probed the concept of the “electronic church” where church services and the building of membership and donors take place via mass media broadcast (Miller, 1981) as well as controversies and scandals associated with this. However, most relevant to directing attention to a theory of spirituality in advertising are studies that explore how consumers link spirituality and advertising and/or the use of religious content in advertising.

Several studies have also probed the connection between spirituality and advertising and marketing from various perspectives. For example, in examining audience response, Haley, White, and Cunningham (1999) explored the category of Christian products and how consumers make sense of their purchases of these products. They bring to our attention the lack of research in the area of contemporary religion and consumerism. Werder and Roberts (2005) investigated the effects of the terrorist attack of September 11 on the advertising attitudes of Generation Y toward various brands. They found that matters of spirituality are dear to the hearts of this generation.

Scholars have also examined religious content such as the effectiveness of religious themes in advertising (e.g., Barnes, 2000; Maddock & Fulton, 1996). In seeking to discover whether religious symbolism is used to sell goods and services, Maguire and Weatherby (1998) analyzed the content of 797 television commercials but found only 16 commercials with religious or spiritual content. Moore (2005) examined images in advertising and revealed that Western and

Eastern religious traditions are treated differently in ads. Eastern religion was portrayed as a philosophy that is more spiritual than religious, while Western religion was portrayed in a very traditional manner and included images of clergy, churches, crosses, and biblical events. Eastern philosophy contents

... were used to sell a variety of goods and services, did so with characters that appeared as contemporary people in contemporary places, and did so in ways that did not belittle the spiritual dimension. In addition ... images of people sitting in the lotus position were the most commonly occurring religious image in news magazine ads. (Moore, 2005)

Moore (2005) expressed surprise at these findings, recognizing that there are two different dimensions—spirituality and religion—and that they are not the same thing for advertisers or for consumers. This conclusion seems more in synch with the definition of and core ideas of spiritual people advanced in the present paper.

After reviewing the relevant literature in the field, we move on, in the following section, to advance a new theoretical framework of spirituality in advertising—the SAF.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The phenomenon of seekers who search for meaning in our time has received theoretical attention in the social sciences. Maslow's (1965) hierarchy of needs is highly recognized. According to the theory, aspirations for self-actualization and higher meaning in life would occur after the basic/physical needs have been fulfilled. The hierarchal concept of Maslow's theory is questioned though, when we encounter other theoretical concepts, such as Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy (1984) which focuses on human existence and the search for meaning. Frankl, a neurologist and psychiatrist who survived the concentration camps of Nazi Germany, argues that "striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man" (Frankl, 1984, p. 121). He continues, "Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a 'secondary rationalization' of instinctual drives. This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone" (p. 121). Frankl demonstrates how the will for meaning in life is such a powerful human need that even in the most horrific situations such as the holocaust, when a man is deprived of all physical needs, he can still search and find meaning. Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, is a best seller that has sold more than 9 million copies. The popularity of the book, according to Frankl, indicates how many people want to overcome meaninglessness and emptiness in their lives.

These acute human dilemmas are particularly substantial in the context of modernity. A few researchers have characterized the modern person and concluded that this individual is craving for the inner. The major explanation suggested is that we are living in an overly rational world which has suppressed the psyche and the spiritual need to an isolated part of our lives (Laing, 1968). Jung (1933), in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, describes modern people, in contrast to their 19th century counterparts, as those who search deeply and have great insights from their psyche: they have no relation to a certain traditional creed; they look for mystical experience; they reject dogmatic forms of religion; and they want to experience life directly, not based on the stories of others. The modern person is not satisfied with the givens of life. He or she

starts to ask questions, raise doubts and dilemmas about suffering and “chaos” removal (Linzer, 1996). As Linzer (1996) suggests, the literature offers certain names for such seekers: Jung (1933) names them as the modern men, James (1902) as the sick souls and Wilson (1982) as the outsiders.

The seekers and their characteristics, which are theorized above, coincide with Fromm (1967) and Allport’s (1976) definition of intrinsic or mature religion. According to their typology, people with intrinsic religious approaches tend to be experimental, mystical, and deep; they express a need for direct spiritual experience and reject dogma or institutionalized authority. Conversely, people with extrinsic or nonmature type of religious approaches tend to comply with rigidity, dogma, and satisfaction of ego needs such as status and self-esteem.

Next, we define and present the Spirituality in Advertising Framework (SAF).

What Is Spirituality: Defining the Concept

The job of defining spirituality is no easy feat due to the abstraction and complexity of the term. In this section we advance a definition by identifying 16 core ideas that reflect characteristics of spiritual people and spiritual messages (the Spirituality in Advertising Framework—SAF) as part of an exploratory attempt towards operationalization, to facilitate the translation of this abstraction into the realm of advertising and marketing. Extensive examination of the literature points at three contemporary meanings of spirituality: religious spirituality, natural spirituality, and humanistic spirituality (Emmons, 2006). We take an eclectic approach and combine the above meanings to define spirituality. We perceive spirituality as a broad and holistic construct that crosses disciplines and approaches. Nevertheless, our interpretations draw heavily from naturalized spirituality in our definition, considering the practical nature of the field of advertising. Since the content of spiritual advertising, eventually, refers to the thoughts, emotions, and actions experienced in our naturalized world, we tend to agree with Solomon (2002) that the emphasis of spirituality should be, at least in the context of advertising research, on personal experience, here in our naturalized world and not, there in the supernatural world and the beyond. Solomon (2002) also asserts that some spiritual experiences that illustrate naturalized spirituality in our life could be music, nature, or dancing, all of which are very common in advertising messages. Our definition brings spirituality closer to practice and advertising. Below, we expand the concept of spirituality as how it potentially relates to the field of advertising.

