

**Driven by Nature: A Comparative Analysis of Environmental Messaging in Ford and
Subaru's Advertising Landscape**

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This paper conducts a comprehensive analysis of environmental messaging in the advertising strategies of automotive giants Ford and Subaru, spanning from 2000 to 2022. Through a comparative examination of their commercials, the study explores how these brands position themselves in relation to nature and environmental consciousness. While Subaru emphasizes empathy and social responsibility, particularly through its poignant portrayal of shelter dogs with special needs in its 2022 commercial, Ford takes a historical narrative approach, celebrating its role in American progress in its 2020 advertisement. Despite differences in tone and messaging, both brands subtly convey their stance on environmental issues, reflecting their unique brand identities and target demographics. This paper highlights the evolution of environmental messaging in automotive advertising and its implications for consumer perceptions and brand loyalty. Through an analysis of Subaru's trajectory towards emphasizing empathy and social responsibility, and Ford's focus on dominion, American heritage, and rugged individualism, the study reveals how these brands have adapted their advertising strategies to align with shifting cultural values and consumer preferences over the years. Ultimately, the study sheds light on the complex interplay between advertising narratives, brand positioning, and environmental consciousness in the automotive industry.

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Introduction

As humans have spread across the planet and leveraged their will over the natural landscape; our concepts of nature and the way we relate, as a society, to nature have changed. Nature is often perceived as that which is free from societal meddling, untouched and wild. In a confusing fashion, the desire to depict a non-anthropocentric conception of the world is rooted deeply in the very anthropocentrism it eschews. Any attempt to understand the current conception of the environment must take into account its complex history and development. Like shadows from a light source, “Nature” is viewed as the projection of human absence (Uggla 2010). It is a respite from the rapid and insatiable consumption of modern society; yet it is also deeply ingrained in the way we practice consumption.

The American consumer is bombarded with advertisements daily, potentially reaching thousands of individual instances depending on the person (USC Dornsife, 2023). As the average consumer spends more and more time interacting with media and the internet, this number can be expected to rise accordingly. There is a conscious and unconscious effect to such wide exposure to different advertisements throughout one’s day. While the consumer may consciously acknowledge and pick out a few advertisements based on where their attention was drawn, it is likely that they also will unconsciously pick up on subliminal messages across the many other advertisements they are exposed to (Blackwell, 2007). As a persuasive communication style, storytelling allows advertisers to quickly impart meaning or lessons on the viewer which are attributed to the advertised product. Through selective use of imagery and rhetoric, advertising imparts desirable cultural meanings to consumer goods by reflecting the explicit and implicit thought patterns associated with cultural archetypes (Ganassali 2019). Advertising has played a crucial role in challenging traditional political and cultural values over several decades (Davidson 2013). Through metaphor, archetypes, and themes, advertisements reveal certain social beliefs regarding human-nature relationships (Wampole 2021). This surfeit of information containing brand attitudes and opinions toward social and political issues are broadcast to consumers rapidly and repeatedly, building patterns in the subconscious and conscious mind, and influencing the consumer’s own beliefs in turn (Zekan, 2022).

This repetition of commercial communication and consumer self reflection contributes to the construction of the identity of both consumers and advertisers. Identity in this matter cannot be developed in a vacuum, it is an inherently social practice in which the individual demonstrates

the characteristics that connect or separate themselves from others (Wilska, 2002). An aspect of social identity, the way an individual consumes under capitalism reflects the demographics into which they fit such as socioeconomic class, lifestyle, niche archetypes constructed by pop cultural iconography. If, for example, an individual purchased an expensive watch, a puffy vest, and an indoor putting green mat, an image begins to form from socially held stereotypes. In this way, an individual's patterns of consumption can be linked to their demographics or to demographics which they desire to identify with.

The consumer culture that underpins Western society is predicated upon a continuous expansion of commodity production (Featherstone 2007). New markets must constantly be constructed, and through advertising and media the public must be 'educated' as consumers (2007). Advertisements are creative in using storytelling techniques to reflect what people desire to experience and repeat either consciously or unconsciously (Woodside 2008). Thus advertisements reach consumers through various means of storytelling, conveying information which resonates with a consumer's acknowledged or desired identity. The social construction of this consumerist identity has created an environment in which advertisers are not only selling a product; they are selling the idea that the consumer needs that product in order to validate or communicate their identity to society (Villaran, 2017).

Advertisements seeking to win over consumers have a few avenues to approach the problem; rationally persuading consumers through reason, manipulating consumers through emotional appeals and more subtle influences, and coercing consumers through misleading claims and perceived threats (Villaran, 2017). The most straightforward strategy for advertising is rationally persuading consumers through reason, providing details and specifications of the product in order to communicate the real or perceived benefit to the consumer by purchasing the product. This taps into the idea of extending the capability of the individual through consumption, 'If I had this product, I could do this.' The second approach is manipulative advertising targeting the consumer through emotional appeals and more subtle influences. This is a more personal call to the consumer's sense of self and often involves portraying a story in which the consumer can picture themselves or wants to picture themselves. Rather than an approach which extends the boundaries of *what* the consumer could do if they purchase the product, it targets the perception of *who* the consumer could be if they purchase the product. Finally, the last approach is coercive

advertising which presents misleading claims and perceived threats to hook the consumer. While closely linked to manipulative advertising which aims for what could be possible if the consumer purchases the product, coercive advertising targets what might happen if the consumer *doesn't* purchase the product. This fabricates a perceived threat to the identity or desired identity of the consumer which creates a need for the product in order to avoid the threat. These approaches are general, and are often combined at different levels from advertisement to advertisement, however the combination is telling of both the brand advertising, and the audience being targeted. Advertising and popular culture transfer desirable cultural meanings to consumer goods by reflecting the explicit and implicit thinking associated with an archetype and transitively, these traits are transferred on to the advertised brand itself (Ganassali 2019). This is one of the ways in which brands construct their own brand identity through advertising campaigns employing specific approaches in order to target specific audiences or generate, in the consumer, an emotional response towards the advertised product or brand. “Brands develop brand narratives, ‘to convey a worldview, a set of sacred beliefs that transcend functional and epistemic product attributes. They bond with the consumer by asserting or affirming fundamental beliefs that consumers use to explain the meaning of their lives.” (Vincent, 2002). This conversation between the brand and consumers over the course of months, years, and decades creates the social identity of the brand which in turn influences the social identity of the consumer.

Given the nature of identity as a social determination, and the interplay between consumption and the construction of identity, brand identity takes on characteristics of dominant demographics within their consumer base. Capitalism is an inherently political system and cannot be viewed as solely economic, especially in the modern political climate in which economic entities are viewed as having corporate personhood (Torres-Spellicy, n.d.). The idea of ‘voting with your dollar’ can be traced back to James M. Buchanan from a concept coined as “political consumerism” (Buchanan, 1954). Consumption, politics, and social identity are intrinsically linked to the point that the political leanings of a consumer base can be attributed to certain brand identities (Ordabayeva et al., 2018). Vice versa, brands are able to convey, through advertising and political funding, certain political beliefs to their consumer base. This creates a paradigm in which advertisements not only communicate a social identity to consumers, but an identity which is attached to political and social beliefs (Wilska, 2002). For

example, this can be especially seen in brands which strongly associate with patriotism or nationalism. While this is not an entirely partisan strategy, it is demographically distinct, often appealing to consumers who are politically and socially conservative (Ordabayeva et al., 2018). One of the best examples of political consumer archetypes is the “rugged individual”; since the rise of pioneer and cowboy narratives, this archetype has become a popular culture and advertising trope synonymous with endurance, power, grit, masculinity, and mastery over one’s environment. Employed to advertise anything from clothes to cars and even personal hygiene products, this archetype advertises not only a commodity but a lifestyle rooted in a portrayal of control over self and control over nature (Belmont, 2020). This message resonates with the systems of heavy economic and social influence from extractive industries. In turn, these industries are tied to the Republican party and a political base of blue-collar workers who have a history of relying on environmentally intensive labor (Adler, 2020). Perpetuating this message and archetype solidifies a cultural sentiment and belief in the right to exert human will over the natural world.

Studies that reveal stereotypes linking *eco-consciousness* with *femininity*, also posit that men may avoid green behaviors to preserve a masculine image, one more in line with the ‘rugged individual’ (Brough 2016, Roach 2002). While climate change has been a political issue on and off throughout the 20th century, it truly took the stage as a divisively partisan issue in the 1980’s and remains contentious to this day (Uggla, 2010). Uggla presents a historical account of the construction and politicization of nature that provides context to the progression of how human-nature relationships are used in marketing. While the greatest division on the matter exists at polar ends of the political spectrum, there is a general difference in party beliefs on climate policy and climate science (Funk, 2016). As heavy consumerism as seen in the United States has been linked to climate change (Fromm, 1996), corporate brands must navigate their portrayals of the environment in their advertising in order to connect with their consumer bases. In the 21st century, climate change and environmental concerns have become a core part of brand identities and sociopolitical identities. As such the representation of the environment within advertisements provides an insight into the positions of the advertising brand and their target audiences (Belmont, 2020).

One of the clearest examples of this dialogue between brand advertising, consumers, and the political state of climate change is the automotive industry, which is heavily implicated in climate change, responsible for roughly 29% of greenhouse gas emissions in 2021 (EPA, 2023). The prevalence of cars in infrastructure, economics, and social identity is a complex issue which is centered around “cultures of car consumption,” a pattern of systemic valuing of private automobiles and devaluing of public transport which has “captured” the country in a car-dependent transit system (Li, 2013). The automotive industry is tied through political economies to American labor unions, the fossil fuel industry, social status symbolization, and the physical embodiment of concepts of freedom and autonomy considered intrinsic to the “American way” (Li, 2013; Mattioli, 2020). The contributions of cars to the progression of climate change and the degradation and asphalt entombment of the environment, and the pervasiveness of car crashes as a leading cause of death (roughly 1.35 million per year worldwide) presents a challenge to automotive advertising (CDC, 2023). The automobile advertisement serves to distract from the overwhelming anxiety of car dependence and potential loss of control, by centering the consumer and reasserting the sovereign self in order to convince the consumer of their complete control (Li, 2013). Car advertising is full of storytelling and rhetoric that is intended to put the viewer at ease, increase a sense of security, and convince the consumer that their autonomy and safety can be assured by an automobile. This narrative provides a fantastic opportunity to observe the ways in which advertising brands use various approaches and rhetorical strategies in order to influence the consumer’s perception of the environment, and the reality of the automotive industry.

