Spring 5-10-2023

What Happens When a Company's Marketing Strategy No Longer Mirrors the Shopping Trends of the American Consumer: A Case Study of Sears, Roebuck and Company

Savannah Burnett

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A COMPANY'S MARKETING STRATEGY NO LONGER MIRRORS THE SHOPPING TRENDS OF THE AMERICAN CONSUMER: A CASE STUDY OF SEARS, ROEBUCK AND COMPANY

By
Savannah Grace Burnett

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College

Oxford
May 2023

Approved by:

Advisor: Professor Deborah Hall, MBA

Reader: Dr. Robert Magee

Reader: Dr. Christopher Newman

To my parents, Lylah Kate, and Nathan, who with love and effort have accompanied me in this process, and to my many friends, who have provided relentless support and encouragement: love and immense gratitude.

ABSTRACT

Once America's largest mass merchandiser, Sears is a name that remains recognizable for many people. Throughout our country's history, the U.S. retail industry has often shifted alongside its country's major historical events. However, one major corporation who once mirrored the ebbs and flows of the United States economy slowly faded out of the minds of the American consumer. This thesis seeks to answer if Sears' fall from grace was a direct reflection of American consumer trends.

Secondary data was gathered through books accessed from the university library, newspaper articles, scholarly journals, and online news sources, as well as the company's online database. Primary data was gathered via an online sample survey created using Qualtrics to gain insight regarding the potential effects of the Sears' catalog on past consumers' perceptions of the brand. Survey results conclude that the discontinuation of the Sears catalog directly affected the customer's view of the brand. Former customers predominantly chose Amazon.com as their primary replacement to Sears due to convenience and availability of products. Additionally, the Christmas Wish Book catalog played a large role in Sears' customers' loyalty to the brand and remains nostalgic in the minds of consumers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Getting his start by selling time, Richard W. Sears began the business' history in 1886 by purchasing unwanted watches and turning them for a profit on the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railway. His success led to his partnership with Alvah C. Roebuck, which would lead to the establishment of Sears, Roebuck and Company. From 1886 until the late 1960s, Sears continued to grow at a rapid rate as America's most popular department store, selling everything from infant clothing to insurance. The 19th century mail-order firm had evolved into a mass distribution channel, an anchor in post-war suburban shopping malls, and a mirror of American capitalism.

In the late 20th century, the company started to take a turn for the worse. A new focus in credit and financial products led to more-than dwindling profits and eventual bankruptcy. Despite its efforts to return to their identity as a retail giant, the market's customer base seemed to have already moved on to rival companies and new ways to shop. Soaring inflation in the 1970s allowed other huge stores such as Target and Walmart to attract new customers with competitive low prices, and in 1991, Sears was replaced with Walmart as the nation's largest retailer. How could a company which had once thrived during the era of print media, proving their skill in corporate branding and product advertising through their infamous catalog, not have been able to notice their consumers' changing needs and habits? Furthermore, could the utilization of integrated marketing communications principles have prevented the company's eventual downfall?

Chapter One: The Largest American Retailer of the 20th Century

Commonly known as Sears, the department store chain Sears, Roebuck and Company was founded in 1886 by Richard Warren Sears and Alvah Curtis Roebuck. Gaining its start as a mail-order company, Sears was the first of its kind to reach millions of Americans across the country, offering an extensive selection of products (Howard, 2017). The two founders first started the business as a watch company in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and would later expand their selection of merchandise to include jewelry, clothing, household items, and shoes. By taking advantage of the mail-order business, Sears and Roebuck were able to reach customers in rural America, who had limited access to retail (Howard, 2017).

