Off Like a Rocket: A Media Discourse Analysis of Tesla Motor Corporation

Jordan McKay
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ABSTRACT

Energy and transportation are topics of great importance to global sustainable development. Tesla Motor Corporation is an electric vehicle company with the objective to “accelerate the world’s transition to sustainable energy” (Musk, 2016). This thesis, a media discourse analysis, examines media texts concerning Tesla Motors to provide a better understanding of the company’s hitherto success in penetrating the automotive market. Qualitative analyses of text were utilized to first define the discourse, then to describe how it has contributed to Tesla’s success. A combination of word frequency analysis, textual analysis for positive modality, and analysis for principles of branding was utilized as method. A sample set of 15 texts were analyzed to define the macro discourse, and one interview of Elon Musk analyzed closely to explicate how the textual content contributes to the company’s success. The results of a word frequency analysis suggest that Elon Musk’s personal narrative represents the discourse surrounding Tesla Motors and that it contributes to the company’s success via being imbued with authority-building, trust building, and branding content.

Keywords: sustainable development, electric vehicles, media discourse analysis, transportation, communication

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POPULAR SUMMARY
Transportation and energy are two very important topics regarding the future of human society. Fossil fuels have been the dominant material used for energy production and transportation, and petrol vehicles account for a large share of the greenhouse gas emissions produced globally, but electric vehicles are slowly gaining popularity. This thesis looks at how mass media portrays an electric vehicle company; Tesla Motor Corporation. The aim of this thesis is to better understand what the media says about Tesla and how what is said contributes to Tesla’s growing success. This is done in hopes of providing insight into how a startup company can compete in a large and entrenched market such as the automobile market. This thesis looks at language, specifically media text, so as to better understand what messages are conveyed and the effect they have on the company. The results of the text analysis point to Tesla’s CEO Elon Musk being greatly important to the discussion around Tesla. The results of a closer examination of Musk’s language in an interview viewed by more than 3 million people. The results describe how an environmentally-oriented company with relatively few resources and with an advertising budget nearly non-existent can compete with big automakers for market share. This information could be useful as a model to other small firms seeking to change the status quo.

Keywords: sustainable development, electric vehicles, media discourse analysis, transportation, communication

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ABREVIATIONS

EV – Electric Vehicle

ICE – Internal Combustion Engine

HV – Hybrid Vehicle

CL – Critical Linguistics

DA – Discourse Analysis

CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis

MDA – Media Discourse Analysis

EM – Elon Musk (in TED interview transcript)

CA – Chris Anderson (in TED interview transcript)
1. INTRODUCTION

Regardless of which vehicle we drive every gallon of gas we burn adds 19 pounds of carbon dioxide to the air (Paine, 2006). Road transportation, according to NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies, is and will continue to be the greatest contributor to atmospheric warming. As of 2010 there were over a billion cars and trucks in use globally, excluding off-road vehicles and heavy construction equipment, and according to the International Organization of Motor Vehicle Manufacturers (OICA) every day more than 165,000 new passenger vehicles are added to earth’s roads. This amounts to a staggering 60,000,000 new cars produced per annum and this excludes light commercial vehicles and heavy trucks (motor vehicles with at least four wheels used for the carriage of goods), buses, coaches and minibuses (comprising more than eight seats in addition to the driver's seat)” (OICA, 2012).

Fig. 1: (Left) chart depicts 2013 U.S. CO2 Emissions by sector. (Right) Chart depicts 2013 Transportation Sector CO2 Emissions by source. (EPA, 2016)
Automobile sales comprise a huge portion of the global economy and are involved in most human activity worldwide. It is scarcely possible to imagine global commerce without automobiles. As national governments, transnational bodies, and individuals attempt to face vast hydrocarbon dependence two topics are at the forefront of conversation--Energy and Transportation.

Enter, Tesla Motor Corporation, an electric vehicle (EV) company with the explicit objective of changing both energy and transportation consumption (Musk, 2016). Although electric motors have been around for over a century, the internal combustion engine (ICE) has definitively dominated and defined the 20th and 21st centuries. Due in part to oil prices, innovations in ICE technology, and mass production in the first part of the 1900s the ICE overtook electric propulsion and has remained our dominant form of motorized locomotion ever since, but Tesla motors is challenging that dominance. The company’s objective as explicitly communicated on the website is to “accelerate the world’s transition to sustainable energy.” (Musk, 2016). Co-founder and CEO of the Silicon Valley startup Elon Musk makes a point of communicating his company’s objective early and often during appearances. With the recent release of a new model to the Tesla lineup being met with huge demand and the seemingly magnetic online presence of Elon Musk in social media, Tesla is making waves in the automobile industry.

Although Tesla’s market share is minute, only 100,000 flagship models sold worldwide compared to global auto production at over 70 million units (Young, 2016), Tesla’s media presence and market impact is much larger. With media attention and demand feeding one another’s fervor Tesla motors appears to be driving, or at least contributing to, large-scale automotive-market change. Automotive giants like GMC, Ford, Toyota, BMW, Mercedes, and Nissan have been spurred into action. Throughout the past decade there have been a number of attempts to popularize and normalize electric cars, but to no avail. Tesla Motor Corporation, a manufacturer of EVs is enjoying drastic sales increases and is rapidly disrupting the entrenched global automobile industry, replacing combustion-engine vehicles with electric-engine counterparts (Ramsey, 2016). This is a transition that many companies, both existing and start-ups, have been attempting for years. With an overtly stated goal of accelerating sustainable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quarter</th>
<th>Model S</th>
<th>Model X</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1 2015</td>
<td>10,030</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2 2015</td>
<td>11,507</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11,507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3 2015</td>
<td>13,091</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13,097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4 2015</td>
<td>17,192</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>17,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 2: Displays Tesla model S and X quarterly sales for fiscal year 2015. (Wikipedia, 2016)
transportation globally Elon Musk and Tesla Motors are managing to install market demand and the product to satisfy it.

The causes for Tesla’s success are both numerous and complex. This thesis aims to look more closely at one of those factors; media. As Tesla has a nearly non-existent advertising or marketing budget (Veerasamy, 2015), the brand relies purely on media rhetoric and relations for support and interest. Elon Musk would have us believe that it is simply the superiority of Tesla vehicles that creates demand and enthusiasm for the company. Whether or not EVs are the solution to our transport problems is up for discussion. However, what appears beyond doubt is that Tesla’s media interaction is unique, innovative, and having real global impact in favor of EV adoption. It is precisely this unique and seemingly important method of media discourse which will be examined in this thesis.

1.1 RESEARCH AIM

This thesis aims to explain the media discourse surrounding Tesla Motor Corporation. It also aims to describe how the media discourse has contributed to the success of the company. To reach these objectives two questions will be asked and answered.

1) What is the media discourse surrounding Tesla Motor Corporation?
2) How has the media discourse surrounding Tesla contributed to the company’s success?

The automobile industry is one of the most entrenched markets in the world. This thesis will examine and explain media discourse surrounding Tesla in hopes of illuminating some important drivers of Tesla’s increasing success in garnering market share. Michel Foucault, a seminal contributor to discourse analysis, focuses on societal power asymmetries and his work “critiques” this power inequity hoping to expose and ultimately upset the balance (Foucault, 1982). Norman Fairclough, another seminal author, conceives of the “critique” aspect of CDA as “...making visible the interconnectedness of things” (Fairclough, 1989). By applying ideas such as these, among others of discourse analysis, this thesis aims to illuminate a driving force for how a small company with new ideas, can capture some of that societal power via mainstream media. The knowledge base provided by discourse analysis and contemporary branding theory will help to explain the current conversation around the company, with the secondary goal of producing an understanding of this process that may be applied to other companies seeking to penetrate entrenched markets or to upset the status quo.

“The point here is to be aware of the significance of language differences and linguistic limitations, while conceding what seems an irrefutable proposition: that language has a vital role to play in constructing understandings of and mediating action in the world.” (Harvey, 1996).
1.2 EV MARKET
While GMC may have produced the first EV, aptly named “EV1” for mass market, it did so only briefly during the 1990s and produced and sold millions of ICEs during that time as well (Who Killed The Electric Car, 2006). Nissan has been producing the “world's all-time best selling highway-capable all-electric car,” (Wikipedia, 2016) the Leaf since 2010 but like GMC has also been producing ICEs at a much grander scale. Toyota’s Prius was the first mass produced hybrid vehicle (HV) that is both ICE and EV and it remains the most popular of hybrid vehicles. First released for global purchase in 2000 it was revolutionary and has been steadily increasing in sales ever since. However, like the aforementioned manufacturers Toyota continues to garner most of its profit from ICEs and has yet to shift the auto market towards electric propulsion in a meaningful way. In the case of previous EVs and HVs it appears that manufacturers simply produce what the market demands. Tesla, however, produces only EVs and aims to re-orient the market towards EVs. All significant EV or hybrid manufacturers excluding Tesla produce ICEs in varying forms to suit market needs; Tesla has the objective of changing the market and creating demand where it doesn’t exist.

![Chart showing United States plug-in electric car sales from February 2013 to January 2014](Levin, 2014).

Central to creating demand for a product or service is advertising. That is, communication with the public to build a brand image and manage relations with customers and potential customers (Aaker, 2014). Elon Musk often attributes Tesla’s success to the absolute superiority of its product. However, this thesis assumes that there is more to the story than this. After all, if a company produces the most brilliant product ever conceived and sells it for 1 USD nobody will by it if they don’t know it exists or they don’t believe it can truly be so brilliant. It follows then that there must be more to Tesla’s growing success. That is, without communication there would simply be cars built and awaiting sale, but no accompanying consumer demand. Creating and maintaining demand growth is a very difficult and important aspect of starting and growing a successful company, especially in an industry as entrenched and capital-
intensive as automobile production and sales. Tesla has a very different media presence and approach than any other automobile manufacturer.

1.3 WHY TESLA

Named *Consumer Reports* “car of the year” in both 2013 and 2014 Tesla’s Model S is making big waves in the industry. The Model S and X have also received the highest safety rating ever given to any automobile by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). As of April 21st, 2016 Tesla Model 3 has garnered “nearly 400,000” (Warren, 2016) pre-orders for its 2017 model 3 (Guardian, 2016). To put those figures in perspective 400,000 is more than all Tesla cars sold and delivered to date, of any model, and is over twice as many as Toyota Priuses sold last year (Wikipedia, 2016). Tesla has a unique strategy for capturing market share and creating outstanding demand and ultimately disrupting the seemingly immovable automobile market norms. Elon Musk often publicly states that Tesla allocates no funds towards marketing or advertising (Veerasamy, 2015), however Musk does spend large amounts of time appearing publicly, which could be considered advertising. Just how much Tesla spends on marketing and advertisement is unclear but it appears insubstantial. The table below is an excerpt from Tesla’s publicly available Annual Report describing Tesla’s marketing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marketing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our principal marketing goals are to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- generate demand for our vehicles and drive leads to our sales teams;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- build long-term brand awareness and manage corporate reputation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- manage our existing customer base to create loyalty and customer referrals; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- enable customer input into the product development process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Historically, we have been able to generate significant media coverage of our company and our vehicles, and we believe we will continue to do so. To date, media coverage and word of mouth have been the primary drivers of our sales leads and have helped us achieve sales without traditional advertising and at relatively low marketing costs.