Two brands which demonstrate distinctly different approaches to this challenge are Subaru and Ford. Subaru is a Japanese brand which specializes in SUVs and portrays an image of Outdoor reliability and eco-friendliness. Conversely, Ford is a domestic American brand which is known for its pickup trucks, despite having a diverse range of vehicles, and portrays an image of toughness and control over the environment. Subaru largely targets an audience of middle-upper class consumers living in areas with inclement weather with a background in higher education, outdoor hobbies, and dog ownership (Levin, 2022a). Ford has a broader range of vehicles from SUVs to pickup trucks and sedans, and provides a variety of options for financing in order to reach a broader consumer base. Historically, Ford has appealed to lower and middle class

consumers, and blue collar workers, however with a strong history of domestic manufacturing, there is a presence of patriotic and nationalist consumers who patronize the brand (Levin, 2022b). Despite the significant and numerous differences in brand identity, target audience, and consumer bases, Both Subaru and Ford are attempting to accomplish the same goal; convince consumers that they need either a Subaru or Ford automobile in order to fulfill their identity or desires. The methods employed by each brand in their advertising reveals much about the ways in which consumers identify themselves with car culture. Socially, politically, and environmentally, each manufacturer conveys specific messaging in order to carve out their niche in the automotive market and resonate with consumers' own beliefs. By analyzing these two brands and performing a comparative analysis on these methods we will be able to divine the breadth of approaches and specific strategies used to cultivate and tend the American automotive consumer.

In order to reach an audience concerned with security, access, and capability in the outdoors, Subaru employs advertising strategies which rely more on appeals of reason to attract customers. They present a dynamic in which their vehicles are sturdy and safe no matter the climate or terrain. This appeal, paired with a history of liberal and progressive views in their advertising campaigns attracts a politically liberal consumer who enjoys the outdoors and is likely concerned about the environment. On the other hand, Ford employs appeals to negative emotions to convince consumers of the potential risk of not owning a Ford vehicle. This relies on a strategy of storytelling and communicating perceived threats in order to develop the sense of urgency and need within their more conservative leaning audience. These distinctions in the methods each brand uses to advertise their vehicles in relation to the environment parallel strategies for influencing these audiences socially and politically. Where a more left-leaning audience is likely to listen to appeals of reason and trust the veracity of scientific evidence regarding climate change, a more right-leaning audience is likely to be swayed by personal bids to stoke emotions of fear and distrust (Funk, 2016). Understanding the nuances of these relationships at the consumer level reveals strategies which could be used to market climate science, and climate actions to diverse audiences on both sides of the political aisle.

Between Subaru and Ford, we see a duality arise, one which straddles the lines of reason and manipulation, joy and fear, access and conquest. In regards to the environment, this is a duality which can be drawn back to concepts of “the frontier” and “the sublime”. In particular, with the

advent of the industrial revolution, the Romantics movement was a rebuke to the disruption and distortions of an industrializing society. In comparison nature began to seem a clean, innocent, pristine thing that existed outside of dirty busy centers of human activity (Biro 2005). Authors such as Thoreau and Whitman among others, perpetuated a Romantic narrative, likening the wilderness to Eden and Heaven, calling on the ‘common man’ to recognize his place in the grander whole of the world (Hay, 2002). This is the representation of nature as the sublime, an escape from the presence of man. However, from the same stimulus arises the concept of the frontier, the formerly imposing barriers presented by nature became commodified as depictions of escape and exploration. The wilderness was marketed to the middle class in a reaction to urban landscapes and industrialism as a challenge to overcome (Recarte 2011). What is compelling about this narrative is that it is played out on a new stage here between Subaru and Ford, however while each perspective may seem distinct, they are closely linked through a religious lens. Judeo-Christian ethics have perpetrated these two primary narratives of subjugation and stewardship for millenia. However, regardless of the position, those seeking to preserve or exploit the environment are placing themselves in a position of supremacy, an ideology which removes society from nature (Turner 1996).

In the first chapter, we will explore the relationship with the environment Subaru and Ford were respectively communicating at the turn of the century. Subaru takes the viewer on an adventure through the forest to discover the L.L. Bean edition Outback. Ford tells the tale of a conflict between a man and a river, resolved by the strength of the Ford F-series truck. Chapter two will continue this exploration with commercials from nearly a decade later in which Subaru depicts a day in the life of an adventurous couple, and Ford celebrates its part in the development of the American landscape. Chapter three will take a slightly different tack and will focus on commercials from this decade which break the mold in some way. Subaru pulls at heartstrings with a reminder to support underdogs and adopt animals in need, and Ford takes a trip down memory lane in order to highlight the excellence and growth of their partnership with America.

Subaru's advertising campaigns consistently prioritize themes of environmental stewardship and outdoor exploration, positioning the brand as a champion of sustainability and nature conservation. By showcasing narratives of adventure and connection to the natural world, Subaru communicates a perspective that emphasizes harmony with the environment and

responsible outdoor enjoyment. In contrast, Ford's marketing strategy often centers on narratives of conquest and development, reflecting a perspective that portrays nature as a realm to be conquered and utilized. By leaning into nationalist and exceptionalist narratives, Ford communicates a stance of ownership over the environment. The differing portrayals of the environment in Subaru and Ford commercials underscore broader conflicting societal attitudes towards nature and sustainability, highlighting the importance of critically inspecting the alignment of brand messaging with environmental values in contemporary advertising landscapes.

Treading Nature's Path: Subaru's 2000 L.L. Bean Outback Meets Ford's 2000 F-Series

Subaru 1: (Figure 1)



A 2000 Subaru commercial depicts the L.L. Bean edition Subaru Outback, and is a thirty second video centered around a single individual likely intended to be viewed on TV. This advertisement plays on the collaboration between L.L. Bean and Subaru in order to attribute positive traits from each brand onto the other. This expands the potential marketing audience of the Outback, and infers that those who enjoy L.L. Bean products are likely to enjoy or identify with the Subaru Brand. As L.L. Bean is an outdoor gear and apparel brand, this implies that the Subaru Outback is the right car for those who enjoy the outdoors. (Fig. ____)

The commercial opens with an individual running through a forest and splashing through a river. In the background there are forest sounds and a quick tempoed jazzy guitar playing. With this sense of movement and motion, a voiceover reads the line: “The latest in all weather gear from L.L. Bean,” firmly establishing this as an outdoor gear ad. This is followed by the voiceover listing off traits of this new item: “warm, waterproof, rugged.” all things which are desirable in outdoor apparel. However, then the individual depicted in the commercial pulls aside some branches to reveal a white Subaru outback hidden in the trees. From here, the advertisement takes on a more familiar routine, showing the individual driving through the forest

as various specs about the Outback are read by the voiceover. The commercial ends with the Outback parked on a bridge in a clearing and the individual from the beginning of the commercial exiting the car and waving to a nearby fisherman.

In selling an experience or desire which the consumer wants to repeat, advertisements must sell the idea of the consumer living out the scenario in the ad. This is easier to see in a commercial where focus is placed on an individual, especially as the viewer never sees the individual's face. This anonymity allows the consumer to project themselves into the commercial and imagine themselves living it out. This commercial also does a good job of linking the individual to the Outback itself. Opening on the individual running through the forest, the key transition in the commercial depicts the individual coming across the Outback in the forest and getting in. What follows is a sequence of the Outback driving through the forest and splashing through a river, paralleling the journey that the individual made at the beginning of the ad. This juxtaposition emphasizes the connection between the individual and their automobile, and attributes the same ruggedness and power of the Outback to the driver. This creates a narrative in which the consumer can achieve new heights, and delve into nature with the Subaru Outback as an extension of themselves.

An important theme to note in this commercial is the parallel relationship between both the individual and nature and the Outback and nature. While this advertisement is promoting a car which is not marketed or built to be eco-friendly, the relationship between these parties is important for understanding the identity of the target consumer. Firstly, the connection between the individual in the commercial and the Outback emphasizes the similarities in the capabilities of each to exist in a natural setting. As the commercial starts and ends in the outdoors, the viewer may draw the connection that this is where both belong; consumers who enjoy spending time in nature would likely connect with this sentiment and wish to experience that same sense of belonging in nature. Following this, while the Outback is driving through the forest, the voiceover lists a few technical specifications of the Outback including the "full time all wheel drive" and "new 6-cylinder engine". By providing these details, the advertisement is making a statement about the ability of the Subaru to safely reach these spaces. Despite the technical specifications making the Outback capable of overcoming many natural obstacles, the

advertisement makes a clear choice with the final tagline “The toughest drive is a walk in the woods.” Paralleling “a walk in the park”, the advertisement establishes ability and a sense of ease. This choice of language reinforces the sentiment of access to nature being central to the identity of the Outback.

The collaboration between Subaru and L.L. Bean is a key factor to understanding this relationship, and the audience being targeted through this commercial. Brand collaboration allows separate brands with different consumer bases and products to pool their resources, expand their reach, and emphasize the desirable traits of their individual products. Collaboration of this type highlights traits that are similar across both brands while also allowing traits that were not likewise shared to be ascribed to each brand. As L.L. Bean is a higher end outdoor gear and apparel brand associated with both luxury, comfort, and staying warm and safe in nature, a collaboration with their brand transfers those traits to the Outback as well. In return, the Subaru’s associations with safety and security as well as a more progressive consumer base are reflected back upon L.L. Bean. The conversation between brand traits focuses on comfort and safety of the individual rather than the power to dominate which establishes a narrative of access to nature rather than conquest over it. This collaboration implies a potential future collaboration between the consumer and the Outback in order to reach and enjoy the outdoors.

Something to remember concerning the automobile industry in the United States is the ties it has to national identity. Because of the development of the automobile industry during the 20th century through the Great Depression and multiple wars, as well as the heavily pro-automobile infrastructure of the United States, there are heavy sentiments of pro-American manufacturing. As a company of Japanese origin, this is something that Subaru has to take into account in the United States market. As such, the collaboration with L.L. Bean, an American company dating back to the early 20th century, provides Subaru with a link to American manufacturing, allowing Subaru to absorb the association with quality and reliability in order to further expand the range of consumers to which they can market the Outback. Since Subaru also does not have a dedicated luxury branch of production, this collaboration serves to expand the reach of their advertising to appeal to higher socioeconomic status consumers and compete with other manufacturers with luxury brands by promoting the “feel” of a custom interior paired with the reliability of a Subaru.