In etymology the word *spirit* has a few meanings. Solomon (2002) labels them: 1) *spirited* as of being enthusiastic, passionate, or devoted; 2) spirit as a *state of mind* (e.g., “being in a good spirit” or “to raise one’s spirit”); and 3) spirit as *shared passion* (e.g., “team spirit”). This term means that all human beings take part as members in humanity, which is a much larger whole than our individual selves. Thus all of us should experience mutual feelings concerning our shared community. He also articulates spirit as 4) the realm of *super-natural* (the world of muses, gods, angels, devils, ghosts . . .); and finally 5) spirit in the form of *letting go*.

Positive psychologists, who established the positive psychology movement in the 1990s, probe the positive aspects of human beings and thus discuss the meaning of spirit. They state that “in this usage, the spirit being referred to in spirituality is not the Holy Spirit, but rather the human spirit, representing the highest of human potential” (Emmons, 2006, p. 65). Although religion and spirituality do overlap sometimes, many scholars differentiate between the two

concepts. Elkins et al. (1988) see religion as a vehicle to achieve spirituality through a road map. Spirituality was also identified as not limited to a certain form or religion (Kale, 2004). When Zinnbauer et al. (1997) asked people to differentiate between spirituality and religion, they found that in the public eye, spirituality is a personal experience of faith, whereas religion is a formalized and institutionalized expression of faith. Rituals, rules, and community are essential components in organized religion but are not in spirituality (Saucier & Skrzypinska, 2006). Social scientists suggest that spirituality stresses more of an intrinsic dimension while religion emphasizes more of an extrinsic dimension (Marler & Hadaway, 2002). Solomon adds that “spirituality does not mean and is not restricted to belief in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic God, and belief in God does not constitute spirituality . . . [moreover] It is not necessary to be religious—much less to belong to an organized religion—to be spiritual” (Solomon, 2002, p. xii). However, “this is not to say that spirituality is not at home in organized religion” (Solomon, 2002, p. xii). Overall studies show that spirituality and religion are distinctive concepts, although occasionally they could be interdependent (Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Saucier & Skrzypinska, 2006). Saucier and Skrzypinska (2006) differentiated between the terms subjective spirituality (SS), which is basically mysticism and New Age beliefs, and tradition-oriented religiousness (TR). Their survey of American adults yielded a clear differentiation: TR is associated with authoritarian and traditional personalities while SS is related to absorption, disassociation and high openness to new experiences.

“Spirituality . . . is nothing less than the thoughtful love of life” (Solomon, 2002, p. xii). According to Solomon (2002), thoughts which lead us to spirituality are thoughts about the meaning of life and our place in this world. But thoughts without feelings and emotions do not constitute spirituality. Thoughts about the meaning of life and the profound feelings that such thoughts provoke is indeed in the true essence of spirituality. Emotions such as fear of death, grief, joy, and love do not constitute spirituality; however, they serve as antecedents to spirituality (Solomon, 2002). Spirituality is not merely connected to positive emotions or negative emotions: “Thinking of spirituality just in terms of our terrifying realization of loss of control and impending death is morbid, but thinking of spirituality only in terms of joy or bliss is simple-minded . . .” (Solomon, 2002, p. 6).

In consideration of the aforementioned theoretical review, we *nominally* define spirituality in the context of advertising as an experience that:

- 1) is broader than religion,
- 2) occurs within the context of our daily life,
- 3) deals with our efforts to reach our highest potential,
- 4) offers judicious tools with which to deal with suffering, and
- 5) revolves around the notion of meaning.

Building on the above theoretical literature, the *naturalized spirituality* approach and other spiritual and religious sources, we advance a set of core ideas which could be the platform for: a) the characteristics of spiritual people (and, by extension, the characteristics of spiritually inclined consumers) and b) the characteristics of spiritual messages in mass communication (bearing in mind spiritual messages in advertising). Sixteen core ideas that constitute the SAF have been identified, extracted from, expanded upon and developed from the literature are presented below:

1. *The action component*: One of the major characteristics of today's seekers is the urge for personal experience. Seekers complain that they do not want to follow the vision, creed, or law of someone else's experience and follow it as a faith. Instead, they want to live up to it; they want to feel meaning and spirituality in everyday life (Jung, 1933; Kamenetz, 1994; Saucier & Skrzypinska, 2006; Schmidt, 2005). Therefore, spiritual people aspire to behave in a spiritual manner, not just to think and feel (Solomon, 2002, p. 15). For example, if a spiritual person thinks and feels that he or she should appreciate some kind of an action or a person, they should show it, transfer that to behavior.
2. *The big picture*: Spiritual people aspire to see the big picture in every situation, although it is impossible. They try to be aware that there is more to the state of now and to our own individual self. Frankl (1984) emphasizes in his logotherapy theory that a person should always search for the bigger meaning, even in the worst situations; in other words, to see the big picture. He asserts that there is always a potential for meaning.
3. *Letting go*: We argue that spiritual people aspire to reach the state of "letting go," that is, the process of separating ourselves from our ego. One of Forman's (2004) contacts describes the letting go process in Buddhist terms: "Buddhism talks of mind and body disappearing. This sounds like a negative expression. But it's not nihilism. It is through negation that life emerges. . . . To experience life and to get to the positive, you must let go of self, mind and body" (Forman, 2004, p. 55). Forman (2004) continues by describing the letting go process as a release of our attachments. The act of releasing connects us to our source of energy. Spiritual people try to achieve "letting go" status especially when they are immersed with physical daily life worries. Solomon (2002) shows how the "letting go" process can be manifested in the context of forgiveness. Spiritual people observe the "letting go" experience as a refining occurrence where they release negative feelings which are substituted by sensations of relief and happiness. Not through suppressing the negative feelings but through facing them and consciously transforming them to positive ones. Lew (2005) names situations of letting go as "leave-taking." He mentions that every day we should allow time to leave our habits, our consciousness, our comfort zone and monotonous actions in order to experience unusual situations and at that point figure out what we feel and who we are. But the leaving, that is, the letting go, is crucial to understanding ourselves.
4. *More than instant gratification*: Spiritual people try to resist the allure of instant gratification, that is, things to eat, physical things to be done, or consumption that represents an illusion. Spiritual people aspire to understand that immediate satisfaction and stimulus are not the real truth and that we should experience life beyond these limits. Many times we need to resist the immediate stimuli and satisfaction to reach higher fulfillment and being. Schmidt (2005) brings this point forward when he discusses the subject of solitude. In consumption it also means to experience products beyond their physical quality but as energetic entities (e.g., as intended in Feng Shui).
5. *Constant examination of life*: Asking "why" is a major component of being a spiritual person. Spiritual people always probe their environment and their lives (e.g., Frankl, 1984; James, 1902; Jung, 1933; Solomon, 2002). Accordingly, they perceive human beings as a mystery that should be discovered. Kale (2004) states that spirituality is the constant motivation to find meaning, fulfillment, or purpose to our lives.