Our marketing efforts include events where our vehicles are displayed and demonstrated. These events range from widely attended public events, such as the Detroit, Los Angeles, and Frankfurt auto shows, to smaller events oriented towards sales, such as private drive events.

Fig. 4: Excerpt from Annual Report (Musk, 2014)

This thesis assumes that Tesla’s unique usage of Elon Musk in public discourse to communicate and market its products is noteworthy and of significant importance to understanding its media success. With Tesla’s market share at under .1% of global auto sales, and its in-segment realized sales figures trailing or equal to other EVs and Hybrids like Chevrolet’s Volt, Nissan’s Leaf, and Toyota’s Prius it may seem a curious decision to examine only media discourse of Tesla Motor Corporation. While timing or social readiness are most certainly prominent drivers for the rise of Tesla, they cannot account for the lack of prevalence of competing EV manufacturers in the media. Social atmosphere fails also to explain the viewership and readership that media coverage of
Tesla garners in comparison to other EVs or HVs. Elon Musk’s 2013 TED interview has garnered more than 3.1 million views and has not been promoted artificially as advertising or marketing (Musk, 2013). In contrast GMC’s EV1 was released for sale well over a decade ago and other than Chris Pain’s 2006 “Who Killed the Electric Car” has and has achieved little more than fringe media coverage and interest (Who Killed The Electric Car, 2006). Regardless of sales numbers or market share of GMC, Toyota, Nissan, and other EVs there is no mistaking Tesla’s position as the industry disruptor. With high readership and viewership for media coverage, backordered products, and industry-leading specs, Tesla is the EV manufacturer that others look to for brand and hardware competition.

![Market Share Chart]

Fig. 5: This chart depicts percent market share held by major global auto manufacturers from the first half of 2015 (June 2015 YTD). *Tesla is included in the “Other” category. (Cain, 2015)

With sustainable development as a framework for inquiry and media discourse analysis as an approach Tesla stands out from competing firms in two important ways. Tesla distinguishes from other automakers via objectives and strategy.

As this thesis has as one of its primary focusses the subject of sustainable development, Tesla Motors’ explicit objective of accelerating the transition to sustainable transport and energy (Musk, 2015) makes it the most relevant of any automaker. Elon Musk and JB Straubel, co-founders of Tesla, created the company with the expressed intent of “Revolutioniz[ing] the auto industry and mak[ing] every car on the road electric; that’s our end goal.” (Who Killed The Electric Car, 2006). Tesla is the only car company of relevant size to produce no ICE models as well as the only company to express intent to make ICE vehicles obsolete. This sets an important precedent and tact for global sustainable development. Not only does the company have a goal of changing the way we conceive of transportation, but also seems to be realizing that goal with the astronomical number of preorders of the newly released Model 3.
The strategy Tesla applies to achieve its objectives is also unique. From not having a dealer delivery system so that they may maintain direct contact with customers, to not advertising outright, to making battery pack and motor technology open source, Tesla is truly taking a different tack. In addition, the media strategy use of Musk as the face of the company and the continued reiteration of the company’s objectives to alter the course transportation history is why this paper selects Tesla media discourse as subject material. Tesla is having both tangible and intangible effect on global transport development and it is therefore pertinent to explore how and why this is occurring.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As with any endeavor, studying what others in the field have undertaken and accomplished is a prudent starting point. To understand what a discourse analysis is we must first look at how others have understood it and used it as a research tool. To build a useful framework for inquiry, we must first understand how others have done so. Discourse analysis, although relatively young as a field, is broad and diverse in research outcomes and to the untrained eye is only subtly distinguishable from other text analysis theories and methods. This makes it important to first look at what discourse analysts mean when they say “discourse” so that we have a better understanding of the body of work produced analyzing these “discourses”.

Considered by many as the father of discourse analysis, Michel Foucault during the 1960s and 1970s pioneered the notion of a discourse. He pushed linguistic analysis past the scope of sociolinguistics, semiotics, psycholinguistics, and pragmatics (Foucault, 1972). Foucault conceived of language, society, and behavior as interconnected and inseparable and sought to include this into the field of text analysis, therefore defining language as social (Foucault, 1972). He understood language as social action and pushed linguistic analysis away from strict textual analysis to larger discursive macro analysis and this necessitated a different method for describing texts (Foucault, 1982). Discourse as a term seeks to include the social embeddedness of language. Later, another prominent contributor Norman Fairclough, authored his seminal 1989 “Language and Power” in which he informs the reader of how to conceptualize the term discourse by making a series of logical assumptions: First, that language is generally understood to be a set of symbols with certain socially interpreted meanings attached to them. Second, how individuals interpret words and pairings of words is subject to the individual’s socialization; the set of all of their experiences and assumptions that we can call their ideology or ideologies. Third, individuals have unique ideologies, but groups of
people have ideologies as well and with ever expanding complexity so do nations, states, and regions etc. and they are all interacting with one another (Fairclough, 1989). Fairclough then uses the term discourse to describe language as embedded in a social context and inseparable from society. Fairclough puts this relationship nicely, “...The social determination of language use, but also the linguistic determination of society.” (Fairclough, 1989) The notion offers a comprehensive understanding of texts, actions, and society as indistinguishable. Discourse conceptualizes language as social practice (Fairclough, 1989). The operative notion in Fairclough’s understanding of discourse is that it conceptualizes language and social action as one (Fairclough, 1989). Although the research produced analyzing discourses is diverse, the use of the word discourse appears among influential analysts is used similarly, from Michel Foucault’s more action-oriented and often political material to van Dijk, Hall, and Schrøder’s emphasis semiotics and production/consumption of texts (Foucault, 1982) (Dijk, 1985) (Hall, 1973) (Schrøder, 2007). David Harvey, another very prominent contributor to the field gives definition to the concept through visualization:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse/Language</th>
<th>Power</th>
<th>Beliefs/values/desires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social relations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Institutions/rituals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material Practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 7: “Moment” The figure is meant to visualize moments in a cognitive map. (Harvey, 1996)

Included in the above figure is an important notion among discourse analysis theorists and research. That is, discourses are understood as spatial-temporally inclusive. In Harvey’s same influential 1996 work he posits that discourses “internalize” everything occurring at all other moments and therefore that there is nothing truly “outside the text”. When Harvey labels the above figure “Moment” he means that all are taking place simultaneously. It is this dynamic spatial-temporal, discursive, and holistic notion of texts that discourse analysts’ mean when they use the term discourse. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer’s important work on the “Methods of Critical Discourse analysis” echoes a similar notion when explicating the term’s application as generally referring to a “larger discursive unit of text to a be a basic unit of communication” (Ruth Wodak, 2001).

Now that we have a better understanding of what discourse analysts mean when they use the term, we can delve into the body of research that has been produced analyzing such discourses. In order to understand what Media Discourse Analysis (MDA) is, we must first understand Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and to understand CDA we must understand Critical Linguistics (CL). First introduced as a field of research in the 1960s and 1970s, CDA is a relatively novel conglomeration of disciplinary interests. A mixture of sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and cognitive psychology, and critical linguistics (CL), CDA was used by Foucault, Hall, van Dijk and Wodak among many others as a
form of critique on social text production and consumption. As CDA is informed by CL, it is heavily informed by the Frankfurt School of Jürgen Habermas, therefore so too is much of the research produced in the field (Ruth Wodak, 2001). The aspect most carried over from CL to CDA is the “critical” element of the discourse analysis, as is easily noticeable in the nomenclature “C” for critical. Critical here refers to critical theory and carries with it the idea not simply to subjectively examine a phenomenon, but to critique it and often to attempt to expose underlying power relations (Fairclough, 1989). That is, to examine something with intent and creating change or prodding or poking at an imbalance, often linked to socio-political processes as critical theory is itself related to political ecology and among others (Ruth Wodak, 2001). Jorgensen and Philips elaborate on the positionality of critical research, “Critical discourse analysis does not, therefore, understand itself as politically neutral (as objectivist social science does), but as a critical approach which is politically committed to social change.” (Marianne Jorgensen, 2002) Michel Foucault, who is also regarded as a seminal contributor to CL and CDA, among many other fields, endows his research with an emphasis on critiquing social-political practices with an eye towards balancing power asymmetries present in society (Foucault, 1982). Foucault is critical of relationships between language and behavior, and language and power and seeks to understand and expose those relationships so as to create change (Foucault, 1982). Wodak and Meyer understand and apply CL as well as CDA to gender and race phenomena in attempts to understand and explicate the processes underpinning problems so as to empower those with traditionally less (Ruth Wodak, 2001). Moving away from CL and into CDA requires the addition of what we reviewed above—discourse. Van Dijk explains this difference as the addition of the notion that texts are ideological actions (Dijk, 1985). That is, all language is a social act and can be considered ideological. Fairclough echoes a similar understanding of what differentiates CDA from CL and other forms of linguistic analysis,

“Ideologies are closely linked to language, because using language is the commonest form of social behavior, and the form of social behavior where we rely most on ‘common-sense’ assumptions. But despite its importance for language, the concept ‘ideology’ has very rarely figured in discussions of language and power within linguistics, which is itself symptomatic of their limitations.” (Fairclough, 1989).

Now looking at CDA having reviewed CL and its underpinnings we can better understand why much of the CDA research produced is of the positioned, socio-political nature, specifically filling knowledge gaps in power asymmetries. An aptly named heading in Wodak and Meyer’s book “Methods of Critical Discourse analysis” reinforces the critical aspect of CDA method, “CDA as a difference that makes a difference” (Ruth Wodak, 2001). This illustrates nicely how CDA sees itself as separate from other types of linguistic analysis both theoretically and practically.

Now moving to the field of media discourse analysis; we no-longer have the critical aspect of CL and CDA. Alongside prominent contributors like Foucault, Van Dijk and Fairclough was Stuart Hall. In 1973 Hall produced “Encoding/Decoding” which provided a novel theory and method for conceptualizing and analyzing texts, specifically
mass media texts. Hall’s heavily Foucault informed understanding of discourses bares special emphasis on production and consumption of texts with attention paid to the circularity and discursivity of the production/consumption relationship (Hall, 1973). This elaboration on the idea of discourses would become very important in the field, as since then many have used his encoding/coding method of “sensemaking” to justify unique forms of discourse analysis in the media realm. Schröder is one such researcher who applies a version of Hall’s ideas, what she calls “discourse ethnography”, to media text analysis (Schröder, 2007). She argues that other forms of discourse analysis fail to heed the discursive myriad of possibilities of how a text is produced and consumed. She posits that there is not simply one hidden message available to all that can be uncovered, but rather that the method for analysis must include methodology for the “sense-making process text consumption through Hall’s framework of encoding and decoding (Schröder, 2007). She employs this method of analysis to examine media texts from a British Petroleum advertisement campaign and the effect of analyzing both the “sender” and “receiver”, followed by a “sense-making” process provided novel insight into certain aspects of the media discourse (Schröder, 2007). Jurgenson and Phillips use a similar method, although more heavily informed by Fairclough than Schröder, to analyze media discourses but focus slightly less on the sender/receiver and more on certain linguistic forms and “communicative events” and their effect on discourses (Marianne Jorgensen, 2002). That is not to say that Jorgensen and Phillips disregard the importance of the sender/receiver relationship, merely that it is less central their theoretical framework for inquiry. One such linguistic form Jorgensen and Phillips analyze text for is modality, or the degree to which a speaker/writer commits to a statement, which Jorgensen and Phillips argue has the effect of establishing authority and trust (Marianne Jorgensen, 2002).