Ford 1:(Figure 2)



This 2000 Ford commercial is for the Ford F-series trucks, and is a 30 second video likely intended for TV consumption. The commercial is centered around a single individual and a narrative in which the individual has lost his special fishing lure and needs the truck in order to retrieve it.

The commercial opens with a wide lens view of overcast skies, looming mountains, and a middle-aged man with a fishing pole standing in the foreground. Immediately, large block lettering appears across the screen reading “Welcome to Ford country” set to a quick tempo beat and low brass instrument involvement in the background. This quickly zooms out to show a truck and the man as he casts into the river, a deep voice (presumably the man’s voice) narrates: “It happened on my second cast...”. From here, the camera flashes back and forth between closeups and silhouettes of the individual, and wider shots of the F-series truck and the river. The viewer is presented with a narrative in which the individual snags his lure on a log in the river, and, determined to retrieve it, employs the Ford F-series to retrieve the entire stump from the bottom of the river. When the man has finally retrieved the lure from the stump, the camera

flashes back to the opening shot as “Ford F-series. Built Ford tough.” is read and appears across the screen.

In this advertisement, there are certain traits highlighted which are attributed to both the man and the truck. The repetitive use of the phrase “Ford tough” coincides with the very deep voice of the narrator and the uncompromising attitude of the narrative. It is clear from this that toughness and stubbornness are desirable qualities in both the truck and the man. However there is not a direct parallel drawn between the man and the truck, rather there is a hierarchy built in which the man dominates his surroundings, and the truck is the tool with which he is able to do so. This is an important distinction because it highlights the idea that there is an acquirable toughness and power available to the consumer by owning this vehicle.

This is the extent of what ties the individual in the commercial to the truck itself, as there are very few details provided about the truck’s specifications and it is never directly referenced in the narrative despite its prominent role. This seems to be an attempt to emphasize the link not between the individual and the truck, but between the identity of the consumer and the individual in the ad. The use of a personal narrative in which the individual depicted is also the narrator makes the primary connection in the commercial a personal one. It is a call to the consumer who identifies with the hobby, attitude, or story, or a call to the consumer who aspires to rugged individuality. Modeled similarly to Thomas Jefferson’s ‘Yeoman’ this protagonist is self-sufficient, morally stalwart, freedom-loving, hardy, and white (Hoover 2021, Caronia 2021). The commercial stresses this connection in order to hook the consumer and convince them that it is intrinsically tied to the F-series truck. Either the consumer resonates with the identity of the narrator, in which case they should own the truck, or the consumer desires the identity of the narrator and the path to achieving it is through purchasing an F-series.

The line between access to nature and conquest over it is not entirely distinct, as that which allows access to nature has to overcome obstacles. That being said, it is often easiest to see themes of conquest when there is a direct confrontation between a subject and some representation of nature. In the case of this ad, that confrontation is evident between the individual and the stump and is acted out through the interaction of the F-series and the stump.

Accordingly, the narration reads “I’m not going to lose my lucky lure, not without a fight” , implying it is necessary for the man to stand his ground. When the man loses his lucky lure to the stump it creates a situation prime for resolution through force. And this is one of the virtues of the F-series truck apparently, as the only information we get about its specifications is that it has the “most torque in class”, a relatively vague statement considering the lack of other details regarding the build of the truck, which supports an image of power and the ability to do work. By not communicating any other technical details of the vehicle, the advertisement relies entirely on the creation of a story in order to hook and keep consumers interested. It is clear that the takeaway is intended to be an overt claim of toughness, stubbornness, and power on par with nature itself.

One of the striking details of this advertisement is the opening sequence “Welcome to Ford country”, a statement which claims a lot more than just a greeting. The first thing we can take away from this is a call back to the origins of Ford and the automobile industry; the United States automobile market has developed under the thumb of Ford. To this day, Ford remains one of the most dominant manufacturers in the US. But beyond a reminder of the company’s origins, this statement is a call to nationalism, an exhortation of national pride in American built trucks. It is clear from the overtones of strength and toughness that there is a specific image of what this “Ford country” ought to look like and what relationship it has with the natural world. By centering the commercial around an anecdote and a character, there is an assumption of what the ideal member of a “Ford country” should look and act like. The ideal citizen of this nationalistic call is a man who is stubborn and tough, no nonsense, and likes fishing. Most compelling is the portrayal of how a citizen of this country should respond to an outside influence trying to take “what is mine.” The commercial makes it clear that the use of any means necessary, force and conflict, are justified in order to protect personal property in “Ford country”. This commercial sets up the individual and the Ford F-150 as a protagonist and “noble steed” facing off against nature as the antagonist; a heavily moralized way of reinforcing the rights of citizens of “Ford country” to subjugate the natural world for their own means. While the individual is pedestaled and the resolution comes with the retrieval of personal property, there is a hidden violence in the aftermath of such forceful interaction with the river ecosystem. This could include increased erosion, habitat loss, and a variety of other downstream effects. This message is likely to

resonate with conservative political groups in the US, especially the far right which has a history of dismissing environmental claims over personal freedoms. Messaging like this is polarizing as it extols possessive, nationalist, and bullish sentiments in the name of advertising an automobile. It is a divisive way to expand or secure a specific market of consumers to say the least.

In order to draw comparisons between these two ads we must acknowledge their notable similarities and differences. Both ads were released in the year 2000 and are 30 second video formats intended for TV consumption. Each commercial revolves around a single individual and is advertising a brand and vehicle through some natural setting and scenario. However, we should note the difference in model, apart from the obvious as they are from different manufacturers, the F-series truck is a work vehicle while the Outback is a passenger vehicle. This impacts the messaging as much as it may impact the range of consumers to whom the vehicle is marketed. In the United States, class divides are closely linked to political divides; as such, socio-political influence in messaging which is used to market to the working class is unlikely to be as effective as an appeal to the middle and upper class. Similarly, where Ford is an American manufacturing company, Subaru is a Japanese company. While there may not be anti-foreign car sentiment, there is a bias towards American manufacturers among the working class, driven by the historical prevalence of close ties between blue-collar work and the American automobile industry, who are traditionally involved in American manufacturing and labor (Silva, 2023). While Ford's car sales cannot be isolated to consumers in the working class, it is unlikely that Ford and Subaru are marketing to a majority of the same audience, and so their messaging likely reflect their distinct audiences rather than highlighting the beliefs of the company itself.

The way each advertisement chooses to highlight the connection between the individual and the vehicle is interesting in their similarities and differences. Both ads are attempting to convince the consumer that their life would be better with the advertised vehicle. The Subaru advertisement draws a parallel between the individual and the Outback as an extension of themselves through the actions they are able to take, with the Outback allowing them to go further than they could alone. The Ford advertisement, in contrast, draws its connection between the F-series truck and the individual by highlighting traits and characteristics of the individual's identity. This distinction shows us that Subaru is attempting to reach consumers through an

appeal to their reason, showing the viewer that with the Outback's technical features there is an increase in their capability. It also highlights the lack of rational reasoning provided by the Ford advertisement which seems to employ emotional appeals to the viewers identity and slightly coercive advertising to imply that the viewer is at risk of losing their own property or agency without the power and toughness provided by the Ford F-series.

We also see a stark difference in the attitudes towards accessing the natural world and conquering it. The Subaru advertisement includes birdsong and forest sounds in the background of their commercial which implies a coexistence of the Outback with nature. It also heavily employs picturesque forest and river scenes while showing individuals enjoying themselves partaking in outdoor hobbies. By surrounding the commercial in natural imagery and communicating the capabilities of the Outback's technical features, Subaru is able to generate confidence in the Outback and the ability to venture into and enjoy the outdoors. While the Ford advertisement is also shot in a picturesque riverside area, there is a possessiveness to it which seems to exist in spite of nature rather than in balance with it. By labeling this area as "Ford country" from the beginning, the Ford commercial establishes a dominating sense of ownership over the setting. This is combined with the direct application of force against the stump and the riverbed: an event facilitated by the F-series truck for the purpose of asserting ownership and dominance of the individual. By setting the individual and the vehicle against the natural in this setting, Ford clearly communicates that the natural world is meant to be dominated by the consumer and the F-series truck is the tool needed to make that possible.

Despite all the similarities shared by these two advertisements, it is clear that there is a stark difference in the strategies, messages, and audiences they are attempting to reach. The subtle differences in the creation of these advertisements communicate explicit choices by Subaru and Ford to establish a message for their commodities and for their brand. The imagery and rhetoric are specifically chosen in order to control what is associated with each brand and their vehicles. All advertisements are in some way manipulative as they function to convince the consumer of their need for a product or service regardless of whether that need is real or perceived. Similarly, no advertisement uses solely reason, coercion, or manipulation, employing each to a varying degree depending on the message and the audience. Some commercials, like the Subaru commercial, are less overtly political and make rational appeals to the consumer in order to reach the audience that identifies with their product, which hopes to feel prepared,

secure, and adventurous. Others, like the Ford commercial, employ strategies to target the negative emotions of the consumer relying on a perception of deficit and loss to tap into more political aspects of their identity in order to expand their potential market.

Onward and Upward: Subaru's 2013 Outback and Ford's 2015 F-150

Subaru 2:(Figure 3)



A 2013 commercial depicts the restyled 2013 Subaru Outback in a one minute and twelve second long video set to “Cliffs along the Sea” By Bryan John Appleby. The video is likely intended to be viewed on TV and revolves around what seems to be a day in the life of an adventurous young couple.