Sears published its first catalog in 1888, only offering jewelry and watches (Chicago Tribune). The earliest catalogs called themselves “the Book of Bargains” or the “Cheapest Supply House on Earth” and attracted thousands of shoppers, thanks to Richard Sears’ extravagant promotional claims (Halzack, 2023). By 1894, the catalog was 322 pages and included a plethora of items from medical supplies to bicycles (Pruitt, 2018). Until his retirement in 1909, Sears wrote all of the catalogs himself and was led by the motto “We Can’t Afford to Lose a Customer” as he wanted to ensure Sears kept its competitive edge (Pruitt, 2018).

Richard Sears set the tone for Sears, Roebuck and Company’s advertising success, but it was Julius Rosenwald’s leadership that made Sears a mail-order giant. Rosenwald bought a quarter of the company in 1895, and Roebuck sold out soon after for an inadequate allowance (Jacoby, 1997). He took full control of the company by 1900, and over the span of his thirty-year reign, he had raised Sears' profits from $141,000 to $25 million (Hoover, 2022). It was his consumer-focused business strategy, confidence in Sears' innovative efforts, and curiosity for the future that would drive the company forward as mass urbanization created a new threat to the mail-order business (Longstreth, 2006).

After Rosenwald retired in the 1920s, General Robert E. Wood assumed leadership and ushered in a period of peak performance and expansion for the business. Wood maintained Sears dominance within the catalog industry while also guiding the company into the brick-and-mortar retail space, leading to Sears' position as the largest general merchandise retailer. Being the greatest in every product category received new priority under his direction, and for decades this philosophy would shape Sears' reputation (Worthy, 1980).

The economic downturn from the Great Depression was no threat to the company's growth. Sears had positioned itself as a practical and dependable department store, contrasting with other department stores of the time that offered upscale fashion such as Marshall Field's or John Wanamaker's (Howard, 2017). Sears had succeeded by offering staple items like socks and sheets and met the needs of the customer looking for value. Even in the heat of the depression in 1931, Sears profited over $12 million (Pruitt, 2018).

World War II also did not negatively affect Sears business in the slightest. Interestingly, General George Patton used his own money to buy equipment and supplies from the Sears Roebuck catalog for the 2nd Armored Brigade due to the United States' unpreparedness for the war (Sofrep, 2022). After the war's end, Sears proceeded to establish additional locations across North America under Wood's leadership, as the number of suburban shopping malls increased. The company became synonymous with the emerging American middle class and suburban life (Auslin, 2008). The company further expanded its product line by including appliances, electronics, and automotive parts and along with J.C. Penney had become a typical anchor store for retail malls. Additionally, the brand launched the Sears credit card in 1953 (Meyer, 2017). By the mid-1950s, the United States had over 700 Sears stores (Howard, 2017). In the 1960s, the Vincent Price Collection of Fine Art was introduced to modernize the brand, make fine art accessible to the public, and create a more elegant store environment (McKean, 2014).

Sears began to be challenged in the 1970s due to the growth in popularity of discount retailers such as Walmart and Target amidst increasing inflation. The market split, with wealthy upper-middle class consumers choosing more opulent traditional department stores while price-conscious shoppers discovered cheaper pricing at discounters rather than at Sears (Howard, 2017). Despite the budding challenges, Sears was still the leader of the retail industry and a commonality within American culture. One out of 204 Americans were employed by Sears, and the company held the title of America's largest publisher through distributing 315 million catalogs a year. In 1973, the new home of the company, Sears Tower, was opened in Chicago, Illinois and was then the tallest building in the world (Meyer, 2017). Sears exclusively sold the electronic, at-home ping pong video game Pong, produced by Atari, as of 1975 (Rumore, 2021).

The company moved into financial services in 1981 by purchasing the stock brokerage Dean Witter and the real estate company Coldwell Banker (Kelleher, 2018). Four years later, they would introduce the Discover Card in an attempt to compete with Mastercard, Visa, and American Express (Rumore, 2021). While Sears' portfolio was quite expansive by the early 1990s, the strategy of using financial services businesses as alternate revenue sources proved to be more distracting than lucrative (Halzack, 2023).