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Now that we have reviewed how others have conceived of and applied discourse analysis we can build a framework for inquiry that suits our research aim, which is to ascertain what the discourse surrounding Tesla is and how the discourse is contributing to the success of the company. To do this a framework of inquiry suitable to answering these types of questions must be employed. As we learned above, one of the merits of discourse analysis is that it is open to many forms of interpretation and adaptation. In fact, the field of discourse analysis is defined by heterogeneous research. The obligatory heterogeneity of discourse analysis research is due in part to the admitted positionality of the researcher, sometimes referred to as the interpreter (Ruth Wodak, 2001). Although DA research can be qualitative, quantitative, deductive, and inductive; all discourse analysis research is subjective to positionality and interpretation of the researcher as DA places the researcher within discourse, as discourse represents social text behavior. The researcher is also contributing to and constructing the outcome of the research as a social agent. Another more formal way of stating general DA research is that ontologically speaking, it follows generally the traditions of social constructivism (Ruth Wodak, 2001). Instead of prescribing terms with causal linkages in hopes of describing a social phenomenon, discourse analysis attempts to include the messy, ever-changing, and
organic nature of language as a social behavior. Discourse analysis in this regard is effective at explaining discourses in whole, because it accounts for processes instead of simply states. Hence discourse analysts can ask questions of a larger context through analysis and interpretation of relatively few texts, because they can be conceptualized as nodes informed by the greater discourse. This is an important distinction to be made when considering discourse and CDA in comparison with cognitive psychology, sociolinguistics, other methods for analyzing texts in relation to society (Fairclough, 1989). Although perhaps too often professed and ill-delivered, holism is what discourse analysis strives towards, for it assumes dynamism and discursiveness in all regards. Discourse analysts conceive of and define CDA differently, but there are three central notions that underscore CDA research according to Wodak: power, history, and ideology.

While most of the prominent DA contributors include these tenants, some emphasize different aspects of the three ideas or even focus directly on one over the others. Power is, however, always a central theme of discourse analysis research. This thesis seldom mentions power directly as it is assumes that language as a social act with concrete behavioral consequences must wield power to produce them. One could also perform a media discourse analysis on the power that Elon Musk wields in order to drive branding, sales, and socio-cultural perception towards Tesla Motors. However, this thesis shall rather focus on the power in discourse instead of power behind discourse (Fairclough, 1989). Power in discourse is the actual wielding of power via discourse whereas power behind discourse refers to socio-cultural reasons for the power being there and how it affects the discourse (Fairclough, 1989). This thesis examines not the drivers for the discoursal power Tesla or Musk wield, rather it examines the actual texts being produced by and about them. As reviewed in section [2], text is considered ideological itself and discourses are themselves manifestations of history. Therefore, we shall assume when proceeding with research that “behind” the theoretical framework and methodology are those central tenants of DA analysis; power, history and ideology. For when we analyze and make practical interpretations of text through a DA framework we draw on theory of power, history and ideology manifest in text to make those claims.

As this thesis takes an interview of Musk as its primary material for close analysis, we must first build a conceptual grounding for why examining Musk’s text might allow us to make claims about Tesla and ultimately provide answers to our research questions. Our first research question asks what the discourse is and the second asks how said discourse contributes to Tesla’s success. In order to answer first what and then how we need to ascertain what is being communicated in the discourse. That is, what the discourses are about and what is being conveyed. Accordingly, we will closely analyze an interview of Elon Musk which requires prior establishment of whether or not Musk is important to the discourse, and if so, how important he is. To do this we will borrow loosely from Foucault’s “The Subject and Power” (Foucault, 1982). We will use Foucault’s ideas on what makes objects or people subjects of discourses to establish whether or not Musk is an important subject of Tesla Motors discourse, to be explained at length in the methods section below.
Once we have established that Musk is in fact a relevant subject of the discourse in question, we can progress to a detailed analysis of a singular Musk media text. Following the notion of embedded text and behavior within society, this thesis will borrow Hall’s encoding/decoding theory to provide a conceptual grounding for analysis of texts. The idea of Hall’s encoding/decoding understanding of discourses is that texts are encoded or loaded with discoursal data which can be decoded and made sense of systematically (Hall, 1973). That is, any text is informed, and therefore encoded, simultaneously across space and time by all other texts and societal input. There are of course circularity “problems” with this notion but if we include the notion that a sender and a receiver are both sending and receiving in an ever-evolving iterative process, then we can create a framework for analysis.

The above figure produced by Hall was meant to depict televisual communications, but is relevant for our understanding of the dynamic process of text production, sending, and receiving. Although this thesis will not focus specifically on technical infrastructure it must still be remembered as part of discoursal processes.

**CIRCULAR CAUSALITY**

Mass media is sometimes conceived of as a mirror for societal attitudes; this thesis posits that mass media is much more than a reflection. Rather, that media is simultaneously reflexive, generative, propagative, and affirmative. That is, media outlets have the ability to generate ideology or perception while at the same time being informed by perception and ideology. Consider these two statements: 1) Because Kim
Kardashian is more prominent, more media outlets produce texts about her. 2) Because more media texts are produced concerning Kim Kardashian, she is more popular. Both are obviously true and neither negates the authenticity of the other. This analogy is an oversimplification, but still helpful in illustrating the point that there value in creating a framework of inquiry that includes both production and consumption or sending and receiving. When we say that a text is a discourse we mean that it displays the discursive, iterative, and infinitely informed agglomeration of societal inputs present in the larger context. In a sense, with Hall’s theory we can “plug in” to a node of that socio-historical data by looking closely at a text. Harvey notes that discourses “internalize in some sense everything that occurs at other moments” (Harvey, 1996). If we are careful in analyzing text and creating a system of, albeit positioned, sense-making of the encoded data then we can decode the text and make statements about “messages” embedded in them. Of course these messages will appear differently to all social agents as no social agent occupies the same space. That being said it is still possible to produce meaningful insight into phenomena.

We will use this general understanding of encoding and decoding to make sense of what lies within Tesla media text, but in addition we need a more practical linguistic theory to understand the language within the text. As reviewed briefly in the previous section, Jorgensen and Phillips describe the notion of modality, which this thesis will apply to text analysis. Modality is the extent to which the communicator commits to a statement. Consider these two texts; “Eating vegetables may be good for your health” and “Eating vegetables is good for your health.” This first text admits to a degree of fallibility, whereas the second text posits the statement as incontrovertible truth. We can therefore label the first text as displaying expressive modality, and the second as positive modality. (Marianne Jorgensen, 2002) (Fairclough, 1989). According to Jorgensen and Phillips, the use of positive modality establishes authority and trust (Marianne Jorgensen, 2002). Therefore, we can employ Hall’s encoding/decoding ideas in conjunction with Jorgensen and Phillips’ positive modality analytical ideas to see if text exhibits “messages” of authority and trust once interpreted or “decoded”.

Alongside using the idea of establishing authority via modality, we shall employ some principles of branding. This is done in conjunction with modality analysis in order to provide the groundwork for answering the question of how the discourse might be contributing to Tesla’s success. If we merely analyze a communicative event for authority and trust positioning then we will only be able to make claims about the authority and trustworthiness of the communicator, but if we scrutinize content inherent in a text for signs of marketing and branding then we can make claims about how it contributes to the success of Tesla as a company.

David Aaker, whose principles of branding we will use, is a professor emeritus at University of California at Berkeley, has written and been cited extensively on the subject and is active consulting in the field of branding and marketing. Aaker’s principles represent a basic set of contemporary and generally accepted notions of what denotes successful branding. Branding describes how companies establish and grow positive relationships with customers and generate demand (Aaker, 2014). This thesis takes a
version of the Aaker Model (Aaker, 2014) which outlines principles for successful branding. Six elements of successful branding have been selected according to a lecture given by Aaker in 2014 (Aaker, 2014). These six elements will provide a secondary filter to interpret the Musk interview text with. Alongside the Modality analysis conducted, this examination for language used for branding will provide insight into one aspect of the meaning that the text produces and the discoursal effect it has.

This conceptual framework, which combines discourse analysis and analysis for branding will provide the necessary footing to answer our two research questions. The use of concepts from discourse analysis will provide the necessary framework for interpreting the text effectively and reaching conclusions about what the discourse is. The branding analysis will provide the foundation for inquiry and conclusions about how the discourse is contributing to Tesla’s success. We need to both understand what the discourse is and how it is contributing to Tesla’s success. These theoretical tools in conjunction with one another give us the framework through which to effectively analyze the texts and produce answers to our questions.

3.1 LIMITATIONS
Due to the dynamic and discursive nature of a discourse, it is important to outline what can be determined and not determined when performing a discourse analysis. Ontologically, CDA necessarily takes a more constructivist approach. This is due to that fact that the researcher interprets texts according to her/his referential bias and social and cognitive framework. Fairclough refers to an interpretation of a text as generated from, “what is in the text and what is “in” the interpreter,” (Fairclough, 1989). That is, following methodology for interpretation of texts does not exclude the interpreter’s input towards results. In fact, this is central to the notion of discourse because it exemplifies the nebulous, spontaneous, and informed meanings understood individually by all participants in a discourse. The entire notion of a discourse hinges on socially positioned interaction and interpretation and if we agree that every person or group represents a unique social framework with discrete ideologies then it follows that there is no one discourse that we could define or understand, but rather many versions of discourses. Therefore, as discourses are necessarily positioned and relative, so to must the analysis of them be according to the framework in which the researcher operates. The researcher her/himself is situated in many discourse simultaneously (Scollon & Scollon, 2001). This thesis posits, in line with Fairclough, Foucault and Wodak, and Hall, that in analyzing the media discourse of Tesla Motors with the intent of explaining what that discourse is, will produce only one version of an answer. Hall’s encoding/decoding idea exemplifies this notion as well, as the encoding refers to all socio-historical inputs inherent in a text the decoding as all such socio-historical inputs creating the decoded “message” that the receiver interprets (Hall, 1973). Harvey’s position that, “everything can be understood through texts” is not the position taken by this thesis (Harvey, 1996). CDA attempts a more holistic and malleable approach, acknowledging contextual significance and the iterative, evolving and dialogical nature of communication. Therefore, ontologically CDA is non-positivist and admits absolute subjectivity and relativity. Although this thesis may only able to give a positioned
analysis and explanation of a discourse, this is not to say that what is produced herein is without significance or actionable insight.

Due to the modality analysis and branding analysis examining only one text in a deluge of texts produced pertaining to Tesla they provides us only one version of an answer, albeit an important one owing to the significance of the text. According to a hermeneutic understanding of interpretation we can gain great insight into the discourse at large by conceiving of one text as one node, affected by all others surrounding it, which exhibits and relays greater structural characteristics of overarching discourse. We can peak into and examine the greater discourse through this node. The word frequency analysis, however, provides a broader framework against which we can give context to the single-text analysis but still lacks sample depth for extrapolative value.