The Commercial opens to a man opening the driver’s door of the Outback, starting the car, and adjusting his seat. As this happens, text appears on the screen detailing “The restyled 2013 Subaru Outback”, and “Two position Driver’s memory seating.” The scene shifts to the Outback driving up a winding road with the text “Available EyeSight Safety Technology.” Then a shot from inside the car shows us a woman gazing longingly at the man driving, both are smiling, and the text “Bluetooth hands-free connectivity.” After a shot of the man and woman

standing beside the car, looking out across a picturesque body of water in the Pacific Northwest, the commercial cuts to shots of the Outback driving through the forest with the text “Refined Lineartronic CVT”, and “8.7 in. ground clearance.” Next the man and woman get out of the Outback on a rocky beach, the outback has two kayaks on the roof rack. After letting two dogs out of the back of the car, the man and woman start to pull down the kayaks as the text says “71.3 cu. Ft. storage” and “Roof rails with adjustable cross bars.” Now we see a montage of the dogs running along the beach, and the couple preparing to go kayaking. As this scene shifts to the couple setting out on the water, text reads “Partial zero emissions vehicle (PZEV).” Then it cuts to the couple returning as the text reads “IIHS top safety pick- for three years running (2010-2012). The next scene is the Outback driving away from the beach and then through the Larrabee State forest with text that reads “Subaru symmetrical AWD”, “Up to 30 MPG.” The end of the commercial is an extended scene of the couple setting up a camping site with a campfire, then the camera pans away from their smiling faces to show the Outback parked nearby. The commercial fades out with the word “Love” in the center of the screen.

"Cliffs along the Sea" by Bryan John Appleby is a folk ballad that delves into themes of nostalgia, longing, and the passage of time. Through poetic lyrics and a gentle melody, Appleby paints vivid imagery of coastal landscapes and introspective reflections on memories and change. The song creates an intimate atmosphere that draws listeners into a journey of self-reflection and contemplation. With its universal themes and evocative storytelling, "Cliffs along the Sea" resonates deeply with audiences, inviting them to explore their own experiences of love, loss, and the inexorable march of time. Overall, this song tries to capture the essence of the human condition, offering a soul-stirring meditation on life's complexities and the enduring power of memory. Incorporating this song choice into a Subaru Outback commercial enhances the emotional resonance and storytelling potential of both media (MacInnis, 1991). The song's evocative lyrics and melody evoke a sense of nostalgia, longing, and introspection, aligning perfectly with the themes of adventure and exploration often associated with the Subaru brand. Pairing the scenic visuals of the Outback traversing beatific landscapes with Appleby's composition creates a captivating narrative that invites viewers on a journey of self-discovery and contemplation, reinforcing Subaru's identity as a vehicle for those who seek adventure and embrace life's journey.

As the commercial unfolds, showcasing the Outback's features and the couple's outdoor adventures, it taps into cultural ideals of freedom, exploration, and environmental consciousness. In a contemporary context, where issues like climate change and sustainable living are at the forefront of public discourse, Subaru's emphasis on features like "Partial zero emissions vehicle (PZEV)" and "Up to 30 MPG" aligns with growing consumer preferences for eco-friendly transportation options. Moreover, the commercial's portrayal of the adventurous couple enjoying nature resonates with societal desires for experiences over material possessions, reflecting a shift towards a more experiential and environmentally conscious lifestyle. Subaru's strategic collaboration between nature-themed music and outdoor settings not only appeals to consumers' sense of adventure but also aligns with broader cultural movements towards sustainability and environmental stewardship.

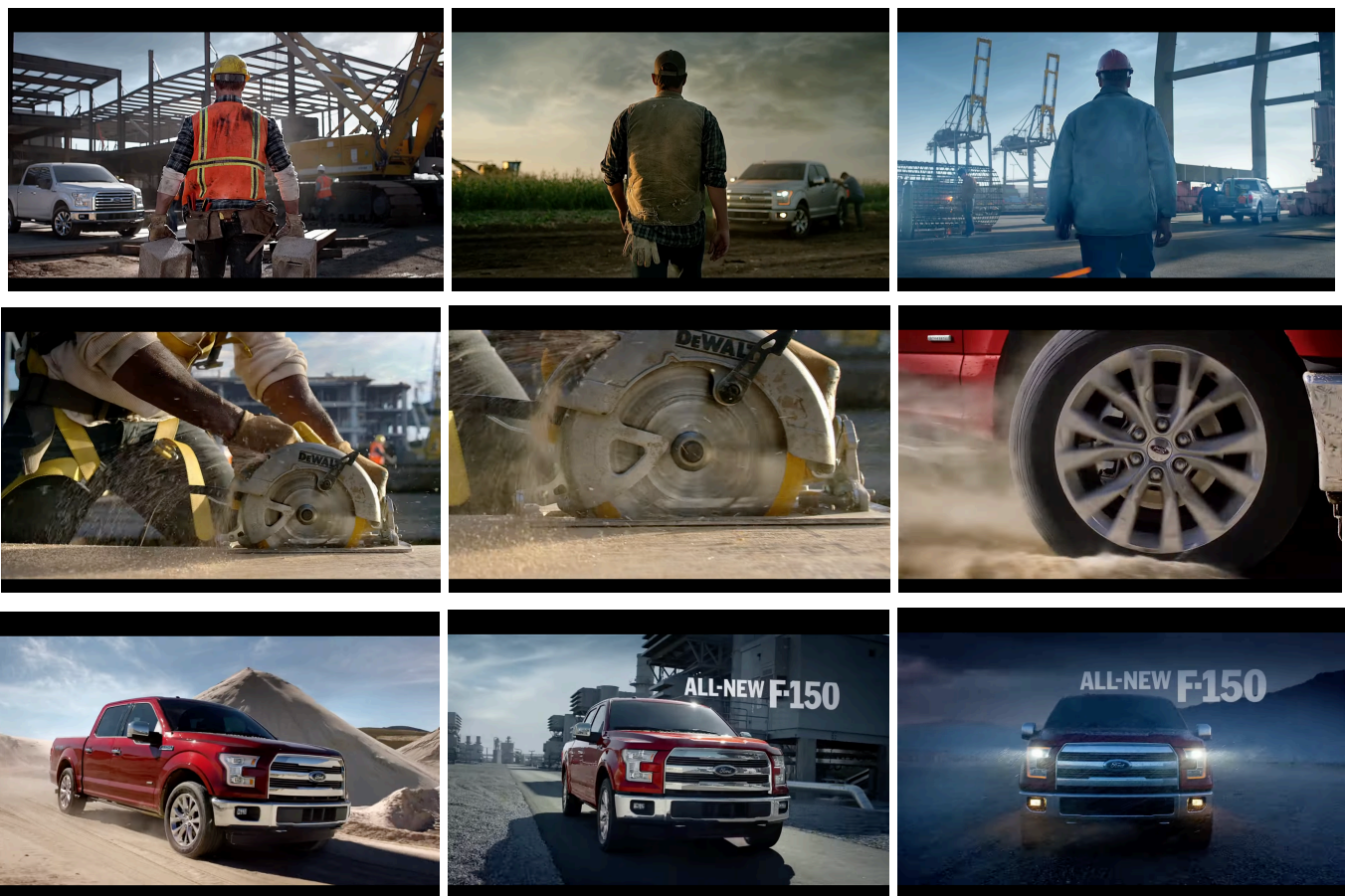
Within the commercial, the portrayal of the individual and the Subaru Outback forms a symbiotic relationship. The commercial opens with the man starting the car and adjusting his seat, symbolizing the beginning of a journey. As the couple embarks on their outdoor adventures, the Outback becomes more than just a mode of transportation—it becomes an extension of their identity and a facilitator of their experiences. The use of text overlays highlighting features like "Bluetooth hands-free connectivity" and "Two position Driver's memory seating" emphasizes the car's role in enhancing the couple's journey, offering convenience, safety, and comfort along the way. Through these visual cues and narrative framing, Subaru positions the Outback not only as a reliable vehicle but also as a companion for life's adventures, reinforcing its brand ethos of adventure, reliability, and connection with nature (Solomon, 2003).

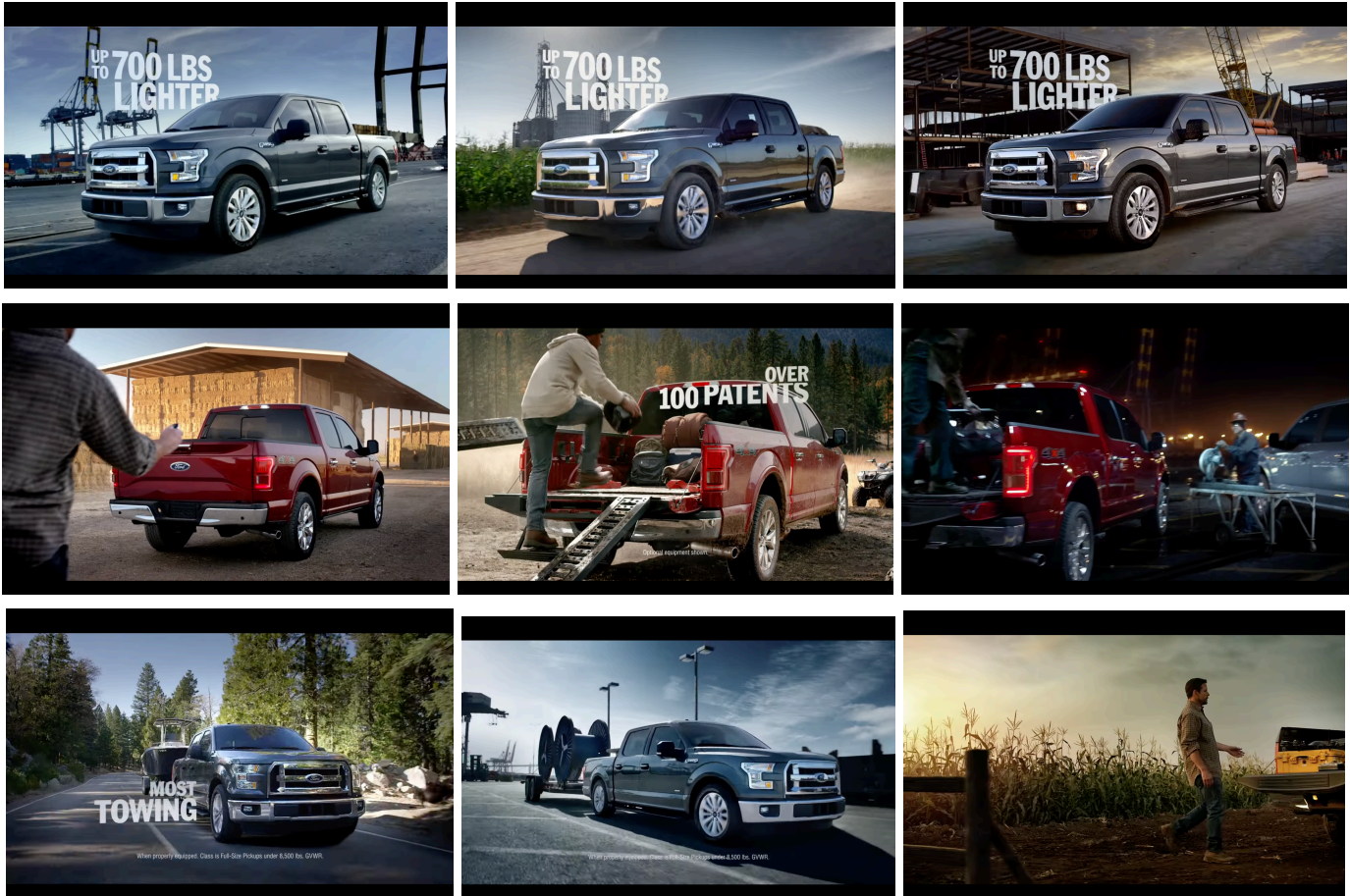
Amidst the scenic landscapes and outdoor activities depicted in the commercial, the environmental characterization plays a pivotal role in shaping the narrative. From winding roads to rocky beaches, each setting highlights the rugged versatility of the Subaru Outback, positioning it as the ideal vehicle for exploration and adventure. Additionally, the inclusion of text overlays mentioning features like "Refined Lineartronic CVT" and "Subaru symmetrical AWD" underscores the Outback's capability to navigate challenging terrains with ease, while the reference to "Partial zero emissions vehicle (PZEV)" aligns with Subaru's commitment to environmental sustainability. By showcasing the Outback's compatibility with nature and its