In 1992, Walmart officially replaced Sears as the United States' top retailer, with Kmart taking the second-place spot, based on total sales revenue for fiscal year 1990 (Rumore, 2021). At the end of 1992, Sears posted a loss of nearly $4 billion, which triggered investors to start doubting its long-term sustainability (Halzack, 2023). After assuming control of the Sears retail division in late 1992, executive Arthur Martinez implemented a new marketing strategy known as “the Softer Side of Sears” (Weiss, 1999). Aside from the launch of the new campaign, Martinez also cancelled catalog distribution in the same year of 1993. After Martinez left the company in 2000, he would later make claims blaming the “Softer Side of Sears” campaign and Sears’ diversification into industries including insurance, banking, and real estate as the main reasons for the company’s downfall (Thomas, 2018). Additionally, Sears sold off both Coldwell Banker and Sears Mortgage Banking Group, parted ways with Allstate in 1993 (Meyer, 2017). The sale of its credit division would come 10 years later in 2003 (Sorkin, 2003).

Three years prior to the credit division’s sale, Alan Lacy was appointed as the new president and chief executive after Martinez’ retirement in 2000 (Lublin, 2000). Under Lacy, Sears purchased Land’s End in early 2002 with hopes that the brand would revitalize apparel sales but would later post the brand for sale in 2005. This was due to low sales and what many analysts believed to be a result of being acquired by Kmart Holding Corp., a merger initiated by Kmart chairman and Sears shareholder Edward J. Lampert (Carpenter, 2005). Shortly before the company’s acquisition in 2005, Lacy introduced a new chain of stores called Sears Grand in late 2003. Sears Grand stores were supposed to be the happy medium between large department stores and discount retailers such as Walmart by offering grocery and convenience products (D'Innocenzio, 2004). Despite Lacy’s claims of initial success, Sears’ inability to launch more than 10 to 20 Sears Grand stores proved to not be enough (Halzack, 2023). Lampert and Lacy would agree on an $11 billion merger of Kmart and Sears in November 2004, promising “up to $500 million a year in savings within three years from store conversions, back-office job cuts, more efficient buying of goods and possible store closings” (D’Innocenzio, 2004). The merger was completed forming Sears Holdings Corporation in March of 2005 (Rahman, 2007).

After many failed attempts at reviving the brand, Sears began its downward spiral of huge losses after never being able to fully transition online and being overtaken by Amazon (Kelleher, 2018). The retailer had to sell off still-well-known brands like Craftsman, close location after location, and lay off staff. On March 9 of 2017, Sears Holdings Corp announced that it lost $607 million during the fourth quarter and, shortly after, disclosed "substantial doubt exists related to the Company's ability to continue as a going concern" (Meyer, 2017). On October 15, 2018, Sears filed for bankruptcy, and Lampert stepped down as CEO (Kelleher, 2018). Since entering bankruptcy, Sears, Roebuck and Company went from being the world's largest retailer with over 3,500 Kmart and Sears stores to now having only 22 remaining locations. As of October 29, 2022, the company has emerged from bankruptcy and a reorganization plan has taken effect (Burch, 2022).

Chapter Two: A History of American Shopping Trends

The average American consumer's behaviors frequently give a clear indication of the economic and technological condition of the United States. From its founding to its bankruptcy, Sears' lifespan provides a look into the evolution of the wants and needs of the typical American citizen. The company's capacity to dominate the retail market for decades while evolving with American society does not line up with their gradual decline in stature around the turn of the 21st century. This observation has prompted me to look more closely at American shopping patterns over the course of American history in order to better understand Sears' downfall.

American consumer culture as we know it today did not emerge until the 1920s. Before this time, most Americans lived in rural areas and shopped for necessities at their town's general store (Provost, 2021). Shopping trips to major cities were not feasible as there were no automobiles, and food was liable to spoil on the trip back home. The local general store sold mainly the bare essentials, and Americans were more prone to purchase products out of need than want (Provost, 2021).