4. METHODS
This thesis will utilize 3 methods to answer the research questions outline above. First, to establish that Elon Musk is an important subject of the Tesla discourse, a multi-text word frequency analysis of 15 texts is produced. This is done to show prevalence of Musk as a subject of general media concerning Tesla Motors. Second, a positive modality analysis of our main Musk interview is produced. Third, a branding principles analysis of the same Musk interview is produced. Central to the general approach is that there is no true meaning ‘behind the text’, rather that the researcher seeks to make sense of text by interpreting patterns (Marianne Jorgensen, 2002). This method of looking at many texts to produce a macro context of a discourse via a multi-text word frequency analysis and then looking closely at single case via positive modality analysis and branding principles analysis is meant to establish a fuller understanding. This method is based on a technique outlined by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (Ruth Wodak, 2001). That is, a macro and micro understanding of the discourse to provide more a more holistic understanding. This type of research helps to define a subject better by providing definition through juxtaposition. Wodak and Meyer contend that by including both macro and micro aspects of analysis that a more holistic and dynamic understanding of a discourse can be achieved (Ruth Wodak, 2001).

4.1 SELECTION OF MATERIALS
For the multi-text word frequency analysis fifteen articles were selected to be analyzed for word occurrence frequency. The texts were selected via a google search on April 7th, 2016 “most read articles concerning tesla motors”. The google search filter was set to disregard location and search history and no person’s account was in use. Just in case of local computer caches or history, the search was performed at a public computer. The first 15 texts in the search que were selected. The texts came from differing sources and were transcribed into basic text form. Image, graphs, and photograph captions were included as were the titles and headings to all 15 texts.

The text selected for the positive modality analysis and the branding principles analysis were done so according to media relevance. The TED interview of Elon Musk represents the most consumed text regarding Tesla Motors as could be ascertained by the literature review. As of 14:20 May 10th, 2016 the TED interview of Elon Musk entitled “The mind behind Tesla, SpaceX, SolarCity…” had garnered 3,215,010 views online. The fact that
it is both the most viewed media text concerning both Tesla and Musk affirms Musk as an important subject of the Tesla discourse. The interviewer Chris Anderson is an accomplished former journalist and was appointed curator of TED in 2002 and has developed the platform significantly since then (Richard Saul Wurman, 2016). The Technology, Entertainment, and Design conference (TED) is held in California and is a non-profit organization dedicated to “spreading ideas, usually in form of short, powerful talks” (Richard Saul Wurman, 2016). Among web videos 3 million views places it into the viral category and among the most watched in the TED catalogue. Originally presented in February of 2013 in California to a live audience for a duration of 21 minutes 4 seconds and is categorized by viewer-produced keywords inspiring and fascinating as well as TED-produced keywords, Energy, Entrepreneur, Exploration, Innovation, Solar energy, Space, Technology, and Transportation. It is also important to note that people choose to watch the video and dedicate significantly more time to doing so, in comparison with an advertisement commissioned by a company with which consumers engage passively.

4.2 MULTI-TEXT WORD FREQUENCY ANALYSIS
Once all imagery and extraneous content of the articles, such as advertisements or suggestions for other reading, were removed the 15 texts were analyzed for word frequency. Frequency here denotes how often a word appears in a text. A word appearing more times than another can be said to have a higher frequency. This was done using free online software available on visualthesaurus.com. The Visualthesaurus software simply scans the text input for discrete words and hierarchizes them according to how many times they appear in the text input. Those results were then placed into a table where a hierarchy of frequency from the first most-used word to the 100th most-used word appears in columns alongside the number of times they appear. Four word’s; “Musk”, “Elon”, “his”, and “he” are highlighted red and emboldened for ease of view. This is done to show subject position in the analysis.

4.3 POSITIVE MODALITY ANALYSIS OF SINGLE TEXT
Modality refers to the degree of which a speaker or writer commits to a statement. Consider these two texts; “Eating vegetables may be good for your health” and “Eating vegetables is good for your health.” This first text admits to a degree of fallibility, whereas the second text posits the statement as incontrovertible truth. We can therefore label the first text as displaying expressive modality, and the second as positive modality. (Marianne Jorgensen, 2002) (Fairclough, 1989). For the purposes of this text analysis we shall only be searching for positive modality usage; that is statements where Elon Musk commits wholly to a statement. A transcript of the TED interview is produced below. All text exhibiting positive modality is underscored. Below text identified as displaying positive modality is an explanation of selection and an interpretation of meaning. We analyzed the text for “encoded” secondary meaning, visible to us via positive modality usage. The analysis attempts to “decode” that secondary meaning and in line with our conceptual framework, posits ideas about authority and trust establishment. There are of course “facts” that the vast majority takes as truth or that can be readily verified via calculation and they are highlighted as well. It is unimportant whether or not what Musk says is verifiable, debatable, or simply opinion stated as truth. It is only important for
this research whether or not Musk commits wholly to the statement i.e. positive modality form.

Some content interpretation included in the analysis is outside of strict modality analysis. Furthermore, some interpretations of meaning and messages beyond modality are included in the analysis, but as this is not strictly represented in the conceptual framework it is not used as a basis for answering our research questions in section [7]. It is important to remember that this analysis does not claim subjective truth in its interpretation of the text or the meaning modality with it. The “decoding” or interpretation is through the lens of the researcher and therefore seeks only to produce one version of the “message” embedded in the text.

4.4 PRINCIPLES OF BRANDING ANALYSIS

The same interview analyzed for positive modality is analyzed for principles of branding. As with the positive modality analysis, we attempt to identify principles of branding inherent in the text. To do this text interpreted as containing branding content is marked using a blue (#) according to which of Aaker’s principles it displays. Once again, there is much sociological data “encoded” in texts, and we attempt to scrutinize the text for “messages” of branding. This is of course once again the researcher’s interpretation of the content that yields our results. Therefore, certain portions of the text and their “messages” may be interpreted or “decoded” alternatively from different reference points. The principles are marked within the same TED interview transcript as the positive modality analysis. As the text is interpreted to contain many examples of each principle of branding, a table of results is produced below with one “exemplary” text and an accompanying interpretation. The table also displays the frequency of identified branding principle content and which principle it is attached to.

4.4.1 Brand Equity

The first of Aaker’s principles brand equity represents the long term goal of a product or firm to have three things: Perceived quality, relevance and visibility, and loyalty with high probability of referral. As it is the first principle, text representing this theme is preceded with a (1) and one exemplary text is reproduced below for closer inspection and analysis.

4.4.2 Brand Vision

The second principle brand vision stresses that a brand must stand for something; that it has to mean something and that it should have personality. Aaker cites material stating that companies exhibiting ethical behavior or a “higher purpose” beyond profit maximization actually “make more money” (Aaker, 2014). All text containing this theme are preceded with a (2) and one exemplary sentence is reproduced below for closer inspection and analysis.

4.4.3 Subcategory Competition

A third principle called subcategory competition focusses on the power of creating a subcategory. That is, creating a new category for a product to compete in through innovative designations, positioning, design, or capability. Beyond this the brand must also establish and maintain that it is the best in the new category. Text containing this theme is
preceded with a (3) and one exemplary text is reproduced below for closer inspection and analysis.

4.4.4 Branded Differentiator
The fourth principle called branded differentiator refers to the success firms see when they introduce an aspect of their product or service with its own discrete brand; which when coupled with the larger brand bolsters sales and loyalty. A well-known example is Westin Hotels’ “Heavenly Bed”. When introduced, it produced significant increase in sales and has been a model for other firms for doing the same. Only Westin has the “heavenly bed”. Text exhibiting this principle is preceded with a (4) and an exemplary text is reproduced below for closer inspection and analysis.

4.4.5 Customer Sweet Spot
The “customer sweet spot” refers to connecting a brand to an organization or enterprise with existing ethical legitimacy or trust. Examples include a large hardware retail company in the United States, Home Depot, collaborating with a philanthropic volunteer service Habitat for Humanity, which organizes volunteers to build houses for those who have none. This effectively attaches and transfers the legitimacy and trust correlated to the organization to the brand. All text exemplifying this theme is preceded with a (5) and an exemplary text is reproduced below for closer inspection and analysis.

4.4.6 Silo Coordination
Silo Coordination describes the notion that a brand should be cohesive, that it shouldn’t have brand equity decentralized and spread thinly and weakly between nodes or aspects of a company. A compartmentalized and scattered company brand is not good; all brand resource should be harnessed around one brand. All text representing Silo Coordination is preceded with a (6) and an exemplary text is reproduced below for closer inspection and analysis.

4.4.7 Stories
Stories as a principle of marketing is slightly more difficult to define, but this thesis understands it as such; individual or group strand of narrative that has personal and specific detail which others may relate to. A story can be historical, ongoing, or hypothetical, but it must have details and represent a vivid scenario that others may relate with through empathy or imagination. All text containing story or narrative material, both discrete and ongoing larger strands, are preceded with a (7). An exemplary text is reproduced below for closer inspection and analysis.

5. ANALYSIS/RESULTS

5.1 MULTI-TEXT WORD FREQUENCY ANALYSIS
Produced below is the result of the word frequency analysis of the 15 most viewed texts concerning Tesla Motors as of April 7th 2016. We have chosen to only include the first 100 words as, past this low of occurrence could be reasonably deemed as not important to ascertaining important discoursal subjects. Emboldened and in red are “Musk” at
position 16 with 92 occurrences, “Elon” at position 51 with 35 occurrences, “He” at position 57 with 30 occurrences, and “His” at position 79 with 22 occurrences.
Among the fifteen texts analyzed for word frequency we can see that Elon Musk is central to the text produced about Tesla. As was described in the methods section, the texts were selected via a google search with terms “most read articles concerning Tesla Motors” so it is interesting that there is such emphasis on Elon Musk. Excluding irrelevant parts of speech Musk appears extremely often throughout the articles, following only “Tesla”, “model”, and “car”. All fifteen articles contained at least one image of Musk, and two articles had his name in the title, “More
Bold Talk from Elon Musk, But can Tesla Motors Deliver?” and “2015 Retrospective: The year in Tesla Motors and Elon Musk” (Muller, 2016) (Richard, 2015). Topics of the articles ranged from preorder sales records, “Tesla Motors receives $10bn in Model 3 pre-orders in just two days” to investment news “The biggest fund bets on Tesla Motors” to “Why Tesla Motors can’t sell cars in most of the United states” (Hern, 2016) (D’Allegro, 2015) (Gilbert, 2016). Save for one article from International Business Times warning of “investors turn[ing] bearish on Tesla”, the rhetoric within the majority of text could be interpreted as positive. Some articles expressed affinity for Tesla already in their titles such as this one from Wired Magazine “Meet Tesla’s Model 3, the long-awaited car for the masses” or as the article mentioned above “Biggest mutual fund bets on Tesla Motors” (Davies, 2016) (D’Allegro, 2015). The common thread throughout the texts was the emphasis on Musk’s personal narrative. This excerpt from a CNBC article exemplifies such rhetoric, “Tesla’s charismatic founder and CEO Elon Musk makes news regularly with plans for commercial space travel, subsonic mass transit and thought on artificial intelligence. James Bond would not stand a chance against him, but can he make Tesla stock a good investment again?” (D’Allegro, 2015). Or this text from The Wall Street Journal “The enormous interest in a car that won’t ship for at least 18 months, however, presents a difficult challenge for the Palo Alto, Calif., auto maker. Mr. Musk has just 20 months to ramp up production amid continuing quarterly losses and hefty cash outflows.” (Ramsey, 2016). This text from Ramsey’s article shows conveyance of information about Tesla, but delivered from the narrative position of Musk. It would have been similar to say that the “the company has just 20 months to ramp up production…” but the writers chose Musk for delivery of the information, which shows that Musk truly is synonymous with Tesla. Other articles use similar textual forms to put aspects of Tesla’s business or products in terms of Musk himself such as this text from Extreme Tech “Today there are 215 Tesla stores in the U.S.; Musk says there will be 441 by the end of 2017 as well.” (Lendino, 2016) or this from The Verge, “Musk is "fairly confident" that deliveries will begin by the end of 2017, and "you will not be able to buy a better car for $35,000, even with no options." And it will be one of the safest cars in the world, according to Musk.” (Golson, 2016). These examples show that media text concerning Tesla Motors is principally mediated via Musk’s narrative.