6. *Unity of all mankind*: Kale (2004) argues that real spiritual people build upon connection and integration with others rather than on separation. Behind this assumption stands the belief or axiom of ultimate unity of all beings (Kale, 2004). Most spiritual traditions believe there is a string connecting all human beings. As such, like in the ripple effect, whatever happens to one human being affects the rest of us, as a total sum. Thus, notions such as 'selflessness' and 'love your neighbor as yourself' appear within the framework of the spiritual person which "means not only as we do ourselves but, literally, *as ourselves*, that is, as a spirit" (Solomon, 2002, p. 16).
7. *Integration with others*: Researchers emphasized that spirituality is manifested through our everyday lives. It is through interaction and relating to others we can grow and implement spirituality. As Johnson (2007, p. 431) mentioned in regards to spirituality at the workplace: "It is through relating during ordinary days that a person creates a spiritual life, not through meditation, imaging, or other singular means." Mary Parker Follett emphasized how people produce meaning while advancing each other and the environment through interaction (Johnson, 2007). Not every interaction though should be counted as spiritual; it has to be a significant interaction, in other words, an interaction that positively affects and influences the people involved in it.
8. *Long-term journey*: In every possible context seekers identify their spiritual experience as a never-ending, spiraling journey. A journey with ups and downs, physical elements, and inward elements, but yet again a journey (Lew, 2005; Linzer, 1996; Schmidt, 2005). Linzer (1996) states that the modern person who seeks for constant change is well aware of his or her past and tries to integrate between past and future. He or she feels that there is another dimension that should be explored, a place that needs to be broken through. William James (1902) in that sense talks about "redemption." Indeed in our times, on many occasions, the journey to redemption could be a physical one, to the East in many cases of today's seekers. People do travel to the East in masses, but it is truly an inner journey (Kamenetz, 1994).
9. *Ritualism*: Spiritual people tend to use ritualism (it does not have to be a religious ritualism but certainly can be) to improve concentration, focus, and balance. Ritualism could be anything that one can invent as long as it meshes with spiritual principles. For example, it could be an act of nature appreciation or an act of gratitude toward a person. Moreover, "ritual and practice are not only the expression of spirituality, but the means to its realization through repetition and familiarity" (Solomon, 2002, p. 16). Many spiritual people use the ritual of prayer and meditation. Since the 19th century westerners adopted eastern methods of meditation such as yoga. Spiritual people see meditation as a tool to repose, to calm the mind and to go inward to learn about oneself (Kamenetz, 1994; Lew, 2005; Schmidt, 2005).
10. *Self-actualization*: Spiritual people seek to reach to their highest human potential, as Emmons (2006) suggested. According to Maslow (1965), self-actualization is the highest of human needs; this is a phase a person reaches after other basic needs are gratified. It includes aspects such as meaningfulness, creativity, authenticity, helping others, and playfulness. Spiritual people aspire to reach the stage of self-actualization where a person is utilizing all his or her positive potential (e.g., in every aspect of life, including relationship, career, family, society). Solomon (2002) suggests that one way to reach

that level is self-fulfilling prophecy; when we think positively toward future actions and believe that we can do it, positive outcomes will take place.