Mail-order shopping provided access to hundreds of items that were otherwise unavailable to the rural American and especially appealed to farmers, with catalogs offering a wide variety of tools and equipment. However, before Congress passed legislation mandating Rural Free Delivery, one could not receive packages directly to their homes. People had to travel long distances to the post office to pick up mail and packages, which made many Americans avoid mail-order experiences until they were absolutely necessary. The introduction of Rural Free Delivery opened the gates for at-home deliveries, and under the Parcel Post Act of 1912, Americans no longer had to rely on private postal companies to deliver packages that weighed over four pounds (Berkun). Parcel post service allowed companies such as Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward to flourish, with 300 million packages delivered during the first six months after the Parcel Post Act's approval (Provost, 2021).

At the turn of the 20th century, department stores started to emerge in American cities. While mail-order was still prevalent, the emergence and popularity of the automobile aided the growth of chain stores due to increased consumer mobility (Library of Congress). Stores such as Sears and Roebuck especially profited from the new market opportunity. Beginning as a mail-order company that catered to rural America, by 1925 the company had branched out into direct retail. Just four years later, Sears had a total of 324 stores across the United States (Library of Congress).

The Roaring Twenties was an era of immense growth in many areas, especially retail. Consumers had money to spend, and the economic boom of the decade laid the foundation for American capitalist culture. Chain stores were expanding quickly and gaining popularity across the U.S., so much that smaller retailers began political movements demanding heavy taxation of chain stores and in some cases outlawing them (Davis, 2001). Advertising also reached new heights in the 1920s. Department stores were placing large display ads in newspapers and magazines, and radio would become a mass advertising medium in 1928 welcoming a new concept of commercials. The decade would also introduce the mass production of electric home appliances such as vacuums and washing machines, but the use of such technologies would not be accepted by the masses until the 1950s (Witkowski, 1998).

After World War II, the "American Dream" was defined by white picket fences and the nuclear family. Men were returning to work while women assumed the role of a housewife, and a huge baby boom contributed to economic growth and a turn towards suburbanization (Gigantino). It is important to note that World War II had a major effect on American consumerism, creating an idea through wartime campaigns that a “good citizen” practiced modest spending and personal saving (Pham, 2011). A housing boom led to the migration towards postwar suburbs, taking place during the 1940s to 1950s. This was a result of wartime measures such as the GI Bill and new federal mortgage arrangements (Wynn, 1996). The suburbs led to the birth of the American shopping mall which would become a center for both consumption and community. The mid-1950s marked the beginning of the shopping mall construction boom, and the mall would eventually become an American cultural icon over the next few decades (Davidson, 2011).

The 1960s and 1970s were an era of high political unrest and cultural change. These decades ushered in new programs and initiatives promoting consumer protection and the idea that consumerism was a social movement. Multiple consumer protection laws were passed in the late 1960s relating to multiple trade practices such as package labeling, product safety, meat quality, and credit reporting (Hilton, 2009).

The 1980s were marked by Reaganomics, the peak of mall culture, and the introduction of computers. President Ronald Reagan’s deregulation of government advertising restrictions at the start of the decade opened the door for new marketing opportunities, particularly in television (Logie, 2020). As far as the physical retail landscape of the decade, shopping malls were increasingly prevalent with approximately 16,000 new locations constructed between 1980 and 1990 (Plaza, 2020). Teenagers at the time considerably influenced the appeal of suburban shopping malls by making them their preferred hangout spaces for eating, socializing, and shopping. Computers began to take over during the 1980s as well, with the introduction of electronics within the retail environment. Electronic cash registers took the role of mechanical registers, and the

Universal Product Code (bar code) system first appeared in 1983 allowing for digital purchase and inventory tracking (Davis, 2001).