minimal environmental footprint, Subaru not only appeals to environmentally conscious consumers but also reinforces its brand image as a champion of outdoor exploration and responsible stewardship of the environment.

This 2013 Subaru Outback commercial, set to the backdrop of Bryan John Appleby's "Cliffs along the Sea," encapsulates a harmonious blend of individual aspirations, and environmental consciousness. While there is a significant amount of the commercial dedicated to appeals to reason, listing the various life and experience-improving specifications of the Outback, the overall sense of the commercial is a sentimental appeal to the consumer. This commercial perfectly depicts the line which Subaru straddles between reason based advertising and manipulative advertising. This seems to align with the Subaru brand as it uses these emotional appeals to hook the consumer, and once their attention is grabbed, Subaru utilizes specifications and reviews to appeal to the consumers' sense of reason (Dahlen, 2010).

Ford 2:(Figure 4)





A 2015 Ford commercial depicts the 2015 Ford F-150 pickup truck in a one minute long video which is likely intended to be viewed on TV. The commercial is not centered around any one individual, rather employing a montage of scenes from work and construction sites in which men in work clothes or the Ford F-150 are seen “hard at work.”

The commercial opens with a shot of a pair of work boots walking away from the camera through dirt before panning out to show a man in construction clothes walking away from the camera through shifting work sites set to the dynamic and quick tempo of an electric guitar. A deep voice narrates: “Forward march to the next generation and a brand new age.” Switch to a new shot of someone in a welding jacket welding something, then a man in work clothes using a Dewalt circular saw. The narration comes: “To the future, and the future of tough.” As the camera closes in on the circular saw, the scene fades to a shot of the spinning front wheel of a Ford F-150 followed by a series of shots of the truck driving through work sites and rough

terrain. “introducing the all-new ford f-150, the first and only pickup with a high-strength military-grade aluminum alloy body up to 700 pounds lighter so it can haul more than any half-ton pickup on the planet.” Now we see a series of scenes in which various men are doing various work, on and around the Ford F-150 accompanied by the lines: Over 100 patents, so you can work even smarter and every single square millimeter tougher. Towing the most of any half-ton pickup, with the muscle to move the world and the brains to change it.” The commercial ends with the Ford F-150 coming to a stop on dusty ground as the sun sets and the narrator says: “This is the all-new ford f-150 the future of tough.”

In the 2015 commercial, Ford portrays the Ford F-150 as a symbol of strength, resilience, and capability, aligning with the rugged individualism often associated with American ideals. This commercial decentralizes the focus of the story arc by depicting various men in a number of different settings. This creates an archetype, the average characterization of the ensemble of characters, a rugged and hardworking american man. Similar to the 2000 Ford commercial, the archetype in the 2015 commercial is depicted as resilient and determined, facing challenges head-on with the assistance of the Ford F-150. However, unlike the previous commercial, which emphasized personal conquest over nature, the 2015 ad focuses more on the truck's ability to facilitate and empower each individual in their work and endeavors. Highlighting the “military-grade aluminum alloy body” shifts the focus away from the capabilities of the vehicle and towards aggressive and pro-military nationalist sentiments. While playing to an audience which likely contains many veterans, active members, and military aspirants, Ford is also marketing the need for tactical grade machinery to average citizens. This shift in emphasis reflects a broader narrative of strength and productivity, resonating with audiences who value hard work and self-reliance. This broader cast of characters in the commercial also seems to create a sense of belonging for the viewer, not simply one character to attach to, but a host of characteristics to resonate with; a group to belong to. While the 2000 Ford commercial emphasized direct application of will over nature, the 2015 commercial highlights the Ford F-150's role in providing access to challenging environments and enabling individuals to tackle demanding tasks. Through scenes of the truck navigating rough terrain and inclement weather, Ford communicates the message that owning an F-150 equips individuals with the tools they need to overcome obstacles and accomplish their goals.

The evolution of Ford's advertising tone from the 2000 commercial to the 2015 advertisement reflects a shift in societal attitudes towards the environment and the role of technology in shaping our relationship with nature. While the earlier commercial emphasized themes of conquest and dominance over the environment, the 2015 commercial adopts a more pragmatic approach, framing nature primarily as a resource to be harnessed for human progress. The environments depicted in the commercial are notably heavily altered by human presence before the scope of the advertisement: construction sites, farms, shipping yards. Unlike the earlier commercial, which depicted nature as an adversary to be overcome, the 2015 commercial portrays the environment as a backdrop for human activity, emphasizing the truck's ability to navigate obstacles in pursuit of productivity and innovation. This shift in tone reflects broader societal trends towards increased industrialization and economic development, with an emphasis on resource extraction and technological advancement. By framing the Ford F-150 as a tool for harnessing the natural world for human benefit, the 2015 ad appeals to consumers who prioritize efficiency, productivity, and economic growth. While not explicitly anti-environmental, the commercial's focus on human ingenuity and progress suggests a more utilitarian approach to nature, viewing it primarily in terms of its instrumental value to human society.

Ford's 2015 advertisement for the F-150 carries significant political and social implications, subtly aligning with conservative ideologies regarding resource extraction, economic growth, and individualism. The commercial portrays the Ford F-150 as a symbol of American ingenuity and resilience, appealing to narratives of self-reliance and rugged individualism that resonate with conservative audiences. At a political level, the ad reinforces the conservative value of free enterprise, framing the F-150 as a tool for economic prosperity and personal empowerment. By showcasing the truck's capabilities in navigating challenging terrain and towing heavy loads, Ford appeals to conservative ideals of hard work and self-sufficiency, positioning the F-150 as a vehicle for individuals who value autonomy and independence. Socially, the advertisement reinforces traditional gender roles and stereotypes, depicting predominantly male characters engaging in activities traditionally associated with masculinity, such as construction work and outdoor recreation. This portrayal aligns with conservative notions of gender identity and reinforces the idea of the F-150 as a symbol of male strength and competence. By positioning the truck as a quintessentially American product, Ford taps into

narratives of national pride and patriotism, appealing to consumers who value American-made goods and the ideals of the American Dream.

In 2015, the country was grappling with various social and political issues, including debates over economic policy, environmental regulation, and cultural identity. In this context, Ford's commercial served as more than just a marketing tool for a pickup truck; it tapped into broader societal narratives and political ideologies prevalent at the time. The emphasis Ford places on being the “future of tough” demonstrates a desire to be viewed as a safe investment in tumultuous times, and the right decision for an audience concerned with their strength or power in society. Placing the commercial in the economic context of 2015, the aftermath of the Great Recession of 2008 had a profound and lingering impact on the American economy and society. As the country recovered from the recession, there was a renewed focus on economic growth and job creation. Ford's advertisement capitalized on this sentiment by portraying the F-150 as a vehicle for economic prosperity and individual success. By highlighting the truck's capabilities in hauling heavy loads and navigating challenging terrain, the commercial appealed to Americans' desire for resilience in the face of economic uncertainty (Griskevicius, 2009).

Additionally, 2015 was a year marked by heightened political polarization in the United States ahead of the 2016 election year. The country was deeply divided along ideological lines, with conservative and liberal factions clashing over issues such as healthcare, immigration, and environmental regulation. Ford's advertisement subtly aligned with conservative values and narratives, appealing to audiences who identified with themes of rugged individualism, personal freedom, and American exceptionalism. The airing of the commercial in 2015 coincided with ongoing debates over environmental policy and climate change. While the advertisement did not directly address environmental issues, its emphasis on the F-150's performance capabilities and utility in challenging environments reflected an attitude towards nature as a resource to be exploited for human benefit. In the context of debates over environmental regulation and resource extraction, Ford's commercial subtly reinforces conservative ideologies regarding the prioritization of economic growth and individual freedom over environmental protection (Carlson, 2010).

Overall, Ford's 2015 advertisement for the F-150 tapped into the political and social zeitgeist of the time, appealing to conservative values and narratives prevalent in American society. By aligning itself with these themes, the commercial resonated with audiences who identified with these values, contributing to its effectiveness as a marketing tool and cultural artifact of the era. The use of varied specifications throughout the commercial also indicates a reason based approach to back up the sentiments of the commercial. This is key as the specifications which were chosen to highlight mirror themes of strength and durability. The commercial demonstrates the way a brand may use product advertising to solidify their stance on certain social and political issues, and develop a sense of heritage in order to further retain the support of their consumers.