Now that we have looked at some examples of text regarding Musk’s centrality in the discourse we can utilize some of Hall’s encoding/decoding ideas to interpret what is being encoded by the media and decoded by us, the consumer of media. Media outlets are principally driven to capture viewership, so we have to be careful not to place undue significance on sensationalist language. However the media is informed and driven to deliver what people are interested in which allows us to looks at Musk’s position with an eye for societal meaning. It is our interpretation that Musk has built substantial social standing and relevance due to his previous successful endeavors, such as Paypal and SolarCity. His outspoken goals of “making humans multi-planetar[y],” and “speeding the transition to sustainable energy” position him as a visionary and an innovator. In addition, his greatly successful businesses gain him validity and authority in the social realm (Musk, 2013).

Musk’s ideologies are publicly visible via his grandiose business ventures and accompanying media publicity. We can therefore decode or interpret this text, “Mr. Musk has just 20 months to ramp up production amid continuing quarterly losses and hefty cash outflows,” as being related to the public’s familiarity with Musk’s personal narrative (Ramsey, 2016). We can identify three of the tenants of discourse analysis here at work. Coded into this text are clear elements of
history, ideology, and power. Musk’s history of becoming a successful entrepreneur in the historical context of United States places him in a position of societal authority. As a white, South-African male with billions of self-made dollars he is among the powerful elite in the US and the world. Encoded in the text is also the notion that technology or innovation can solve some of earth’s pressing issues. Musk offers a solution through his ideology, an aspect of which is commented upon in this GQ interview, “In a move of extraordinary altruism, then, Musk earlier this year ‘open-sourced’ the company patents, technically allowing all and sundry to readily access Tesla technology with the simple shuffle of a mouse (with caveats),” (French-Constant, 2016). This excerpt refers to Musk’s previously stated goal to make all automobiles electric (French-Constant, 2016). This illustrates the media reflecting back and reinforcing Musk’s own ideology. This is not to say that he can actually provide the solution, merely that there is powerful correlation between societal ideology and Musk’s personal narrative as it appears in the media. The statement about him having “just 20 months to ramp up production…” positions him as a gallantly fighting for his business and possibly even for the environment (Ramsey, 2016). We can interpret this media message as fostering Musk’s societal and ideological relevance by writing about him personally. If the media wrote about a John Doe, who hadn’t achieved what Musk has, we might scratch our heads and ask, who cares if Doe has “just 20 months to ramp up production”? This illustrates how the media makes him important and is also simultaneously informed by his importance. This is a perfect example of discourse circularity and dynamism. Musk being a business leader, innovator, and visionary is both stemming from societal understandings of what those things mean and created by the media portraying him as such. This notion shows how phenomenon like Musk’s presence in the media can be caused discursively and without a clear origin.

The article “More Bold Talk from Elon Musk, But Can Tesla Motors Deliver?” shows another good example of positioning Musk as important socially (Muller, 2016). Muller begins three consecutive paragraphs in her article with three Musk positions; first “Sticking with his confident outlook, Musk seemed unbothered by the…” then “Musk, meanwhile, played down the results in China…” and finally “Instead, he was focused on the big picture,” (Muller, 2016). The article tells a story about Musk, insinuating emotions and painting Musk’s personal involvement in Tesla affairs throughout. We can interpret this as Muller using Musk as a literary form to personalize the development of the company. It may be that this is simply good writing, because it makes the article more accessible and interesting to the reader if personal narrative is present. What is important is simply to notice that Muller’s Forbes article positions Musk as somebody we know, who is multi-faceted and trying to run a business. This message can be interpreted as once again showing Musk’s relevance and authority, but also by telling his story, endearing the reader to him through familiarity.

Another article from the Guardian entitled, “Tesla Motors receives $10bn in Model 3 pre-orders in just two days,” addresses two main topics; the pre-order numbers and how the company plans to respond the demand (Hern, 2016). Both topics discussed in the article are written with regard to Musk. The subheading, “Elon Musk’s company took $276m in deposits for the ‘affordable’ $35,000 car, which is primed for a 2017 launch,” even disregards Tesla’s co-founder JB Straubel stating it as simply “Musk’s company” (Hern, 2016). This kind of languages reflects societal understanding of Musk’s authority through declaring his ownership of the company. We also see “$276m” only two words away from Musk’s name in the above sentence (Hern, 2016). This could be decoded as carrying the message that Musk personally received $276m in deposits,
which positions him as hugely wealthy and therefore powerful. We can see Hern’s interpreting the discourse surrounding Tesla and adding to it by including Musk’s name throughout this very short article regarding Model 3 preorders. Furthermore, Hern includes this statement from musk, “Tesla still has to build all the cars, however. Even when total sales still amounted to under 200,000, Musk tweeted that the company was “definitely going to need to rethink production planning.” (Hern, 2016). This exemplifies Hern interpreting Musk’s tweet as important, possibly because Hern understands Musk to be important to understanding the company. However, it is only important to note that Hern’s reinforcing that Musk’s opinion is relevant to include.

What these textual examples that we looked at have in common is being informed by and informing the Tesla Motors discourse. In building our theoretical framework for inquiry into a discourse we reviewed the circularity and dynamic nature of media coding and decoding, which the above examples show in action. These media texts exhibit signs of being informed by the societal understanding that Musk is powerful, successful, and of interest. In turn these texts are substantiating, propagating, and even creating those notions of the company and Musk by encoding text with messages of such.

5.2 POSITIVE MODALITY AND BRANDING PRINCIPLES ANALYSIS

Transcript 1: Below is a transcript of the TED interview “Elon Musk: The mind behind Tesla, SpaceX, SolarCity…” (TED, 2013) Accompanying and within the transcript are notations for the branding principles analysis and positive modality analysis, as well as some interpretations of text identified as showing positive modality. Blue numbers correlate to Aaker’s principles as outlined above. Underscoring denotes text identified as showing positive modality and * denotes accompanying interpretation.

00:11 Chris Anderson (7) Elon, what kind of crazy dream would persuade you to think of trying to take on the auto industry and build an all-electric car?

00:20 Elon Musk: (7) Well, it goes back to when I was in university. (7) I thought about, what are the problems that are most likely to affect the future of the world or the future of humanity? (2)(6) I think it’s extremely important that we have sustainable transport and sustainable energy production. (2)(6)(7) That sort of overall sustainable energy problem is the biggest problem that we have to solve this century, independent of environmental concerns. In fact, even if producing CO2 was good for the environment, given that we’re going to run out of hydrocarbons, we need to find some sustainable means of operating.

*Speaking on the most grandiose of scales, Musk here commits fully to the idea that sustainable energy is the biggest problem we as humans have to solve this century. Musk then bolsters the position with a secondary “expert” statement about CO2 and hydrocarbons, further establishing his authority.

00:51 CA: Most of American electricity comes from burning fossil fuels. (2)(3) How can an electric car that plugs into that electricity help?

01:01 EM: Right. There's two elements to that answer. (3) One is that, even if you take the same source fuel and produce power at the power plant and use it to charge electric cars, you're still better off. So if you take, say, natural gas, which is the most prevalent hydrocarbon source...
fuel, if you burn that in a modern General Electric natural gas turbine, you'll get about 60 percent efficiency. (3) If you put that same fuel in an internal combustion engine car, you get about 20 percent efficiency. And the reason is, in the stationary power plant, you can afford to have something that weighs a lot more, is voluminous, and you can take the waste heat and run a steam turbine and generate a secondary power source. (3) So in effect, even after you've taken transmission loss into account and everything, even using the same source fuel, you're at least twice as better off charging an electric car, then burning it at the power plant.

*Musk answers the question unflinchingly. He doesn’t say “I think” or “Hmm, there might be”. He delves in confidently with a two part answer as to why EVs “help”. He uses somewhat scientific terms, percentages, and generally high-level diction to make claims that are heavily debated and much less simple than this answer eludes. The final sentence even addresses the audience/viewer directly, “even after you’ve taken…” which effectively positions the positively modal statement towards the viewer directly, thus increasing authority and trust-building effects if the receiver accepts it.

01:48 CA: That scale delivers efficiency.

01:50 EM: Yes, it does. And then the other point is, we have to have sustainable means of power generation anyway, electricity generation. (2)(3)(7) So given that we have to solve sustainable electricity generation, then it makes sense for us to have electric cars as the mode of transport.

*Again, Musk commits immediately and confidently to an answer. He delivers answers to why scale delivers efficiency, fully confident and committed in his delivery. His belief in his own knowledge is also evident in the level he commits to his answers. Whether or not they are true, false, or otherwise this type of seemingly-genuine belief in statements is a powerful delivery agent for authority and trust building.

02:06 CA: (1) So we've got some video here of the Tesla being assembled, which, if we could play that first video -- So what is innovative about this process in this vehicle?

02:18 EM: Sure. (1)(2)(3)(7) So, in order to accelerate the advent of electric transport, and I should say that I think, actually, all modes of transport will become fully electric with the ironic exception of rockets. There's just no way around Newton's third law. The question is how do you accelerate the advent of electric transport? (1) And in order to do that for cars, you have to come up with a really energy efficient car, so that means making it incredibly light, and so what you're seeing here is the only all-aluminum body and chassis car made in North America. (1)(6) In fact, we applied a lot of rocket design techniques to make the car light despite having a very large battery pack. (1)(3) And then it also has the lowest drag coefficient of any car of its size. (1)(2) So as a result, the energy usage is very low, and it has the (4) most advanced battery pack, and that's what gives it the range that's competitive, so you can actually have on the order of a 250-mile range.
*After being asked about innovation, Musk responds again showing full commitment to his statements. He includes the last name and natural law of arguably the most famous scientist of all time, of which most people are acquainted with. This has the effect of adding validity to his statements both preceding and following his mention of a scientist who himself contains authority. He then poses a question to himself and answers with a positively modal statement. He states imperatively that to “come up with a really energy efficient car…means making it incredibly light,” There may be alternative ways of creating “incredibly efficient cars” but he poses it as if there is only his method. Musk then describes the Tesla as having technical prowess with regard to drag, using positive modality and technical vernacular. Again, positive modality and choice diction produce an authoritative voice. Also, Musk’s statement about a 250 mile range is debatable, but is not presented as such. It is important to note that CA does not question or defy any of Musk’s positions; he acts more like a student asking questions to learn from one who possesses the knowledge to answer.

03:12 CA: I mean, those battery packs are incredibly heavy, but you think the math can still work out intelligently -- by combining light body, heavy battery, you can still gain spectacular efficiency.