The 1990s and early 2000s marked the beginning of e-commerce's dominance in retail, revolutionizing the way American consumers shopped. When e-commerce first appeared in 1994, approximately 98 million consumers had placed $60 million worth of purchases from home over the phone in response to television commercials and mail catalogs (Tuttle, 2014). While online shopping was initially viewed with uncertainty and mistrust, Americans quickly grew accustomed to the idea and accepted what was first considered as the newest craze. Many of the first successful websites of the Internet were e-commerce retailers, such as the now-famous online distribution giant Amazon.com (Hortaçsu, 2015).

Today, both e-commerce and brick-and-mortar stores are necessary in the retail industry. Speculation of e-commerce replacing physical retail in its entirety has been around at least since 2009, when the term "death of retail" first emerged (Hortaçsu, 2015). However, research of department stores and grocery-department stores (i.e. Walmart)'s physical retail sales versus online sales point not to the death of the physical store but to a promising future for a business strategy that combines e-commerce and brick-and mortar stores. For example, beauty brand Glossier launched with a direct-to-consumer business model, eliminating the retailer and prioritizing customer service. However, the company's profitability and offline brand awareness skyrocketed after hosting pop-up shops and opening physical locations. The success from making its products available physically, appealing to the consumer's need to touch and test items, was so extensive that the company is now prioritizing the re-establishment of its brick-and-mortar presence after forced closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Howland, 2022). This leads to my conclusion that while Sears failed to improve and innovate its digital footprint in the late 1990s and early 2000s (further explained in Chapter Four), the demise of Sears cannot solely be blamed on e-commerce. While brands can quickly build their customer bases and profits online, physical locations remain an instrumental part of a company's long-term success.

Chapter Three: The Catalog

Before its discontinuation in 1993, the Sears catalog was the Amazon.com of the 20th century. Also referred to as the “Big Book,” the mail-order catalog was a driving force in Sears, Roebuck and Company’s initial and long-term success. Over the span of its 105-year lifetime, the catalog had grown to over 1,000 pages and included all sorts of items, such as tools, entertainment centers, appliances, sporting goods, and clothing (Pruitt, 2018). In 1933, Sears issued its first Christmas “Wish Book” which would become an iconic American tradition that still sparks nostalgia for many people (Sears Archives, 2012).

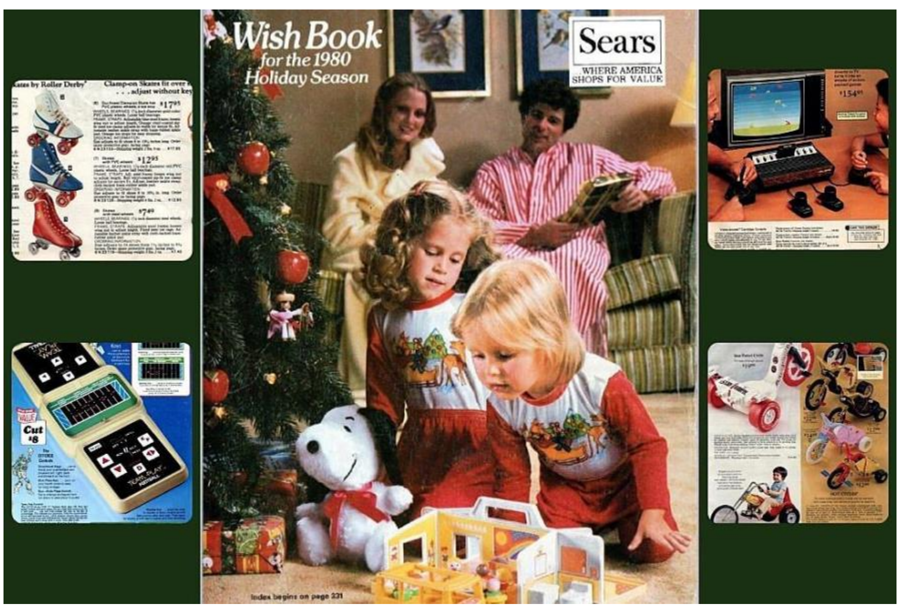

Figure 1- Sears 1980 Holiday Wish Book. Source: Fast Company

The company would turn from a mail-order watch business to a general mail-order firm in 1888, issuing its first catalog that only featured jewelry and watches (DeLuca, 2023). Richard