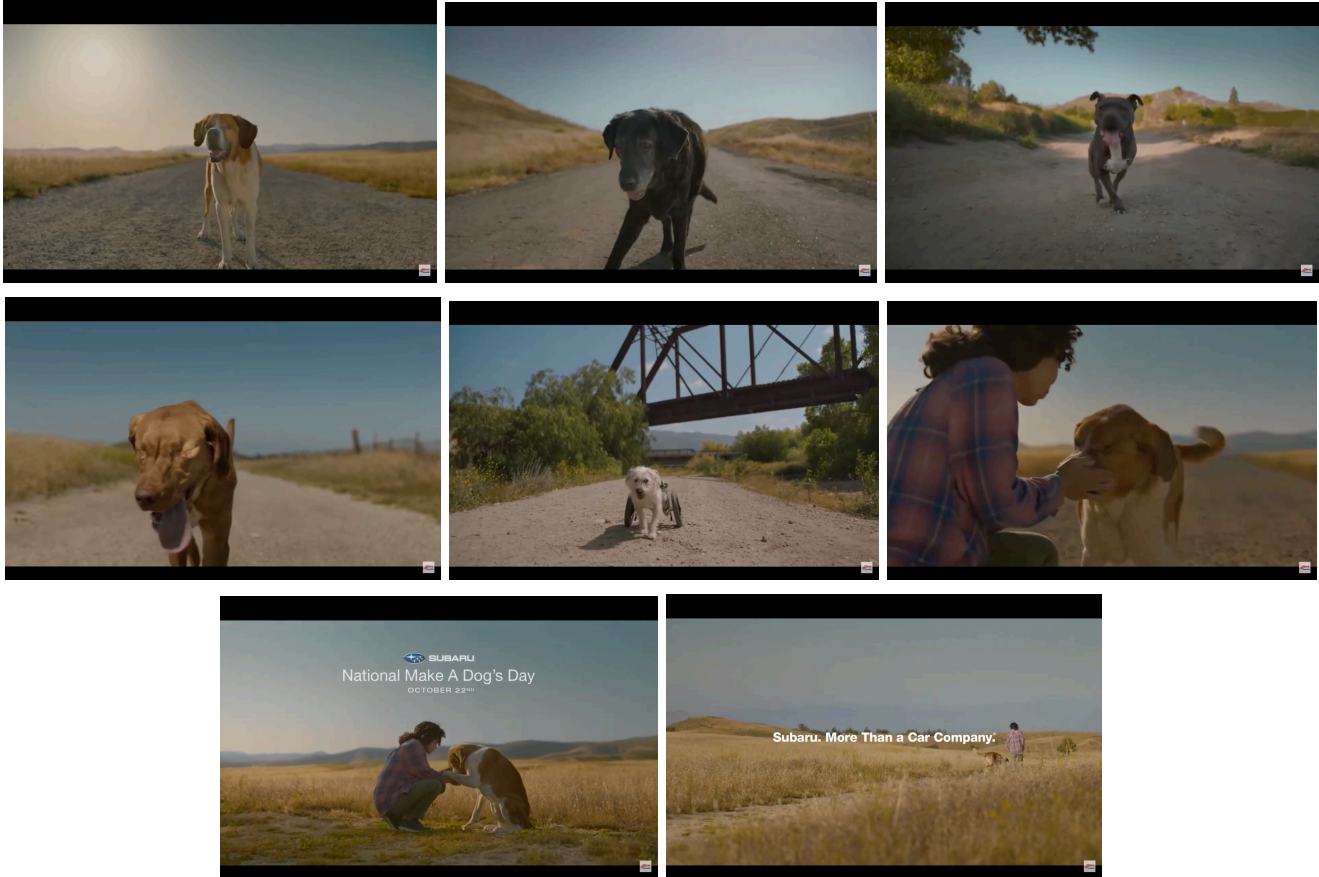
Structurally, the Ford commercial follows a linear narrative, opening with scenes of work sites and construction, gradually introducing the F-150's features, and concluding with a sunset shot of the truck in dusty terrain. The emphasis is on showcasing the truck's capabilities and positioning it as a symbol of American ingenuity and progress. In contrast, the Subaru commercial adopts a more episodic structure, presenting vignettes of the couple's outdoor activities interspersed with text overlays highlighting the Outback's features. This structure creates a sense of narrative progression while also allowing for moments of emotional resonance and connection with the audience such that they feel involved in the adventure (Houston, 1987). Ford relies heavily on visual and auditory cues to convey its message, including dynamic camera angles, fast-paced editing, and a powerful voice over. On the other hand, Subaru leverages music and scenic visuals to evoke a sense of adventure, freedom, and environmental consciousness. The use of a folk ballad and picturesque landscapes creates an intimate atmosphere, inviting viewers to emotionally connect with the brand and its values.

Despite their differences, these two commercials from Subaru and Ford demonstrate a remarkable similarity in the way they seek to reach their audiences. While the tone and settings are completely dissimilar, both commercials place the viewer in a third person point of view. This allows Subaru to involve the viewer as being along for the ride with the couple in the commercial. As a brand centered on narratives of adventure, this is a fantastic way to demonstrate the connection between a Subaru and the possibility of adventure. If the viewer feels a sense of adventure when viewing the commercial, it implies that adventure would be even

more in reach if they owned a Subaru Outback. While Ford also employs the third person point of view in their commercial, it places the viewer in a position of witnessing the “greatness” of Ford rather than participating in it. By employing such quick scene changes and a variety of settings, the commercial seems to communicate how widespread that “greatness” is, something that the viewer may be able to witness in person if they owned a Ford F-150. Where Subaru is more tuned into the daily rhythms of consumer’s lives and supplementing their experience, Ford seems to beckon the audience to join them and become part of something larger: Ford Country. This is a call to patriotism not just to America, though Ford attempts to make themselves synonymous with America, but a call to patriotism for Ford itself, staking itself as a key and defining part of their consumer’s identities.

Navigating the Emotional Highways: Subaru's Shelter Dogs vs. Ford's Frontier Dreams

Subaru 3:(Figure 5)



Released by Subaru in 2022, this final commercial is a 56 second long video which is part of Subaru's "underdogs" ad campaign. The commercial does not include any mention or footage of a Subaru vehicle, and rather centers around dogs.

The commercial opens to slow but hopeful piano music and a dog with one eye missing looking off camera alone on a dusty road. The scene shifts to an old dog walking slowly down a road towards the camera to the words "The older," before shifting to a pitbull with three legs hopping towards the camera to the words "The physically challenged." Then we see a golden retriever with both eyes missing walking towards the camera with the words "The last to be chosen." From here the music takes on a lighter tempo, and we see the first dog start walking to the camera before a montage of other dogs do the same with the narration: "shelter dogs with

special needs face a far longer road to adoption But Subaru knows even the toughest roads can lead to the most amazing places.” At the end of this line, the first dog in the ad is seen running happily into the arms of a woman. The scene shifts to the two of them kneeling together with the narration: “that's why Subaru created National make a dog's day to help all underdogs find homes since 2008 Subaru and our retailers are proud to have impacted the lives of 350 000 pets.” As the commercial shifts to the last scene we see the woman and the dog walking away and playing together as the line: “Subaru more than a car company” is read and appears across the screen.

This 2022 Subaru commercial is an emotionally resonant piece that focuses entirely on the theme of compassion and support for shelter dogs with special needs, aligning with Subaru's "underdogs" ad campaign. The absence of any mention or footage of Subaru vehicles is a deliberate choice, highlighting the brand's commitment to social responsibility and community engagement beyond automotive sales. Through the use of slow, hopeful piano music and visually compelling imagery of dogs overcoming physical challenges, the commercial effectively tugs at the heartstrings of viewers, evoking empathy and compassion (Johnson, 2018). By showcasing dogs with disabilities and emphasizing their resilience and capacity for love, Subaru not only raises awareness about the plight of shelter animals but also underscores the importance of inclusivity and acceptance in society. The narration emphasizes Subaru's dedication to making a difference in the lives of underdogs through initiatives like National Make a Dog's Day, portraying the brand as a compassionate ally in the fight for animal welfare. The commercial's closing line, "Subaru more than a car company," reinforces the idea that Subaru's values extend beyond profit margins, positioning the brand as a force for positive change and social impact. Overall, this ad serves as a powerful reminder of the transformative power of kindness and empathy, resonating with audiences on a deeply emotional level while reinforcing Subaru's brand identity as a company that values compassion, community, and making a difference in the world (Fournier, 2011).

The form and content of Subaru's 2022 commercial are strategically crafted tools aimed at shaping the brand's image and fostering consumer loyalty, leveraging Subaru's established reputation and large consumer base of dog owners. By eschewing traditional automotive advertising tropes and instead focusing on a heartwarming narrative centered on shelter dogs

with special needs, Subaru reinforces its association with canine companionship and pet-friendly values. This approach not only resonates with Subaru's existing consumer base but also attracts potential customers who prioritize their pets' well-being and share Subaru's affinity for dogs. As a result, viewers are more likely to perceive Subaru as not just a vehicle manufacturer but a brand that embodies their values and prioritizes making a positive impact on both human and animal lives (Belk, 1988). This emotional connection strengthens consumer loyalty and reinforces Subaru's image as the preferred choice for dog owners in an attempt to drive up vehicle sales by appealing to the beliefs and lifestyle preferences of its target audience.

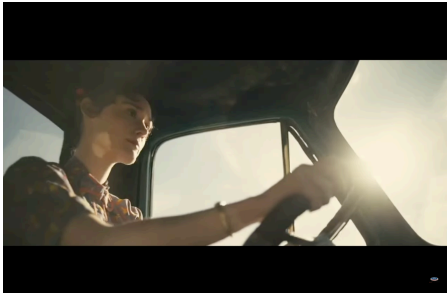
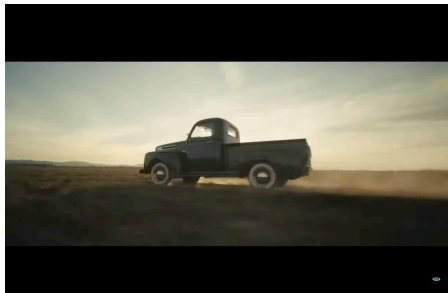
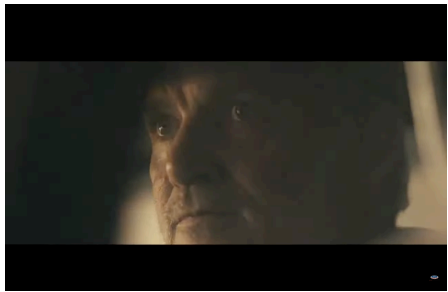
The airing of Subaru's 2022 commercial carries significant social and political implications within the context of America's evolving cultural landscape. In an era marked by heightened social consciousness and advocacy for marginalized communities, the commercial's focus on shelter dogs with special needs aligns with broader societal values of empathy, inclusivity, and compassion. By spotlighting the challenges faced by these vulnerable animals and championing their adoption, Subaru positions itself as a socially responsible corporate entity dedicated to making a positive impact on society (Kozinets, 2004). Against the backdrop of increasing scrutiny of corporate behavior and calls for corporate social responsibility, Subaru's initiative to create "National Make a Dog's Day" underscores its commitment to community engagement and philanthropy.