03:23 EM: Exactly. The rest of the car has to be very light to offset the mass of the pack, and then you have to have a low drag coefficient so that you have good highway range. (1) And in fact, customers of the Model S are sort of competing with each other to try to get the highest possible range. (7) I think somebody recently got 420 miles out of a single charge.

*Beginning the sentence with “in fact” demonstrates the highest level of commitment to a piece of information, as it positions the communicator as merely delivering something that is hard and true. Whether or not one is a positivist or a relativist, this commitment to a statement has the effect, as do all positively modal expressions, of corraling all of the trust or perceived authority one has in the speaker and investing it into the statement at hand. When Musk commits wholly to statements like this he asks for the trust of the receiver to take what he says as truth.

03:41 CA: (7) Bruno Bowden, who's here, did that, broke the world record. EM: Congratulations.

03:47 CA: (7) That was the good news. (7) The bad news was that to do it, he had to drive at 18 miles an hour constant speed and got pulled over by the cops. (Laughter)

03:55 EM: (1) I mean, you can certainly drive -- if you drive it 65 miles an hour, under normal conditions, 250 miles is a reasonable number.

*When Musk here states that “you can certainly drive” he is vouching for the technical capability of the car. He makes a positive statement that the receiver may or may not know to be true or untrue, but once uttered is most likely to be heeded as fact instead of checked for validity.
Let's show that second video showing the Tesla in action on ice. Not at all a dig at The New York Times, this, by the way. What is the most surprising thing about the experience of driving the car?

In creating an electric car, the responsiveness of the car is really incredible. So we wanted really to have people feel as though they've almost got to mind meld with the car, so you just feel like you and the car are kind of one, and as you corner and accelerate, it just happens, like the car has ESP. You can do that with an electric car because of its responsiveness. You can't do that with a gasoline car.

*Here Musk responds using positive modality to his own query about what is possible with an EV. He makes a debatable claim about responsiveness and states absolutely that it is not possible with an ICE. The refutation of ICE capability is so stark here, that the receiver is forced to disagree directly with Musk or heed Musk’s authority.*

I mean, this is a beautiful but expensive car. Is there a road map where this becomes a mass-market vehicle?

The goal of Tesla has always been to have a sort of three-step process, where version one was an expensive car at low volume, version two is medium priced and medium volume, and then version three would be low price, high volume. So we're at step two at this point. So we had a $100,000 sports car, which was the Roadster. Then we've got the Model S, which starts at around 50,000 dollars. And our third generation car, which should hopefully be out in about three or four years will be a $30,000 car. But whenever you've got really new technology, it generally takes about three major versions in order to make it a compelling mass-market product. And so I think we're making progress in that direction, and I feel confident that we'll get there.

I mean, right now, if you've got a short commute, you can drive, you can get back, you can charge it at home. There isn't a huge nationwide network of charging stations now that are fast. Do you see that coming, really, truly, or just on a few key routes?

There actually are far more charging stations than people realize, and at Tesla we developed something called Supercharging technology, and we're offering that if you buy a Model S for free, forever. And so this is something that maybe a lot of people don't realize. We actually have California and Nevada covered, and we've got the Eastern seaboard from Boston to D.C. covered. By the end of this year, you'll be able to drive from L.A. to New York just using the Supercharger network, which charges at five times the rate of anything else. And the key thing is to have a ratio of drive to stop, to stop time, of about six or seven. So if you drive for three hours, you want to stop for 20 or 30 minutes, because that's normally what people will stop for. So if you start a trip at 9 a.m., by noon you want to stop to have a bite to eat, hit the restroom, coffee, and keep going.
*Musk is making statements relative to the range of the car and the convenience of the charging station locations. He makes positivistic statements about the network and availability which is important, due the low probability that a viewer would check his statements for validity. He also makes truth claims about what people want went driving long distances and about what is “key” in doing such long-distance travelling. This positive modality may even have the effect of creating the reality that he posits.

06:43 CA: So your proposition to consumers is, for the full charge, it could take an hour. So it's common -- don't expect to be out of here in 10 minutes. (2)(7) Wait for an hour, but the good news is, you're helping save the planet, and by the way, the electricity is free. You don't pay anything.

06:56 EM: Actually, what we're expecting is for people to stop for about 20 to 30 minutes, not for an hour. It's actually better to drive for about maybe 160, 170 miles and then stop for half an hour and then keep going. That's the natural cadence of a trip. CA: All right. (5)(6) So this is only one string to your energy bow. (5)(6) You've been working on this solar company SolarCity. What's unusual about that?

*Musk places having sustainable electricity production and consumption as an imperative with no space for debate. He goes on to talk about the sun as a giant fusion generator, which true or not, is demonstrating positive modality and therefore authority and trust building. Musk speaks about some large scale, fundamental scientific ideas always using positive modality. While most of these ideas are generally understood to be true, he is still demonstrating knowledge and building authority and trust by demonstrating it confidently via positive modality.

07:26 EM: (2)(5)(7) Well, as I mentioned earlier, we have to have sustainable electricity production as well as consumption, so I'm quite confident that the primary means of power generation will be solar. I mean, it's really indirect fusion, is what it is. We've got this giant fusion generator in the sky called the sun, and we just need to tap a little bit of that energy for purposes of human civilization. What most people know but don't realize they know is that the world is almost entirely solar-powered already. (7) If the sun wasn't there, we'd be a frozen ice ball at three degrees Kelvin, and the sun powers the entire system of precipitation. The whole ecosystem is solar-powered.

08:08 CA: (6) But in a gallon of gasoline, you have, effectively, thousands of years of sun power compressed into a small space, so it's hard to make the numbers work right now on solar, and to remotely compete with, for example, natural gas, fracked natural gas. How are you going to build a business here?
Well actually, I'm confident that solar will beat everything, hands down, including natural gas.

It must, actually. If it doesn't, we're in deep trouble.

*Musk here demonstrates unwavering commitment to the idea that solar must “beat everything”. He again commits absolutely to this idea when stating that “we’re in deep trouble” if solar doesn’t beat everything. He could have said “If it doesn’t, I think we’re going to be in deep trouble.”

But you're not selling solar panels to consumers. What are you doing? EM: No, we actually are. You can buy a solar system or you can lease a solar system. Most people choose to lease. And the thing about solar power is that it doesn't have any feed stock or operational costs, so once it's installed, it's just there. It works for decades. It'll work for probably a century. So therefore, the key thing to do is to get the cost of that initial installation low, and then get the cost of the financing low, because that interest -- those are the two factors that drive the cost of solar. And we've made huge progress in that direction, and that's why I'm confident we'll actually beat natural gas.

So your current proposition to consumers is, don't pay so much up front.

Zero. CA: Pay zero up front. We will install panels on your roof. You will then pay, how long is a typical lease?

Typical leases are 20 years, but the value proposition is, as you're sort of alluding to, quite straightforward. It's no money down, and your utility bill decreases. Pretty good deal.

So that seems like a win for the consumer. No risk, you'll pay less than you're paying now. For you, the dream here then is that -- I mean, who owns the electricity from those panels for the longer term? I mean, how do you, the company, benefit?

Well, essentially, SolarCity raises a chunk of capital from say, a company or a bank. Google is one of our big partners here. And they have an expected return on that capital. With that capital, SolarCity purchases and installs the panel on the roof and then charges the homeowner or business owner a monthly lease payment, which is less than the utility bill.

*We do not and cannot know, due to case specificity, if this statement is true and yet Musk presents it absolutely as true.

But you yourself get a long-term commercial benefit from that power. You're kind of building a new type of distributed utility.
10:38 EM: Exactly. What it amounts to is a giant distributed utility. (5) I think it's a good thing, because utilities have been this monopoly, and people haven't had any choice. (7) So effectively it's the first time there's been competition for this monopoly, because the utilities have been the only ones that owned those power distribution lines, but now it's on your roof. So I think it's actually very empowering for homeowners and businesses.

*Musk makes many positivistic claims about utilities history and competition, all of which could be debated but are nonetheless presented as simple fact.

11:05 CA: (7) And you really picture a future where a majority of power in America, within a decade or two, or within your lifetime, it goes solar?

11:15 EM: (7) I'm extremely confident that solar will be at least a plurality of power, and most likely a majority, and I predict it will be a plurality in less than 20 years. (7) I made that bet with someone — CA: Definition of plurality is?

11:31 EM: (7) More from solar than any other source.

11:33 CA: Ah. Who did you make the bet with?

11:37 EM: With a friend who will remain nameless.

11:40 CA: Just between us. (Laughter)

11:44 EM: (7) I made that bet, I think, two or three years ago, so in roughly 18 years, I think we'll see more power from solar than any other source.

11:53 CA: (7) All right, so let's go back to another bet that you made with yourself, I guess, a kind of crazy bet. (6) You'd made some money from the sale of PayPal. (6) You decided to build a space company. Why on Earth would someone do that? (Laughter)

12:08 EM: I got that question a lot, that's true. (7) People would say, "Did you hear the joke about the guy who made a small fortune in the space industry?" Obviously, "He started with a large one," is the punchline. (7) And so I tell people, well, I was trying to figure out the fastest way to turn a large fortune into a small one. (7) And they'd look at me, like, "Is he serious?"

12:28 CA: And strangely, you were. So what happened?

12:33 EM: (7) It was a close call. Things almost didn't work out. (7) We came very close to failure, but we managed to get through that point in 2008. (5)(7) The goal of SpaceX is to try to advance rocket technology, and in particular to try to crack a problem that I think is vital for humanity to become a space-faring civilization, which is to have a rapidly and fully reusable rocket.
12:58 CA: (7) Would humanity become a space-faring civilization? So that was a dream of yours, in a way, from a young age? You've dreamed of Mars and beyond?

13:08 EM: (7) I did build rockets when I was a kid, but I didn't think I'd be involved in this. It was really more from the standpoint of what are the things that need to happen in order for the future to be an exciting and inspiring one? (7) And I really think there's a fundamental difference, if you sort of look into the future, between a humanity that is a space-faring civilization, that's out there exploring the stars, on multiple planets, and I think that's really exciting, compared with one where we are forever confined to Earth until some eventual extinction event.

13:40 CA: So you've somehow slashed the cost of building a rocket by 75 percent, depending on how you calculate it. How on Earth have you done that? NASA has been doing this for years. How have you done this?

13:51 EM: Well, we've made significant advances in the technology of the airframe, the engines, the electronics and the launch operation. (7) There's a long list of innovations that we've come up with there that are a little difficult to communicate in this talk, but –

*Here Musk essentially asks the viewer to trust him when stating plainly that “There’s a long list of innovations that we’ve come up with” without providing any supporting evidence. This demands trust and therefore builds trust, and builds authority.

14:10 CA: Not least because you could still get copied, right? You haven't patented this stuff. It's really interesting to me.

14:16 EM: (7) No, we don't patent. CA: You didn't patent because you think it's more dangerous to patent than not to patent.

14:21 EM: (1)(7) Since our primary competitors are national governments, the enforceability of patents is questionable. (Laughter) (Applause)

*He commits to this as truth, showing positive modality, but we as viewers simply have to take his humorous claim as an authoritative truth claim.

14:28 CA: That's really, really interesting. But the big innovation is still ahead, and you're working on it now. Tell us about this.