Sears would write almost all the catalogs himself until his retirement in 1908, differentiating his catalog from other established ones from Montgomery Ward and R.H. Macy & Co. by providing excellent customer service and boasting “The Lowest Prices on Earth” (Howard, 2017). Staying competitive in terms of price and value was important to Sears, working by the motto “We Can’t Afford to Lose a Customer” (Pruitt, 2018). The catalog’s combination of Richard Sears’ advertising ability and Rosenwald’s commitment to quality and customer service drove the company to $50 million in sales, and by 1906 the company was worth approximately $40 million (Pruitt, 2018).

In 1992, Arthur Martinez was hired as chief executive of Sears’ merchandising group to revitalize their retail division, and cutting the catalog was one of his first orders of business (Strom, 1993). In an interview with the *New York Times*, Martinez explained that the decision came from needing to rid the company of “a number of unprofitable businesses" and continued by saying that the discontinuation of the catalog “frees up the playing field for us to move forward” (Strom, 1993). While the catalog had lost $175 million, it still made $3.3 billion in sales, which was noted by many analysts who were skeptical of Martinez’ strategy. While noting a “little chance” of the operation (the catalog)’s resurgence, marketing strategists and consultants stated that proper investments of money and time could have lengthened the lifespan of the cult classic (Strom, 1993). Ironically, Martinez stated that he wanted to be remembered as “the guy who got Sears back on its feet” as opposed to the catalog’s “executioner” (Strom, 1993).

Although the catalog is long gone, the catalog nevertheless evokes nostalgia in many Americans and serves as a window into the history of American retail. A curator in the Division of Work and Industry at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History said it best: “...People hung the covers in their homes. It was about more than finding things in the catalog. It was about the thing itself" (DeLuca, 2023). Aside from the clothes, jewelry, appliances and tool kits, the following paragraphs detail unforgettable items of the Sears catalog's past.

In the early days of the catalog, many outlandish medicinal concoctions were sold, claiming to be cure alls for any ailment. The promotion was even more implausible the crazier the treatment was. For example, one "White Star Liquor Cure" advertised as a cure for alcoholism stated, "Makes them stop drinking forever. Drunkards cured without their knowledge" (Cooper, 2022). The basis of these medicines were harmful ingredients such as opium and arsenic, and even heroin was proudly sold and advertised at $1.50 for two vials, complete with a syringe, two needles and a carrying case (DeLuca, 2023).

Figure 2- 1905 Sears Roebuck Catalog. Source: Facts Catalogue

The Heidelberg Electric Belt was another notable Sears remedy, promising men an increase in sexual vitality and performance for $18 (DeLuca, 2023). A 1902 ad copy boasts, "for those sexually weak or impotent or suffering from any trouble of the sexual organs, the Giant 80-gauge Belt affords relief when everything else has failed" as well as proudly claiming that the $18 price tag will "bring you to health and strength, vigor, manliness and happiness, a bigger measure for your money" (DeLuca, 2023). While these product offerings are unheard of within today's society, the selling of these medicines was a direct reflection of American beliefs and cultural tendencies of the late nineteenth century (DeLuca, 2023).