Politically, the commercial subtly addresses themes of equality and social justice by highlighting the plight of "underdog" shelter animals, drawing parallels to societal discrimination and marginalization. By portraying the dogs as resilient individuals overcoming adversity, Subaru implicitly advocates for the recognition and empowerment of marginalized groups within society. The commercial's emphasis on community involvement and the collective effort to support shelter animals also reflects a growing trend of grassroots activism and social solidarity in response to systemic challenges. In the context of 2022 America, characterized by deep political polarization and social unrest, Subaru's message of unity and compassion serves as a timely reminder of the importance of coming together to address pressing social issues and build a more inclusive and equitable society (Cornwell, 2005).

In the context of Subaru's "underdogs" commercial, an emotional appeal to consumers holds more weight than a reason-based approach to marketing vehicles because it taps into deeply ingrained human emotions and values, fostering a stronger connection with the audience. Unlike a reason-based approach, which typically emphasizes logical arguments and factual information about a product's features and benefits, an emotional appeal leverages feelings such as empathy, compassion, and nostalgia to evoke a visceral response from viewers. By aligning its marketing efforts with values that resonate with its target audience on a personal and emotional level, Subaru strengthens its brand identity as more than just a car company, but as a trusted ally and advocate for causes that matter to its customers (Cornwell, 2005). While Subaru has traditionally championed social causes such as gay rights, their commercials have often relied on reason-based approaches, however, the "underdogs" commercial represents a departure from this trend with its emotionally charged narrative centered around shelter dogs.

Subaru's history of using reason-based approaches in its advertising suggests a nuanced marketing strategy that balances both rational and emotional appeals. When marketing its vehicles, Subaru focuses on reason-based approaches in order to communicate the reliability and security of their product. However, when marketing their brand, it is more beneficial to make an emotional appeal to consumers such that they attribute those sentiments to their consideration of the product (Johnson, 2018). The choice to pivot towards an emotional appeal in the "underdogs" commercial may also indicate a strategic shift aimed at forging deeper emotional connections with consumers, particularly in light of changing societal attitudes and expectations toward commercial brands. This would not be a first from Subaru, who actively cultivated, advertised, and publicized their cars popularity with the LGBTQ community, giving rise to a defining facet of the Subaru brand which is that "Love" is what makes a Subaru a Subaru.. By leveraging the emotional resonance of the "underdogs" narrative while staying true to its legacy of social activism, Subaru demonstrates its adaptability and responsiveness to evolving consumer preferences, ultimately reinforcing its brand identity as a socially conscious and empathetic company.

Ford 3:(Figure 6)





This 2020 Ford commercial depicts a shortened history of Ford in a one and a half minute video likely intended to be viewed on television. Rather than centering around one model, the commercial employs a series of scenes throughout American history.

The commercial opens to a man driving down a dirt road toward the mountains in a modern Ford truck under telephone lines. In the opening, there is no music and rather the viewer hears the radio: “68 degrees it's one minute before six o'clock in the morning.” The camera pans out from the moving truck and shows a bird flying high in the sky above power lines, a narrator states: “here's what happened.” The scene shifts to two men riding horses through the foothills of the western US before shifting again to a shot of two horses hooves at a gallop “Americans wanted a faster horse.” The scene shifts from the horses running to two young children running through an orchard trying to chase an old model Ford car “So we built them a car.” wistful music begins to play in the backdrop. This quickly changes to old video footage of Ford cars driving out of an old Ford car plant, you can hear the original audio of the vehicle: “cars began coming off the assembly line at the rate of one every forty seconds.” The music becomes more serious and the scene shifts again to a video of an older model Ford car driving headfirst into the wall of a sandstorm with the words “then they needed a car that worked harder than a car.” As the scene cuts to a shot of the driver driving through the storm, “so we built something else...” As the car shoots out from the other side of the sandstorm onto an open plain, it is revealed to be an old model Ford truck “the truck.” The music intensifies and the scene shifts to a later model of the

Ford truck driving toward the camera, then shifts again to a truck driving along a winding road: “Americans said okay now we're getting somewhere...” The commercial speeds up, showing a montage of work sites and highways; “and they used our trucks to build interstates,” then a family getting into a truck on a farm “and families,” then young people going through a drive-through and football players gathering around the bed of a truck after a game “and communities,” then a power-line worker, construction workers, and a livestock vet “and industries.” As the music begins to swell, the scene shifts to a series of construction sites and housing developments “Americans used these trucks to build livelihoods, and neighborhoods...” Next a number of shots of Ford trucks towing construction machinery, boats, and an airstream trailer “and in their spare time tow really heavy things.” The scene shifts to shots of a shipyard, people sitting around a table, and a man looking up into the distance: “Americans needed vehicles worthy of who they are...” Then a shot of a Ford truck driving through a river, shots of fire and sparks, then a number of shots of Ford trucks driving straight towards the camera: “and what they can do...” We see a number of shots of ethnically diverse people in the driver's seat of a Ford truck before the scene shifts and returns to the opening scene with the words “So we built them a truck.” The camera pans out to see the truck driving towards the camera on a well paved road, with the words “Built for America” branded across the screen which then shifts to “Built Ford Proud.”

This Ford commercial effectively utilizes a historical narrative to showcase the evolution of Ford vehicles and their integral role in American society. By tracing the journey from the early days of horse-drawn carriages to modern-day trucks, the commercial highlights Ford's enduring commitment to innovation and adaptability. The use of nostalgic imagery, such as old model Ford cars and vintage footage of assembly lines, evokes a sense of heritage and tradition while also emphasizing Ford's pioneering spirit in automotive engineering. The inclusion of diverse scenes, from construction sites to family gatherings, underscores the wide-ranging impact of Ford vehicles on various aspects of American life, portraying them as essential tools for both work and leisure. Through these vignettes, the commercial effectively positions Ford as a symbol of American resilience and progress, celebrating its legacy of craftsmanship and ingenuity. By employing an aspirational tone, the commercial aims to evoke feelings of pride, patriotism, and nostalgia among viewers, tapping into deeply ingrained cultural values and ideals

associated with the American Dream. The use of wistful music, vintage footage, and stirring narration creates an emotional connection with the audience. By highlighting Ford trucks as essential tools for building communities, livelihoods, and industries, the commercial positions Ford vehicles as indispensable components of the American experience, appealing to both existing customers and new prospects alike. This carefully crafted narrative not only resonates with consumers who identify with Ford's legacy and values but also attracts those who aspire to be part of this iconic American story (Aaker, 2001).

Intentional use of varied camera angles further enhance the narrative of the Ford commercial by providing dynamic perspectives that capture American life and progress through the lens of their vehicles. Wide shots of expansive landscapes and bustling city streets convey a sense of scale and grandeur, emphasizing the vastness of the American landscape and the enduring presence of Ford vehicles within it. Close-up shots of individual vehicles, whether navigating rugged terrain or traversing highways, highlight their durability and reliability. Additionally, the use of low-angle shots to capture Ford trucks driving through challenging environments, such as sandstorms or rivers, imbues them with a sense of power and resilience, further underscoring their capability and utility. Conversely, high-angle shots provide a bird's-eye view of bustling construction sites and thriving communities, showcasing the far-reaching impact of Ford vehicles on American society.

In the nuanced portrayal of Ford's history, the commercial offers a compelling narrative that celebrates American innovation and perseverance. By tracing Ford's evolution from the early days of horse-drawn carriages to the modern era of trucks and automobiles, the ad highlights the brand's deep roots in American culture and its enduring commitment to meeting the evolving needs of consumers. The commercial skillfully weaves together elements of nostalgia and progress, striking a delicate balance between honoring Ford's heritage and showcasing its forward-thinking approach to automotive design and technology. Through a series of vignettes depicting Ford vehicles as integral to various facets of American life, from building highways and communities to fostering economic growth, the ad fosters a sense of pride and admiration for the brand's contributions to the nation's development. However, beneath the surface of this idealized narrative lies a more complex reality that warrants scrutiny. By romanticizing the

image of Ford vehicles as symbols of American progress and prosperity, the ad overlooks the environmental and social costs associated with mass production and consumption of automobiles. Moreover, the commercial's nostalgic depiction of a bygone era of American greatness may inadvertently reinforce regressive attitudes and perpetuate myths of exceptionalism, obscuring the systemic challenges facing contemporary society. Thus, while the commercial offers a nostalgic tribute to Ford's legacy, it also serves as a reminder of the complexities and contradictions inherent in America's automotive culture (Andrews, 2016; Scott, 1994).

In the charged political environment of 2020, characterized by heightened social awareness and activism, the Ford commercials' nostalgic portrayal of American history takes on added significance. Against the backdrop of widespread protests against systemic racism and calls for environmental justice, the ad's uncritical celebration of Ford's legacy may be viewed as tone-deaf or even insensitive by some viewers. At a time when many Americans are grappling with the legacies of colonialism, slavery, and environmental exploitation, the commercial's omission of these darker aspects of history risks perpetuating a sanitized, whitewashed narrative of American progress that ignores the suffering of marginalized communities. Furthermore, the commercial's idealized portrayal of Ford vehicles as symbols of American identity and pride may inadvertently reinforce nationalist sentiments at a time when the country is deeply divided along partisan lines and grappling with questions of national identity and belonging. The commercial aligns Ford with the colonization of America, and the focus on development ignores the reality of the displacement and ecological damage that resulted. By presenting Ford as an unambiguous force for good in American society, the ad overlooks the brand's complicity in perpetuating social inequalities and environmental degradation. Thus, while the commercial may resonate with audiences nostalgic for a simpler, more optimistic vision of America, it would likely alienate others who are more critical of the country's history and its ongoing challenges (Cornwell, 2005).