14:37 EM: (7) Right, so the big innovation—

14:38 CA: In fact, let's roll that video and you can talk us through it, what's happening here.
EM: Absolutely. So the thing about rockets is that they're all expendable. All rockets that fly today are fully expendable. The space shuttle was an attempt at a reusable rocket, but even the main tank of the space shuttle was thrown away every time, and the parts that were reusable took a 10,000-person group nine months to refurbish for flight. So the space shuttle ended up costing a billion dollars per flight. Obviously that doesn't work very well for—

*Positive modality exhibited throughout this paragraph on subjects difficult for lay-people to verify or falsify. How many people it took to refurbish, which parts are thrown away, and how much money the space shuttle costed are facts privy only to those working on the projects. Musk therefore easily assumes the position of authority and builds that authority with exhibited knowledge.*

15:08 CA: What just happened there? We just saw something land?

15:12 EM: That's right. So it's important that the rocket stages be able to come back, to be able to return to the launch site and be ready to launch again within a matter of hours.

15:22 CA: Wow. Reusable rockets. EM: Yes. (Applause) And so what a lot of people don't realize is, the cost of the fuel, of the propellant, is very small. It's much like on a jet. So the cost of the propellant is about .3 percent of the cost of the rocket. So it's possible to achieve, let's say, roughly 100-fold improvement in the cost of spaceflight if you can effectively reuse the rocket. That's why it's so important. Every mode of transport that we use, whether it's planes, trains, automobiles, bikes, horses, is reusable, but not rockets. (7) So we must solve this problem in order to become a space-faring civilization.

*Musk makes a claim about “what a lot of people don’t realize…” when he could say “I think, what a lot of people don’t realize”. This type of positive modality is easily overlooked, but still has the same effect of authority placement. Musk then returns to technical capabilities of space shuttles and rockets, which the average viewer could never actually refute. He then broadens his positivistic claims to relatable subjects like”…planes, trains, automobiles, bikes, horses…” following with a claim that we “must solve this problem”. Note that he doesn’t say “should solve the problem” or “I think it therefore important that we solve this problem”. *

16:00 CA: You asked me the question earlier of how popular traveling on cruises would be if you had to burn your ships afterward. EM: Certain cruises are apparently highly problematic.

16:12 CA: Definitely more expensive. So that's potentially absolutely disruptive technology, and, (7) I guess, paves the way for your dream to actually take, at some point, to take humanity to Mars at scale. You'd like to see a colony on Mars.

16:28 EM: Yeah, exactly. (5)(7) SpaceX, or some combination of companies and governments, needs to make progress in the direction of making life multi-planetary, of establishing a base on another planet, on Mars -- being the only realistic option -- and then building that base up until we're a true multi-planet species.
Musk here again uses positive modality to describe something as imperative, “…companies and governments, needs to make progress…” instead of stating it as his opinion or will.

16:48 CA: So progress on this "let's make it reusable," how is that going? That was just a simulation video we saw. How's it going?

16:56 EM: We're actually, we've been making some good progress recently with something we call the Grasshopper Test Project, where we're testing the vertical landing portion of the flight, the sort of terminal portion which is quite tricky. And we've had some good tests.

17:12 CA: Can we see that? EM: Yeah. So that's just to give a sense of scale. (7) We dressed a cowboy as Johnny Cash and bolted the mannequin to the rocket. (Laughter)

17:21 CA: (1) All right, let's see that video then, because this is actually amazing when you think about it. You've never seen this before. A rocket blasting off and then --

17:30 EM: Yeah, so that rocket is about the size of a 12-story building. (Rocket launch) So now it's hovering at about 40 meters, and it's constantly adjusting the angle, the pitch and yaw of the main engine, and maintaining roll with cold gas thrusters.

18:05 CA: How cool is that? (Applause) Elon, how have you done this? (5)(6) These projects are so -- Paypal, SolarCity, Tesla, SpaceX, they're so spectacularly different, they're such ambitious projects at scale. (6) How on Earth has one person been able to innovate in this way? What is it about you?

18:33 EM: I don't know, actually. I don't have a good answer for you. (7) I work a lot. I mean, a lot.

18:44 CA: Well, I have a theory. EM: Okay. All right.

18:46 CA: My theory is that you have an ability to think at a system level of design that pulls together design, technology and business, so if TED was TBD, design, technology and business, into one package, synthesize it in a way that very few people can and -- and this is the critical thing -- feel so damn confident in that clicked-together package that you take crazy risks. You bet your fortune on it, and you seem to have done that multiple times. I mean, almost no one can do that. Is that -- could we have some of that secret sauce? Can we put it into our education system? Can someone learn from you? It is truly amazing what you've done.

19:30 EM: Well, thanks. Thank you. Well, I do think there's a good framework for thinking. It is physics. You know, the sort of first principles reasoning. Generally I think there are -- what I mean by that is, boil things down to their fundamental truths and reason up from there, as opposed to reasoning by analogy. Through most of our life, we get through life by reasoning by analogy, which essentially means copying what other people do with slight variations. And you
have to do that. Otherwise, mentally, you wouldn’t be able to get through the day. But when you want to do something new, you have to apply the physics approach. Physics is really figuring out how to discover new things that are counterintuitive, like quantum mechanics. It’s really counterintuitive. So I think that’s an important thing to do, and then also to really pay attention to negative feedback, and solicit it, particularly from friends. This may sound like simple advice, but hardly anyone does that, and it’s incredibly helpful.

*CA positions Musk very well to make knowledge claims about such a question as how to be generally successful in endeavors. Musk responds appropriately by making claims about subjects as personal as how humans “get through the day” and what to do if “when you want to do something…” After an interview filled with differing forms of positive modality Musk concludes by offering general advice in form of fact-based truth. Musk does begin his answer with “I do think there’s a good framework for thinking,” which admits to subjectivity, but soon moves back in to positivistic speech.

20:35 CA: Boys and girls watching, study physics. Learn from this man. Elon Musk, I wish we had all day, but thank you so much for coming to TED.

20:43 EM: Thank you. CA: That was awesome. That was really, really cool. Look at that. (Applause)

20:49 Just take a bow. That was fantastic. Thank you so much

5.3 PRINCIPLES OF BRANDING ANALYSIS

Table 2: Seven of Aaker’s branding principles, their frequency of appearance in the TED transcript above, and exemplary text, and an interpretation for each are produced herein.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Example Text</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Brand Equity</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>“So as a result, the energy usage is very low, and it has the most advanced battery pack, and that’s what gives it the range that’s competitive, so you can actually have on the order of a 250-mile range.”</td>
<td>Building on the previous two sentences which explained the car as having “rocket design techniques” and being “incredibly light”, Musk here is assuring the technical capability of the car. Using positive modal form like “most advanced battery pack”, he uses his position of expertise and authority to describe aspects of the quality of the car. Connecting the vehicle design to rocket design captures latent</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) Brand Vision</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“Wait for an hour, but the good news is, you’re helping save the planet, and by the way, the electricity is free.”</td>
<td>CA uses extremely stark and positivistic language to claim by association that driving Tesla car at any time is “helping to save the planet”. This places a strong ethical valuation of Tesla car ownership and firmly states the brand as having a higher purpose beyond profit maximization.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(3) Subcategory Competition</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“So given that we have to solve sustainable electricity generation, then it makes sense for us to have electric cars as the mode of transport”</td>
<td>After having stated why electric cars are more sustainable than combustion engine counterparts Musk portrays the new segment of electric cars as imperative. Not only is he creating a subcategory, electric cars, as a portion of the automobile category, he states that this new category “makes sense” as the dominant category. He also uses positive modality in saying that we “have to solve sustainable electricity generation” which places an ethical imperative on his subcategory creation, which endears viewers to the brand’s seemingly noble cause.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(4) Branded Differentiator</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“There are actually far more charging stations that people realize, and at Tesla we developed something called a Supercharging technology, and we’re offering that if you buy a Model S for free, forever.”</td>
<td>The prefix “super” presupposing Tesla’s fast-charge technology has obvious positive-association value. It functions as a talking and rationalization point both socially and internally for purchasing the vehicle and although fast-charging is not limited to Tesla vehicles,</td>
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“supercharging” is attached to Tesla both formally and informally. This differentiates Tesla from other EVs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(5) Customer Sweet Spot</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>“You’ve been working on this solar company SolarCity.”</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Although SolarCity is not a traditional non-profit organization with a specific ethical mandate for social or environmental betterment the solar industry does carry with it connections to environmentalism, conservation, and social responsibility. Choosing solar over traditional energy suppliers carries with it a socio-economic and political repercussions and could be said to be a form of environmentalism or at a very minimum an expression of ideology. The fact that Tesla is referred to in conjunction with a solar cell company attaches even more environmental legitimacy and trust to the Tesla brand, as exemplified in the previous sentence, “This is only one string to your energy bow.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>(6) Silo Coordination</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“These projects are so – Paypal, SolarCity, Tesla, SpaceX, they’re so spectacularly different, they’re such ambitious projects at scale. How on Earth has one person been able to innovate in this way?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Stories</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>“I did build rockets when I was a kid, but I didn't think I'd be involved in this. It was really more from the standpoint of what are the things that need to happen in order for the future to be an exciting and inspiring one? And I really think there's a fundamental difference, if you sort of look into the future, between a humanity that is a space-faring civilization, that's out there exploring the stars, on multiple planets, and I think that's really exciting, compared with one where we are forever confined to Earth until some eventual extinction event.”</td>
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<td>---</td>
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<td>Here we are delving into the personal life of young Musk building rockets and so forth. He gives a detail about his youth, the rockets, and then transitions his personal story into a broad conceptual narrative about the future he is trying to build. The viewer is brought into his actual past experiences and then placed into a hypothetical future scenario all the while through Musk’s personal narrative voice. Musk even directly addresses the viewer, “…if you sort of look into the future, between humanity…” which feels personal and calls for a certain level of engagement from the viewer.</td>
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</table>
Table 2 above reproduces only texts interpreted as clearly displaying principles of branding, but as is evident in Transcript 1, there are many portions of text interpreted as carrying messages of branding. This is crucial to understanding how the discourse surrounding the company produces tangible demand, recently to the tune of more than $10bn pledged upon delivery of over 400,000 Tesla Model 3s (Hern, 2016). With the word frequency analysis and modality analysis suggesting Musk as a principle subject of the discourse, it is important to then establish how what he says creates interest and demand in the products and services Tesla provides. First of all, the context of the TED interview is important to acknowledge with regard to its discoursal effect. The TED interview context provides in itself a message that we can interpret as such; that Musk is somebody worth interviewing. TED, after all, has as an institution the goal to spread “ideas worth spreading” (Richard Saul Wurman, 2016). Many TED speakers and interviewees are among the brightest, most charismatic, and successful people in the world. Musk therefore joins the ranks of Nobel laureates, government leaders, and top CEOs in TED’s video archive. We can decode the context as placing normative values of importance on those being interviewed at TED. This is important to remember, as all Musk interviews may not be similar or have comparable discoursal effect. An interview lasting over 20mins and viewed by more than three million people may be considered extraordinary when it comes to media concerning Tesla or Musk. Whether or not this Musk interview is similar to others in which he appears is outside the bounds of this research, but it remains meaningful to see how branding is undertaken throughout this text. We cannot say that because Musk engages in branding techniques as understood by Aaker, that he does so in other contexts (Aaker, 2014). We can however interpret what he says and create an understanding of how this “node” of the discourse shows what societal understanding we have of Musk and the Tesla. As mentioned above, this being a TED interview shows that societally, at least the curator of TED who happens to be the interviewer Chris Anderson, thinks what Musk has to say is “worth spreading”. Accordingly, during the interview Musk is prompted with statements and questions like these, “These projects are so – Paypal, SolarCity, Tesla, SpaceX, they’re so spectacularly different, they’re such ambitious projects at scale. How on Earth has one person been able to innovate in this way?” (Musk, 2013). Embedded in this language appears to be a message of reverence for Musk and what he has achieved or attempting to achieve. We can interpret this as having the effect of bolstering all brands attached to Musk as being worthy of respect as well. We can interpret the “message” as meaning what Musk says and does is worth listening to and understanding. Therefore, stating that the Tesla has the “lowest drag coefficient of any car ever” has definite branding value when being delivered in the same interview as questions pertaining to Musk’s innovation or success. The portion about the drag coefficient shows clear brand equity building, as Musk is describing the technical prowess of the product. The part of the interview when Musk describes his life-long excitement about a space-faring civilization represents both storytelling and brand vision. There are many examples in the text where branding value can be interpreted. There is a consistent theme throughout the interview; Musk’s story. He is asked to describe how he came up with ideas and why he made the choices he did as well as what he wants, but embedded within the answers are examples of all seven of Aaker’s principles of branding.