11. *Anything is possible*: Spiritual people aspire to unchain themselves. They believe that we are not restricted by anything or anyone in this world but ourselves and our doubts. In other words, our fears and anxieties prevent us from achieving our goals. Thus, if we desire something strong enough, we can achieve it; dreams can turn into a reality (e.g., Langan, 2006; Lew, 2005).
12. *Live in the present*: Eastern philosophies, especially Buddhism, emphasize the importance of being constantly present in our life. Living in the present is a tough mission because the human mind always wanders away to the future or the past. Spiritual people attempt with mindfulness and meditation to live the present. It is possible and brings us closer to spiritual growth and fulfillment (Langan, 2006; Lew, 2005). Csikszentmihalyi's (1988) flow theory, which was influenced by Eastern philosophies, meshes with the "live the present" principle. The flow theory describes people in peak moments of creativity and enjoyment. The reports show that people are completely immersed in the moment, concentrated, lose a sense of time and self. Consequently, they are able to produce their best self.
13. *Take responsibility*: We tend to blame others for our misfortunes (Lew, 2005). Spiritual people strive to take responsibility (Frankl, 1984) and are committed to change personal misfortunes. However, at the same time they should not waste energy on guilt (Solomon, 2002). Accordingly, being spiritual in that sense is being responsible for our own actions but not suffering from guilt because of it.
14. *Gratitude*: Solomon (2002) argues that gratitude is an essential element of being a spiritual person. Appreciation of the meaning life bestows into it. Thus when we are grateful for what we have, even suffering, we are acting in a spiritual meaningful manner. Nothing should be taken for granted.
15. *Transformation*: One thing that becomes noticeable when spiritual people begin researching themselves is their need to change, to transform. Some spiritual traditions describe the life of most human beings, before they decide upon a spiritual transformation, as "death." In other words, people act automatically, reactively, out of familiar patterns and traditional habits, without mindfulness and careful observation of who they really are (Langan, 2006; Lew, 2005). Spiritual people believe that change in a proactive manner is the key to fulfillment and happiness.
16. *Suffering*: Spiritual people understand and feel that life is dynamic: there are ups and downs, peak moments and low points. Being spiritual does not mean feeling positive all the time or ignoring suffering. On the contrary, welcoming suffering and facing it better represents the spiritual way. Traveling on a spiritual path brings with it obstacles and difficulties. According to Lew (2005), difficulties are opportunities to develop and later to achieve our desires. Solomon suggests we should embrace suffering because it is part of life. Since life is meaningful so is suffering. Frankl (1984) welcomes tension in our lives because it brings meaning: "What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task" (Frankl, p. 128). Of course suffering is not a necessity to find meaning in life, but if people find themselves in an unavoidable suffering, it is essential to find meaning in order to survive, feel relieved and fulfilled (Frankl, 1984). Part of being spiritual is the ability to be your own creator, take responsibility and get yourself out of the mud (Zohar &

Marshall, 2001). In the process of facing our own suffering we need to accept that there is a negative side to ourselves. As Leary (2004) points out, there is much blessing in being human and thus the ability to reflect. However, we should not forget the aspect of ourselves which is negative. Leary (2004) terms this side as “the curse of the self.” He adds that when we face our negative feelings or actions (e.g., jealousy, grudge, violence, or we would add over-righteousness) we need to remember that we are not unique; these propensities are experienced by and ingrained in all human beings. Accordingly, in the process of transforming personal negative aspects, it is important to release guilt and treat ourselves with self compassion (Neff, 2003). If not, over reflection (Frankl names it *hyper reflection*) on our actions, thoughts, and emotions could cause us even more suffering. In fact, since hyper reflection is all about the person, it might be the exact thing that interferes with the experience of full connections with others and thus with true spirituality.

Defining and identifying characteristics of spiritual people and spiritual messages is only a first step toward systematic research on the topic. We offer this new theoretical framework for future research in communication and advertising and show how the SAF can be used to interpret spirituality in advertising messages via the analysis below.

APPLYING THE SAF TO ADS

This study focuses on the analysis of two television ads based on the SAF. Of all media, television has the strongest potential to express spirituality. The synergy of audio and video together creates the optimal conditions for bestowing a spiritual message. The obvious communicative qualities of television portray authentic situations (Horton & Wohl, 1956) that facilitate the connection between viewers and the spiritual message. Moreover, previous research on religious imagery in ads found that religious images were more prevalent in television commercials than in magazine ads (Pardun, 2000). For these reasons in this study we focus on television commercials as the unit of analysis.

In this initial application of the SAF to advertising messages, we take an interpretive-anthropological approach with the goal of discovering whether the 16 core ideas are present in advertising and can be tapped by the SAF. We wanted to show initially how the SAF worked in real advertising prior to applying the framework in a rigorous quantitative study. Three stages comprised the selection process of the two ads analyzed here. First, we used a content assessment procedure where we sampled 154 ads of prime-time television.¹ We watched and analyzed these ads, according to the SAF, in order to see if spirituality could be identified in ads at all, as well as patterns. Second, based on the analysis, we recognized a few product categories that used the SAF ideas prominently. From among those categories, we chose to focus on financial services and apparel since they were imbued with attributes that were connected to spirituality, such as intangibility, experience, and identity. Third, for each of

¹Television commercials aired on the CBS network, between 7–10 pm, were collected for the week of Feb 26 to March 2, 2007. The purpose of this sample was not to generalize its results to the population but to get an idea whether the SAF elements appear in prime-time television at all. See unpublished work by the authors (2007) *Take a Deep Breath: Spiritual Themes in Televised Advertising*.

the two product categories, we chose to examine a representative ad that used a large number of core ideas from the SAF. Through this process, the Bank of America ad was selected to represent the financial services category, and the JCPenney ad represented the apparel category.

Although the analysis applied here is qualitative in nature, we have developed a systematic method to analyze the two ads. First, we watch the ad and employ a holistic approach. We observe the ad as a whole without paying attention to the details and ask ourselves: Based on our definition of spirituality, does the ad elicit any spiritual message at all? If so, then we attempt to deconstruct the spiritual flavor of the ad, by examining and comparing each of the SAF core ideas to the ad's content. When a match is identified between a certain core idea and the content of the ad, we describe it in the analysis. Finally, we focus on the creative execution of the ad, including sound, text, light, music, colors, and camera techniques while identifying how these different creative tactics contribute to the creation of the spiritual ideas featured in the ad.