Both Subaru's 2022 commercial and Ford's 2020 ad effectively utilize emotional appeals to resonate with viewers, albeit in different ways. Subaru's ad centers on empathy and compassion, portraying shelter dogs with special needs and emphasizing the brand's commitment

to social responsibility. Through poignant music, stirring narration, and visually compelling imagery, Subaru makes an emotional appeal to viewers, evoking feelings of empathy and compassion towards animals. On the other hand, Ford's commercial evokes nostalgia and national pride by tracing the brand's historical evolution and highlighting its role in American progress. By showcasing iconic moments in American history alongside Ford vehicles, the ad taps into viewers' sense of pride and patriotism, forging a deeper connection with audiences who identify with those values. Despite their differences in focus and tone, both ads effectively leverage emotional storytelling to strengthen brand identity, foster consumer loyalty, and drive engagement. The difference in Subaru's and Ford's advertising strategies reflects their respective brand identities and target audiences. Subaru's focus on empathy and social responsibility showcases its commitment to animal welfare and inclusivity, reinforcing its image as a caring brand, and resonating with dog-loving consumers who view their pets as family members. Ford's emphasis on nostalgia and national pride speaks to its legacy as an iconic American brand, appealing to an audience of patriotic consumers who value tradition and heritage. Overall, the difference in their strategies reflects the unique positioning of each brand within the market and underscores the importance of tailoring advertising efforts to resonate with target audiences.

Subaru's emphasis on compassion and social responsibility in its "underdogs" commercial carries significant economic implications, particularly in terms of brand loyalty and consumer perception. By aligning itself with values such as empathy and inclusivity, Subaru not only deepens its emotional connection with existing customers but also attracts new consumers who prioritize ethical values in their purchasing decisions, or wish to be viewed as such. This strategic focus on social responsibility can translate into increased brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth marketing, as consumers are more likely to support companies that demonstrate a genuine commitment to making a positive impact on society (Griskevicius, 2010). Furthermore, Subaru's image as a compassionate and socially conscious brand may differentiate it from competitors in the automotive market. Ford's 2020 commercial strategically targets a demographic segment nostalgic for traditional American values and the nation's historical legacy. By celebrating its pivotal role in American history and progress, Ford aims to appeal to consumers who value patriotism, rugged individualism, and a sense of national pride. This demographic segment likely consists of older, more conservative consumers who identify

strongly with traditional American values and view Ford as an emblem of American identity. The commercial's nostalgic portrayal of Ford vehicles as symbols of American progress and prosperity resonates with this demographic, reinforcing their emotional connection to the brand.

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of Subaru's and Ford's commercials reveals distinct approaches to brand positioning and messaging, influenced by their respective target demographics, brand identities, and broader socio-political contexts. Subaru's emotional storytelling in the "underdogs" commercial aligns with its reputation as a socially conscious brand, appealing to consumers who prioritize compassion and community. By focusing on themes of inclusivity and social responsibility, Subaru reinforces its brand identity as a trusted ally and advocate for causes that resonate with its target audience. In contrast, Ford's nostalgic portrayal of American history in its 2020 commercial targets traditional American values and the nation's historical legacy. This approach appeals to consumers who identify with Ford as a symbol of American identity and ingenuity. Ultimately, the success of each brand's marketing strategy depends on its ability to resonate with its target audience while remaining authentic to its core values and brand identity in an ever-changing marketplace (Escalas, 2004).

Conclusion

The paper delves into the realm of emotional storytelling in modern advertising, specifically focusing on narratives of access and conquest as they are used to portray human-nature relationships. It highlights the pivotal role emotions play in shaping consumer behavior and decision-making processes, underscoring the importance of emotional resonance in fostering brand loyalty and engagement. Within this context, narratives of access often revolve around themes of inclusivity, empowerment, and social justice, catering to consumers' desires for acceptance and belonging. Conversely, narratives of conquest typically evoke feelings of ambition, aspiration, and achievement, appealing to consumers' yearnings for success and advancement. Notably, both Ford and Subaru employ emotional storytelling techniques in their advertising campaigns, albeit with distinct approaches and emphases.

Chapter 1 delves into the advertising strategies employed by Subaru and Ford through their respective commercials from 2000. Subaru's commercial for the L.L. Bean edition Outback focuses on portraying the vehicle as a companion for outdoor enthusiasts, leveraging its collaboration with L.L. Bean to enhance its appeal. By featuring an individual engaging in outdoor activities and seamlessly transitioning to showcasing the Outback, Subaru creates a narrative of connection to nature. The collaboration with L.L. Bean not only expands Subaru's marketing audience but also attributes desirable traits associated with outdoor gear and apparel to the Outback, such as comfort, safety, and a sense of belonging. In contrast, Ford's commercial for the F-series truck presents a narrative centered around resilience and power. Through a personal anecdote involving a man retrieving his fishing lure with the help of the F-series truck, Ford constructs a narrative of overcoming challenges. The commercial's emphasis on personal property rights and the use of the truck to assert dominance over nature align with conservative cultural values, particularly appealing to consumers seeking reliability and strength in their vehicles. Despite differences in messaging and target demographics, both commercials employ similar advertising techniques, featuring a single individual in a natural setting and framing the vehicle as an essential tool for outdoor activities. Subaru's approach focuses on rational appeals, highlighting the capabilities of the Outback and fostering a sense of belonging and adventure in nature among viewers. In contrast, Ford's strategy relies on more negative emotional appeals and

emphasizes the truck's role in overcoming challenges, resonating with consumers seeking to leverage their will over their surroundings

Chapter 2 focuses on two similar but distinct commercials from the 2010's : Subaru's 2013 Outback commercial and Ford's 2015 F-150 advertisement. The Subaru commercial portrays the Outback as a vehicle for adventure and environmental consciousness, set against the backdrop of Bryan John Appleby's "Cliffs along the Sea." Through scenic visuals and emotional storytelling, Subaru appeals to consumers seeking a blend of practicality and sentimentality. The use of text overlays highlights the Outback's features while reinforcing its role in facilitating outdoor experiences. By aligning with ideas of freedom and exploration, Subaru positions itself as a champion of adventure and environmental stewardship. In contrast, Ford's 2015 commercial presents the F-150 as a symbol of strength, resilience, and American ingenuity. The ad showcases the truck's capabilities in navigating challenging environments and facilitating productivity, appealing to audiences who value hard work and self-reliance. Through dynamic visuals and a powerful voiceover, Ford emphasizes the F-150's role in enabling individuals to tackle demanding tasks and overcome obstacles. The commercial also aligns with conservative ideologies regarding resource extraction and economic growth, tapping into narratives of national pride and patriotism. Despite their differences in tone and messaging, both commercials employ similar advertising techniques, placing the viewer in a third-person perspective to evoke emotional resonance and connection with the brand. Subaru focuses on enhancing the viewer's experience and sense of adventure, while Ford beckons the audience to join a larger narrative of strength and patriotism.

Chapter 3 explores commercials from Subaru and Ford which differ from the usual format of their car commercials. Subaru's commercial, released in 2022, takes a poignant approach by focusing entirely on shelter dogs with special needs, aligning with the brand's "underdogs" campaign. The absence of Subaru vehicles in the ad emphasizes the brand's commitment to social responsibility beyond automotive sales. Through emotive piano music and visually compelling imagery of resilient dogs, Subaru effectively evokes empathy and compassion in viewers. The narration highlights Subaru's initiatives to support shelter animals, positioning the brand as a compassionate ally in the fight for animal welfare. By leveraging

emotional resonance and emphasizing inclusivity, Subaru strengthens its brand identity as more than just a car company, but a force for positive change in society. In contrast, Ford's 2020 commercial employs a historical narrative to showcase the evolution of Ford vehicles and their integral role in American society. Through nostalgic imagery and stirring narration, the ad traces Ford's journey from the early days of horse-drawn carriages to modern trucks, celebrating the brand's legacy of innovation and adaptability. By highlighting Ford trucks as essential tools for building communities and industries, the commercial fosters a sense of pride and patriotism among viewers, appealing to those who identify with traditional American values. While neither commercial explicitly engages with the environment, each subtly displays a brand position on the matter. Subaru's commercial focuses on empathy and social responsibility, resonating with consumers who prioritize ethical values, when it comes to environmental issues, the sentiments expressed in this commercial along with Subaru's reputation for environmental stewardship demonstrate an investment in continued mindfulness and empathy. On the other hand, Ford's commercial targets a demographic nostalgic for American heritage. The historical narrative portrays support for the colonization and development of American land. It is clear from this that expansion and further development are expected and supported by Ford as long as it is a part of the action.

Comparing these commercials across the decades and across brands demonstrates how Subaru and Ford have meticulously adapted their advertising strategies over the years to align with shifting cultural values and consumer preferences. Across different decades, these automotive giants have demonstrated a keen awareness of the societal zeitgeist, leveraging their commercials to not only showcase their vehicles but also to tap into broader narratives that resonate with their target audiences.

Subaru's trajectory, for instance, illustrates a strategic shift towards emphasizing empathy, social responsibility, and environmental consciousness in its advertising. From the collaborative promotion with L.L. Bean in the early 2000s to the poignant portrayal of shelter dogs in its 2022 commercial, Subaru has consistently positioned itself as a brand that champions causes aligned with its customers' values. Subaru has successfully cultivated a brand identity that goes beyond mere automotive manufacturing, resonating with consumers who prioritize ethical considerations

in their purchasing decisions. While each of Subaru's commercials are set in picturesque outdoor environments, over time nature is depicted as a place where humans exist, belong, and deserve to access safely. Subaru makes its position clear, a brand which will facilitate safe and mindful interaction with nature and the wider world

In contrast, Ford's advertising approach has evolved to tap into a sense of dominion, American heritage, and rugged individualism, particularly in its more recent commercials. The trajectory of these commercials is significant, beginning with a small story of a single man's perspective, and expanding out to a chronicling of American history through the lens of Ford's contributions. By celebrating the brand's historical legacy and its role in shaping American progress, Ford appeals to consumers who identify with traditional American values and narratives of resilience. The 2020 commercial serves to reinforce Ford's status as an emblem of American ingenuity and strength, resonating with audiences nostalgic for a bygone era of American greatness. At each step, the environment is placed either in conflict with the "protagonist" of the narrative or is relegated to being the stage upon which American excellence is built.

While both Subaru and Ford employ similar advertising techniques, such as showcasing outdoor settings and framing their vehicles as essential tools for exploration and adventure, their underlying messaging and brand positioning diverge significantly. Subaru's focus on empathy and social responsibility speaks to a more progressive and environmentally conscious consumer base, whereas Ford's emphasis on nostalgia and American pride appeals to a demographic that values patriotism and economic expansion.

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