Within this TED interview, over 90 sentences were interpreted as having branding value, nearly half of which were interpreted as being stories or narrative based. As this text is an interview, it is therefore expected to be more personal than an article written about Tesla or Musk. Musk is asked questions about his childhood rocket-building, the ideologies on which he has built his
companies, and how he became the man he is today. This is hugely important both for discourse analysis and branding analysis, for it offers an opportunity for viewers to see Musk communicating his personal ideologies and history, as well as how he has managed to become relevant and powerful. Whether or not he is correct or not in describing his successes, or whether his companies actually fall in line with his expressed ideology, Musk is able to communicate with the viewers here directly. He tells his story and in doing so we can see how coded in his recounting of youth and hardship with the company, that there is valuable branding occurring. Mixed throughout his personal stories are Tesla vehicles specifications and commitments of product quality, as well as mention of his other companies which all contribute valuable branding.

6. DISCUSSION

We conducted this thesis seeking to better understand a startup company with explicit goals to accelerate humanity’s transition to sustainable transportation and energy use. More specifically we sought to understand the media discourse surrounding Tesla Motors by asking two questions; what is the media discourse surrounding Tesla Motors and how has that media discourse contributed to the success of the company. We asked these questions with the intent of better understanding how a small company with sustainability as a focus can compete and succeed in entering an entrenched market. In terms of entrenchment and barriers to entry, as well as power norms and financial backing, the automobile market is about as difficult to enter as any.

To explain what the discourse is, we used a multi-text word frequency analysis. Following our conceptual framework and our understanding of subject positioning, we were able to establish what some of the subjects of the discourse are. If we look at the results of the word frequency analysis in Table 1, we can see that much of the text written or spoken about Tesla Motors centers around the vehicles themselves. Excluding irrelevant parts of speech, “car”, “Tesla” and “Model” were the most common subjects discussed. Following those three unsurprising subjects of the discourse was “Musk” as the fourth most frequent topic of discussion, with his first name “Elon” appearing only a short way down the hierarchy of frequency. This coupled with the frequency of “his” and “he” appearing high on the list as well, shows us that when we encounter Tesla Motors in online media we are also encountering Elon Musk as one of the most important subjects of the discourse. As discussed above, much of the textual content is conveyed through Musk’s personal narrative, either through direct citation or paraphrasing what Musk has stated. Informative portions of text about Tesla that need not mention Musk often do, which shows his centrality to the media understanding of the Tesla Motors discourse. Often, the company is referred to via Musk’s personal narrative or rhetoric. The analysis showed that the media understanding of Tesla included Musk’s personal narrative as its mediation device. We interpreted the manner in which Musk appeared in the media texts as being both created by social understanding of Musk and media simultaneously and reflexively. We can therefore say that the discourse surrounding Tesla Motors is both about Tesla’s vehicles and Elon Musk himself. The discourse has Musk as one of its central subjects, and therefore is defined by Musk and media perception of him. This is important because it positions a person as central to the notion of the company. The results of our word frequency analysis show that when one reads or interacts with Tesla Motors in the media, one is in fact reading and interacting with both societal and media understanding of Elon Musk. It follows then, that what Musk says is of great importance to public perception of Tesla.
We conducted a positive modality analysis and a branding principles analysis on an interview text which has been viewed well over 3 million times and was therefore deemed as an important contribution to the wider discourse of Tesla Motors. We also posited that the institutional setting of the TED interview carried coded messages of relevance, authority, and trust. These were described as very useful attributes for a context in which to build a brand. In accordance with our conceptual framework we established that the use of positive modality instills both authority and trust in the speaker or writer of the text. The interview, presented at the well-respected TED conference, was steeped in positive modality and the interviewer often incited and supported Musk in his positioning himself as an authority. As appears in Transcript 1, we analyzed Musk’s usage of positive modality and interpreted the possible meaning behind some of the claims he made. Musk, as a Caucasian male successful billionaire entrepreneur, already carries certain societal authority. We showed that during the interview he bolsters his position as an authority figure.

After analyzing the interview and finding significant amounts of authority and trust building in the Musk image, we then analyzed the text for principles of branding. We interpreted the text as containing content pertaining to all seven principles of branding, according to our Aaker framework. Much of the text was interpreted to be showing signs of branding and positive modality simultaneously. For example, when Musk says during the interview “So as a result, the energy usage is very low, and it has the most advanced battery pack, and that’s what gives it the range that’s competitive, so you can actually have on the order of a 250-mile range,” he is making claims about Tesla battery pack quality and capability. He states that the battery pack is “the most advanced” which displays positive modality. This is important for Tesla brand image, because if one is to advertise the vehicle in this manner, the person delivering the message has to possess authority for it to have effect. There are many other examples within the interview text where Musk recounts the technical capabilities of his product, Tesla or SpaceX, and therefore builds brand image.

With the results of the word frequency analysis showing Musk as the 16th most used word across fifteen media texts, second only to “car” if we remove irrelevant parts of speech, it is clear that Elon Musk has a central position in the discourse surrounding Tesla Motor Corp.. The results of the positive modality and branding principles analysis of the individual text show that within a non-sponsored event considered as educational there are powerful currents of branding and positionality in favor of Tesla. It appears that Musk is the brand identity of Tesla.

In effect, Tesla is managing to generate demand without the traditional contrived marketing campaigns. Whether or not this is fully deliberate or not is outside the limits of this thesis, but is interesting to consider. For a company CEO to be invited to TED with the opportunity to speak about his personal life in the same breath as his company’s products is a marketer’s paradise. Not only is it exposure to the brand face, Elon Musk, but is exposure where the consumers, in this case physical and virtual audiences, are seeking to learn something or be inspired and not be advertised to. Pair this with Musk’s history of success in the business world, his visionary and heavily publicized space endeavors, and his use of strong positive modality throughout and it is unsurprising that demand for Tesla products is growing fervently.

Musk and Tesla are nearly synonymous, but what this thesis points to is the possibility that tying a car brand to a person; a person with an outspoken goal of “speeding the transition to sustainable transportation” can be a powerful branding mechanism. As is posited in Aaker’s
principles of branding; for a company to serve a higher purpose or to denote a lifestyle or ethical mandate is of great importance and Musk and Tesla are managing to do so without major advertising or marketing investment. Musk being the face of Tesla attaches his life story of success and innovation and vision to a product; and then his story transitions to a vision where we might as consumers take part in creating his vision of a sustainable future. This attaches the Tesla car to a solution to one of the world’s greatest challenges. This is powerful branding.

What it means for the actual sustainability to the transport sector remains for debate, but this type of model for building a customer base is very interesting and could be considered viable for other firms. Other firms wishing to tap into market readiness for environmental action or ethical imperative may consider attaching themselves from the start to an idea like “sustainable transport” instead of a utility or service that their product may provide.

7. CONCLUSIONS
To recap, this thesis asked two questions: what is the discourse surrounding Tesla motors and how has that discourse contributed to the company’s hitherto success? The purpose of asking these questions was to better understand a company attempting to disrupt a very entrenched market with huge environmental consequences attached to its function. The idea being that if we could understand the media discourse surrounding Tesla, we may apply what we have learned to other markets. The theories employed in service of this goal included aspects of discourse analysis and branding theory, namely the word frequency analysis, positive modality analysis, and branding principles analysis. This was done to first establish the subjects of discussion in the discourse and then to grasp what type of language has been used regarding Tesla, produced by both Musk and the media. Then a text was interpreted or decoded for messages of branding.

With regard to our first research question; the multi-text word frequency analysis revealed Musk as being a central subject of the Tesla Motors discourse. When we more closely analyzed what was being written about Musk we saw that much of the content regarding the company and its products is mediated through Musk’s personal narrative. We can therefore answer our first research question. The media discourse surrounding Tesla Motors is very much about the story of its co-founder, Elon Musk. The analysis and results suggest that the discourse surrounding Tesla is defined by Musk’s public persona. That is, what Musk says about the company and what media outlets write about him in relation to the company seems to be central to societal understanding of Tesla Motors.

With regard to our second research question we used a positive modality analysis and analysis for branding principles to ascertain how the discourse, now having been identified as largely focused on Musk, contributes to the company’s success. The results of that modality analysis, appearing in Transcript 1, show that Musk often positions himself authoritatively throughout the single most consumed piece of media concerning Tesla Motors. We then sought to understand how Musk’s media interactions lead to increased demand for Tesla cars. We did this by looking for text displaying branding content, the results of which appear in Table 2. Therefore, one answer to the question of how the media discourse contributes to the company’s success is that Musk is simultaneously focused on by the media, building authority via public appearance, and building brand image via media texts. What this thesis has done is to expose rhetorical use of authority-positioning and the prevalence of no less than seven principles of branding embedded
within an interview held in a supposedly marketing-free space. This effectively explains how the discourse, which we established to be focused upon Musk, contributes to the success of the company.

It is important to note that this thesis did not ask the question or provide the theoretical framework for answering why Musk is definitive in the media discourse nor did this thesis take enough media text material as subject matter to make extrapolative claims about all media texts. As noted in the theoretical framework, we were attempting to peer “in” to the discourse and interpret what we found as an informed piece of the discourse. Our sampling of texts was not large enough to make any general claims about media at large. Furthermore, the analysis of the TED interview was meant to illuminate how one, albeit important, media text can give us an idea of the societal understanding of the company and how success might be cultivated. That is, we do not claim that the texts examined are representative of other texts, rather that the texts we analyzed are themselves representative agglomerations of societal and media understanding of the company. It would be interesting to explore some of these avenues of inquiry, such as asking why it is that Elon Musk has such presence in the public eye and how he came to build such a presence. It would also be interesting and enlightening to carry out comprehensive statistically robust research analyzing a much larger sample set of Tesla media text or to inquire into the semiotics and power dynamics of Musk and Tesla in media communications.

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