In the following section we first provide a URL link to the ads and then briefly describe each of two different television commercials, followed by an analysis of how the SAF can be used to interpret spirituality in these ads.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Bank of America 2007 Television Commercial

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg7yMkt1TGo&feature=related>

The spot opens with an everyday life situation: an ordinary young woman crosses the street. In the background, we hear natural city voices. Suddenly she stops and looks back at a Bank of America logo. A dove flies away, immediately followed by the beginning of tender music. Through the logo, she sees herself owning a house and smiling. As she is about to leave, an older Asian woman comes along; they glance at each other and now the Asian woman stares into the logo, seeing herself ready to scuba dive into the ocean. With great pleasure she leaves to continue walking down the street. From this point on we can see various people lining up to glance into the logo and see their own visions: An African American child sees himself as a doctor operating on a patient; an Anglo man observes himself opening a business day at the New York Stock Exchange; and a Latino man sees himself at the grand opening of his own business. At 47 seconds into the spot a calming male voiceover says:

This is, and will always be, the land of opportunity.
And fortunately it comes with a bank.
Bank of America.

Finally, the ad ends with the following text on the screen: "Bank of America. Bank of Opportunity."

SAF Analysis

The action component in modern spirituality emphasizes the injection of spirituality into one's own life. That is precisely the essence of the Bank of America (hereafter BOA) ad; regular

people, acting routinely, inject a spiritual dimension into their own life through visions and dreams. Moreover, the action component is further reflected in the ad when we realize that these dreams will not remain within the scope of imagination, but will cross over to the concrete with the help of the bank. The commercial portrays the bank as a tool for translating our dreams into actions and thus into a reality.

The big picture idea is also reflected in the ad. Although currently the characters portrayed in the spot lead a simple or somewhat common life; they break through their present limitations and envision their ultimate goal, that is, the bigger picture of their life (for example, owning a house, becoming a doctor or being a successful business man). The idea of observing obstacles and life circumstances as opportunities (the *suffering* core idea) is the inspiration guiding the ad. By getting a glimpse into their future, it seems that the characters in the ad receive a boost of energy to take responsibility for their lives and to start acting to move forward on the path they choose (the *take responsibility* idea). By showing how different each dream is, the commercial sends a clear message to consumers: the individual is responsible to structure and act upon his or her own dreams; the bank is only an aid for that. While thinking big the characters in the ad embark on a process of self actualizing (the *self actualization* idea). The ad signals for people not to be afraid, to listen to their inner desires and fulfill them. For example, the young African American child is seen as a surgeon and amazed by the possibility. The *transformation* core idea is fully reflected in the ad as well. Transitions from one situation to another are commonly insinuated in the spot: from misfortune to success, from neglectfulness to leisure, and from deprivation to wealth. People in the ad stop their habitual activities (e.g., shaving, walking in the street, working) to reflect on change while reexamining the status of their life (the *constant examination of life* core idea).

The commercial also coincides with the *anything is possible* idea, especially when it focuses on minority characters such as the African American youth, the Latino man, or the Asian woman. Their presence in the spot conveys the message that no matter who you are, where you come from, or how difficult and undesired your life circumstances are, anything is possible if you desire a dream enough. It is all about overcoming fears and doubts affiliated with life circumstances.

The dreams presented in the ad are long term, significant, and life changing. As such, in the process of achieving them, they require practicing restraint toward short-lived desires that come along the way. Consistence with the *more than instant gratification* idea, it seems that the characters in the ad are encouraged to invest money wisely toward long-lasting aims and not ephemeral desires. This also could reveal how the Bank of America brand would like to be perceived by consumers, that is, as an intangible brand that symbolizes the realization of dreams. In general, the bank is presented as energetic entity, with no definition, time or place.

Returning to the characters portrayed in the commercial, it is evident that they have a journey ahead, exactly as discussed in the *long-term journey* idea. It is obvious that the characters in the ad are present at one point in their life, while aspiring to another one—a situation that requires a journey. After observing their visions, the characters' facial expressions disclose their happiness but also their acceptance of the journey ahead of them.

The characters in the ad experience an occasion of *letting go* when they lose themselves into the Bank of America logo. They literally suspend their current lives and attachments when they merge into that dream-like moment; they rise above their current financial situations or circumstances and from that point on find energy for transformation. This mode is connected to

the *live in the present* idea described by Csikszentmihalyi (1988). The characters in the ad are immersed completely in the moment and focusing, while leaving that experience strengthened, joyful, and with a better self. Three creative techniques were used in the ad to underscore the letting go experience. First, the dove's flight is used in the spot to signify the transition between our habitual situations to a "leave-taking" (Lew, 2005) situation (the *letting go* core idea). The dove symbolizes freedom, magic, and peace—an appropriate artistic tool to begin the description of a positive letting go experience. Second, the change of soundtrack at that letting go moment is another tool to express a "leave-taking" situation. Before the dove enters the picture the soundtrack comprised street noises such as cars passing by or a dog barking. After the dove flies away, a tender and quiet music dominates the soundtrack to transport us, the consumers, into a dream-like mode. Third, the transparent bright-colored logo visually expresses the meditative sensation emphasized in the ad. The leave-taking mode within the letting go process is also connected to the *ritualism* core idea since the characters in the ad experience a moment which could be classified as meditation.

From that letting go moment, the ad projects a sensation of appreciation, reflected in the ad in two different ways: first, the characters' facial expressions that are full of gratitude; second, the male voiceover that expresses a patriotic appreciation toward America, a country that makes dreams come true (the *gratitude* core idea). As exemplified by the voiceover message concluding the commercial: "This is, and will always be, the land of opportunity. And fortunately it comes with a bank. Bank of America. Bank of Opportunity." [The voiceover playing on the words of the patriotic saying, "America, the land of opportunity"].

JCPenney "Today's the Day" 2007 Television Commercial

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgv6Fo3sst8>

A song named "How Can It Be" by Forever Thursday is the complete soundtrack of the commercial. The lyrics are introspective and correspond to the visuals of the ad:

I say, and so say I
 my morning thought
 it knew itself just fine
 until across the room
 it caught its first glimpse of my afternoon . . .
 I say, and so say I
 my morning's day seems nothing like its night
 my night so self assured
 was all at sea when faced with dawn's strange world.
 How can it be
 that these things live in me?

The ad opens with an odd visual situation: a miniaturized version of a family's house cut in half, like a child's doll house, rotating slowly. The camera angles from high above, down on the house, circling from above to peek in sequence eventually into each room of the house. The camera continues to move from room to room and lingers to focus on the inside of the

house, while occasionally, in text—“today’s the day”—appears on the screen. Over the course of the commercial, the camera focus travels throughout the house, pausing to view different rooms and the family activities of life within these rooms. First, the camera frames the mother in the hallway, heading toward the children’s room. She tidies up this room while her inner thought—“to install order”—is seen as text on a mobile consisting of three objects hanging from the ceiling of the children’s room. Next, the camera moves to the parents’ bedroom showing them awaking in the morning and beginning the day. Later, we see the mother in her work environment in an elementary school classroom, where she joyfully teaches young children. We understand that “today’s the day” to “captivate an audience,” since this message is shown on the blackboard at the front of the classroom. The camera returns to scenes of the house where we see the father greeting his family upon returning from a day at work. At the same time while in the room with his family, from outside the house, text on the window emerges, created by falling raindrops dripping down the glass—“to be a kid again.” Then, the camera scene shifts to the playroom where the whole family plays a game of ping-pong together. Afterwards, the family hectically eats breakfast, while the message—“to get in sync” is seen on the refrigerator in children’s colorful plastic magnetic letters. Later, the characters previously in their roles as father and mother, are now in the roles of husband and wife, as the husband gives his wife a new necklace with a card saying: “for the gift that counts.” Then, the mother is seen walking out of the front door into the yard and then reading a newspaper page that reads: “for a change of scenery.” In the final scene featuring the house, we see the entire family in the living room. Then, the camera zooms out; the visual reveals a film reel or metal spool for winding film and as the camera continues to zoom out, the image reveals a film reel for each date on a calendar for the month of June and then, zooming farther out, for all days of all months of the entire year, while the text message “to never end” appears on the screen. The ad is completed with the following text on the screen: “JCPenney. Every day matters.”

SAF Analysis

The commercial focuses on family life, an ideal platform for applied spirituality. As described in the *action component*, we see many opportunities in the ad where family members act and interact according to their thoughts (portrayed in the ad as text). The ad illustrates how the characters transform thoughts into actions. For example, the message “to be a kid again” is immediately followed by the father’s spending time playing with his children and having fun, even though he is tired and has just returned from work. This leads us to the *integration with others* idea illustrated in the commercial. As seen in the ad, productive family ties and the positive effects family members have on each other are the epitome of modern spirituality. For example, the ad underscores this point by showing scenes of: parents having quality time with their children; open communication between a married couple; and positive relationship between a teacher and her pupils. The mutual effect humans have on each other is demonstrated in the ad throughout the different situations and interactions the mother experiences. It shows how we are all connected as depicted in the *unity of all mankind* idea. The lyrics of the song and the mood swings, triggered by the interaction with others, reflect that idea as well.

The big picture idea is seen mostly in the ad through creative camera techniques. First, the zooming in and out of the camera angles emphasizes the outsider’s perspective of each situation we are in. For example, the opening scene, where we see the entire house cut into

half, injects the macro-level perspective to the whole commercial. With this outlook we get a simultaneous overview of all the scenes followed. Observing a family house in this manner shows that although specific events happen individually in each room, eventually they are all connected. Another example is the gradual zooming out from one specific day to a whole calendar year. Second, the slow rotation of the house, the circling movement of the camera, and the image of the film reels at the end of the commercial demonstrate the circuitry of life and the patterns we might detect in it: the various seasons of our lives, different times during the day, or even a whole calendar year. We are reminded that our unique experiences are embodied with repetition and the larger view. This cyclic aspect brings us to observe the *long-term journey* idea in the commercial. There is a realization in the ad that life's activities, challenges, and family growth will go on forever, as suggested by the text shown on the film reel in the final scenes: "to never end."

The lyrics of the music in the ad also reflect the idea of *constant examination of life*. The words actually describe an inner dialogue: "I say, and so say I." The lyrics describe an inner examination of a person's soul: how it surprisingly changes over time; how dynamic human thoughts and feelings can be; or how can people find who they truly are. Also described here is the puzzlement of the human condition: "how can it be that these things live in me?" The visuals synchronize with the lyrics in that respect. The people in the ad are aware of their environment, examine it and act accordingly; the short message in text that appears throughout the ad (e.g., "to get in sync") illustrates what is on the characters' mind and how they incorporate it with the environment.

Mother, the protagonist character in the ad, *lives in the present* in everything she does. Although she might have some plans of what her day should look like (i.e., in the morning she thought of "to install order"), she becomes flexible as the day goes by. She changes intentions according to the feelings of the moment and the different hours of the day, as the song indicates. Moreover, the ad's motto, "today's the day," reflects the sensation of taking the day one bit at a time and accepting what comes along.

The various thoughts or goals portrayed as texts in the background of the ad symbolize the attempts of the characters in the ad to actualize themselves in various aspects of their life (the *self actualization* idea). Some of the texts convey the following messages: "to install order," "to captivate an audience," "to be a kid again," and "to get in sync." These messages symbolize aspirations. The visuals show that the people in the spot act according to these aspirations and thus win small accomplishments.

The characters in the ad behave according to the *more than instant gratification* idea. By way of illustration, it is obvious that after a long day at work the father might rather be taking a shower or relaxing on the couch (that is, fulfilling his immediate needs). However, he chooses instead to spend time with the children. Moreover, the *more than instant gratification* idea also states that we observe products as living energetic entities. That is precisely the feeling conveyed in the ad toward the JCPenney products, including clothes, furnishings, housewares, jewelry, recreational items, and so forth. These items used by the various characters in the ad are accorded intangible meaning when put in the context of family and the life situations depicted in the ad.

Appreciation for family life is interwoven throughout the ad (the *gratitude* core idea). For example, gratitude is seen in the appreciation expressed by the wife for the gift given to her by her husband. The message on the gift card says: "for the gift that counts." Of course, the

slogan of the commercial, “Every Day Matters,” only further emphasizes the importance and gratitude of each experience, especially time spent with family. In the midst of hectic family life, the mother finds a moment for her self when she looks through the window with a quality of a “leave-taking” situation (the *letting go* idea). Although we do not know, it may very well be a ritual she adopts daily (the *ritualism* core idea).

Finally, the ad conveys the feeling (with the aid of the visual of the film reel in the final scenes of the ad) that we are responsible for creating and nurturing our own life’s movie. Where we put the emphasis (e.g., family vs. work) or how we choose to fill our life is our own decision, as depicted in the *take responsibility* core idea.

The above application of the SAF to prime-time television ads illustrates how spirituality and advertising can work together in practice. The next section supports a theoretical case for the coexistence of spirituality and advertising.

THINKING FORWARD: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN ADVERTISING

Many people would be less than convinced when presented with the connection between spirituality and advertising. Obviously, the marriage between the epitome of materialism—advertising—and the world of intangibility—spirituality—raises doubts about the possibility of the union. We realize that the argument we make in this paper is uncommon, and offer further support for why this union is plausible and natural.

As discussed earlier, research points at an increasing tendency toward spirituality among the population (Couchman, 2005; Drumheller, 2005; Kale, 2004; Rickard, 1994; Smith, 2003). How, then, is advertising related to the growing interest in spirituality? How do spirituality and advertising even mesh? Advertising is one of the most visible symbols of our secular and pluralistic society today. According to Maguire and Weatherby (1998, p. 175), advertising is “the barometer of prevailing patterns of social life.” Holbrook (1987) claims that advertising mirrors the values in our society. Therefore, it is only expected that advertising messages would reflect social shifts, such as the inclination toward spirituality. Researchers in macro-marketing have already recognized these shifts and set an agenda to study spirituality because:

spiritual needs translate into demand for goods and services worth billions of dollars, and it is important that macro-marketers understand these demand patterns, both throughout time and across customer segments. (Kale, 2004, p. 93)

Twitchell (2004) argues that advertising and commercialism have occupied every aspect of our lives, including spirituality. In his book *Branded Nation*, he discusses how the connection between spirituality and branding/advertising is possible: “We desperately want meaning; things can’t supply it, so we install it via narrative, via branding” (p. 36). He also shows how poets and romantics, by emphasizing spiritual concepts such as dreaming and humanization of nature, have inspired today’s advertising tool box. Jhally (1989) goes even further with the notion of meaning and suggests that advertising can be observed as a religion. He believes that advertising dominates the relationship between humans and products; a relationship that signifies, according to him, what it means to be human. He explains that “in many traditional societies, the exchange

of goods was literally an exchange of people, in that people had embedded something of themselves in the goods they produced” (Jhally, 1989, p. 219) and thus created meaning. Today this is not possible due to mass production. Accordingly, products lose their story and identity. This is where advertising becomes a cultural agent that creates the framework of meaning and defines the relationship between humans and products (Jhally, 1989). Jhally (1989) argues that the role of advertising has recently gained even more power with the decline of traditional institutions that once bestowed more meaning into our lives. In practice, these ideas are more finely articulated when advertisers appeal to spiritually inclined consumers. Advertising creates a bond with consumers in order to . . .

Fill the empty places where non commercial institutions like schools and churches might have once done the job. Brands become more than just a mark of quality, they become an invitation to a longed for lifestyle . . . already made with identity. (Rushkoff, quoted in “The Persuaders,” see Goodman & Dretzin, 2004)

Advertisers and marketers have observed the current shifts in our society and have long been aware that they are not selling products but rather are communicating meaning to consumers. Although consumers purchase products for functional uses, they also buy sensations, feelings, life styles, identities, and images—that is, intangibles (e.g., Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry, 1989; Mick & Buhl, 1992). For example, a consumer buying perfume might actually be buying hope; one who buys financial services might actually be buying freedom or status. Moreover, with the popularization of traditions such as the Feng Shui, where objects are considered energetic entities, together with the notion of William James, whereby matter is believed to have consciousness (James, 1902), there are even broader possibilities for connections between the world of advertising and spirituality.

Indeed, mainstream advertising research has already acknowledged the meaning-transfer approach to advertising (McCracken, 1986). Advertising practitioners today understand they are creating meaning, community, and leadership with consumers. They admit trying to forge not only an emotional bond but a spiritual bond between the consumers and the brand. Companies such as Nike, Benetton, and Starbuck’s have built their brands on meanings such as transcendence, multicultural statements, and community, respectively, thus tapping into the market of spiritually inclined consumers (Goodman & Dretzin, 2004). The future of advertising promises more of the same.

. . . people won’t abandon material comforts to find their bliss, but they will demand a new sensitivity from marketers that places intangibles on an equal footing with tangibles and that cares as much about the soul as the pocketbook. (Smith, 2003, p. 52)

What the U.S. consumer will seek . . . a renewed of sense of spirituality. The marketers who understand and meet those needs will win them over . . . consumers will seek products that reward their search for self-fulfillment. (Rickard, 1994, p. S-1)

An important factor to be considered by advertising theorists as well as practitioners is the current development in spirituality research. Based on neuroscience research, Zohar and Marshall (2001) bring our attention to a third neural system in our brain (besides the other two—cognition and affect) that represents what they call the Spiritual Quotient (SQ). This

revelation is significant and potentially could change the way we think about consumerism and the process of consumption. Traditionally, advertising research has focused on consumers' information processing on mainly three intermediates: affect, cognition, and experience (e.g., Lavidge & Steiner, 1961; Ray, 1973; Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999). Now, it seems there is a new intermediate to consider and that is spirituality.

Given the many points of interface between spirituality and advertising, the potential for further examination both in theory and practice is rich. We elaborate upon a number of suggestions for future research in the following section.

DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although past research has examined the connection between spirituality and advertising and media, there is a dearth of theoretical development of the construct of spirituality within the scope of advertising. The main purpose of this study was to establish a theoretical framework that could be applied to advertising practice. We introduced the Spirituality in Advertising Framework, which provides an extended platform to study the characteristics of spiritually-inclined consumers and spiritual advertising messages. Next, we applied and analyzed the SAF using prime-time television ads. By doing so, we show how the spiritual core ideas, as reflected in the SAF, are manifested in current advertising. These results demonstrate that spirituality in its holistic sense, exists in current advertising messages, and thus warrants attention in future research.

The current study makes several contributions to the literature. First, we offer a rigorous and systematic attempt to measure a broad and complex theoretical construct. Previous definitions of spirituality tended to be general and vague. Second, through the detailed spiritual core ideas we provide a simple and practical way to use spirituality in advertising research. Third, our approach to spirituality is holistic and inclusive, and thus comprises many approaches to spirituality. Accordingly, the SAF could be used as an anchor for future applications and research in various disciplines. Fourth, the analysis provided in this article exemplifies how the SAF can be applied to real advertising and thus provide guidelines for future analysis in the field. Finally, the qualitative approach applied in this study is appropriate at this preliminary stage of our exploration since it offers an in-depth approach to facilitate understanding of the SAF and to grow future quantitative research.

There are also some limitations in this study. The results of the qualitative analysis of the two ads presented here cannot be generalized to the broader population of television commercials. However, the findings suggest that current prime-time advertising does appeal to the spirituality of the viewing audience. Future research should seek to undertake a quantitative content analysis of spiritual ads that are randomly selected and might also explore other media channels in addition to television. This could provide a clearer picture of the use of spiritual messages in ads.

A future research agenda for the study of spirituality and advertising would include examining a broader range of commercial messages using more rigorous quantitative methodology, as mentioned above. Moreover, subsequent theoretical effort is needed to further develop the concept of spiritual messages in ads; nuances in terminology need to be taken into account. For example, careful consideration should be given to the differences between *spiritual appeals* and

spiritual themes when analyzing *spiritual messages* in ads. Does the ad really carry a profound spiritual message? Or is it just a fashionable spiritual appeal? Moore (2005) has alluded to how subtle, unclear, and humoristic such spiritual messages could be. Finally, what might be the key determinants of effectiveness of spiritual messages? These types of questions are central to future research on advertising and spirituality within the context of the message.

Future research can also focus on getting to know the spiritually-inclined consumers: who they are; how do they articulate their spiritual needs; how do they define themselves; or how might they be segmented. The SAF can be used as a starting point for future interviews and focus groups with spiritually inclined-consumers. Broader considerations of spiritual messages in advertising need to be kept in mind. For example, how will spiritually inclined consumers react to the new emerging meaning of advertising? Can advertising truly fill the vacuum left by traditional institutions? Two outcomes could emerge from the consumers' perspective (i.e., in the person). The *negative outcome* may be that the true essence of spiritual search is not fulfilled but rather the illusion of that. It would be as if the consumers had achieved a false spiritual life style but not true spiritual growth. A brand community, a cult, the brand—these may not gratify spiritual human needs. It would be similar to replacing one religion with another. The *positive outcome* may be that the spiritual appeals and messages could trigger something in people's minds and lives. When spiritually inclined consumers see a spiritual message such as "thinking big," they may integrate it with their own lives and implement it to other realms of their lives and actions.

Ethical consideration is another path the research of spirituality and advertising can take. The use of spiritual appeals in advertising may raise again a debate between advertising critics and defenders. Critics state that advertising has the capability to shape our lives and therefore to violate our system of values (e.g., Berger et al., 1972; Paterson, 1983; Potter, 1954). Thus, they argue that "advertising is charged with exalting materialism at the expense of traditional spiritual values in American life" (Petit & Zakon, 1962, p. 15). Conversely, defenders of advertising assert that advertising does not oppose or shape our value system, but only reflects it (Brown, 1981). Finally, others combine the two approaches and conclude that advertising both shapes and reflects our social life (e.g., Williamson, 1976). Indeed, even if advertising merely reflects our life, still one should not underestimate the ability of advertising to strengthen or emphasize certain values over others and thus influence the authentic picture of our life. We encourage a healthy debate on the ethical and social considerations concerning the growing presence of advertising as a spiritual influence for individuals and society.

As we have seen throughout this paper, and particularly from the analysis performed on real ads, current expectations are that advertising messages that address the spiritual nature of consumers will grow. Yet many traditional research approaches in the past were unable to capture the full theoretical extent of spiritual influence in advertising. As the advertising industry edges forward toward tapping spirituality in consumption, so should academia. We believe that the theoretical contribution of this paper moves spirituality research a step forward, at an age where a new meaning of advertising is forming.

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