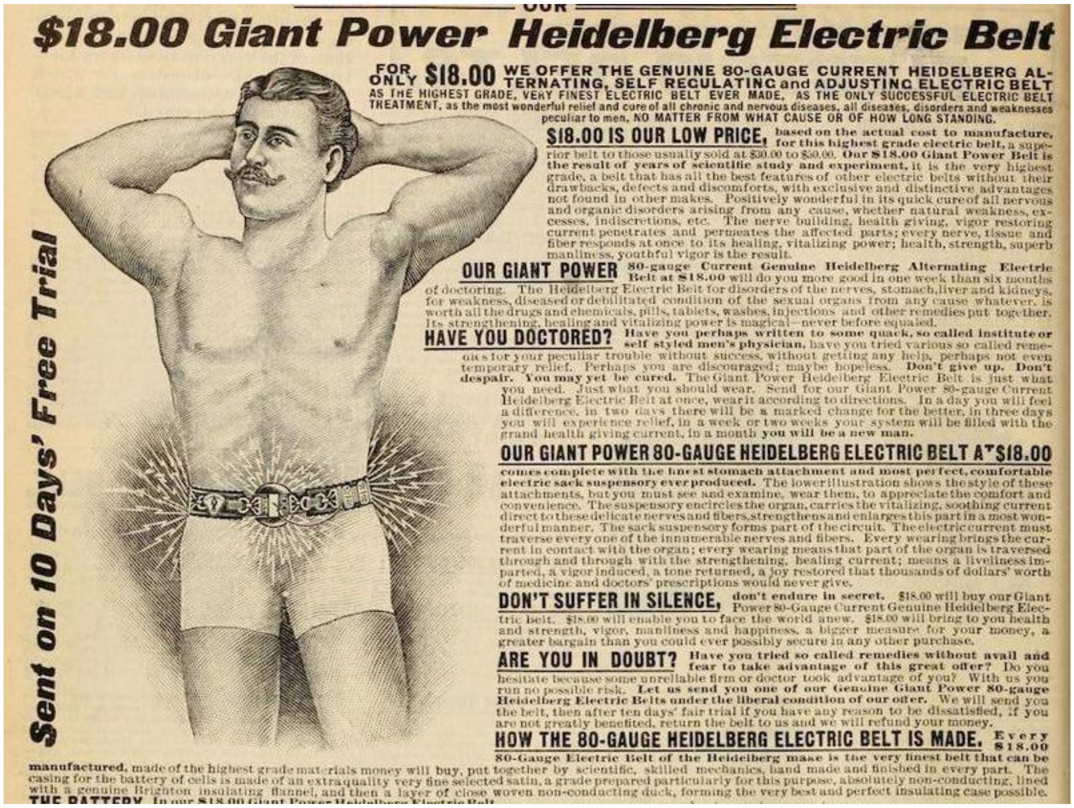

Figure 3- Sears Heidelberg Electric Belt. Source: Work + Money

One could also open a Sears catalog and find ways to purchase a ready-to-build home. Until the early 1940s, Sears sold do-it-yourself home kits that came with everything needed to build the home, from nails to staircases, starting at prices as low as $107, which is about $3,500 today (DeLuca, 2023). The mass-produced homes were sold through the "Modern Homes" catalog from 1908 to 1940, and Sears eventually offered three different lines of homes with varying price ranges and features, including the Simplex Sectional, Standard Built and Honor Bilt. By the end of the "Modern Homes" catalog's run, more than 100,000 homes had been sold (DeLuca, 2023).

Figure 4- Build-It-Yourself Home. Source: Philadelphia Inquirer

Tombstones were available for purchase starting in 1906, published via a special "Tombstones and Monuments" catalog (Brown, 2021). Keeping with their company promise for affordability, Sears was able to sell customizable grave markers which typically were only afforded by the elite. People could buy "White Granite Markers" for as low as $8.60, or for those with deeper pockets, a "Splendid Monument in Best Barre Granite" (as seen in the photo below) starting at $113.87. Sears made no mistake regarding the advertising and marketing of the tombstones, with the catalog's pages marked with testimonials boasting excellent quality for such low prices. “There are many costly stones in the cemetery but saw none I should prefer to the one ordered from you” (Brown, 2021).

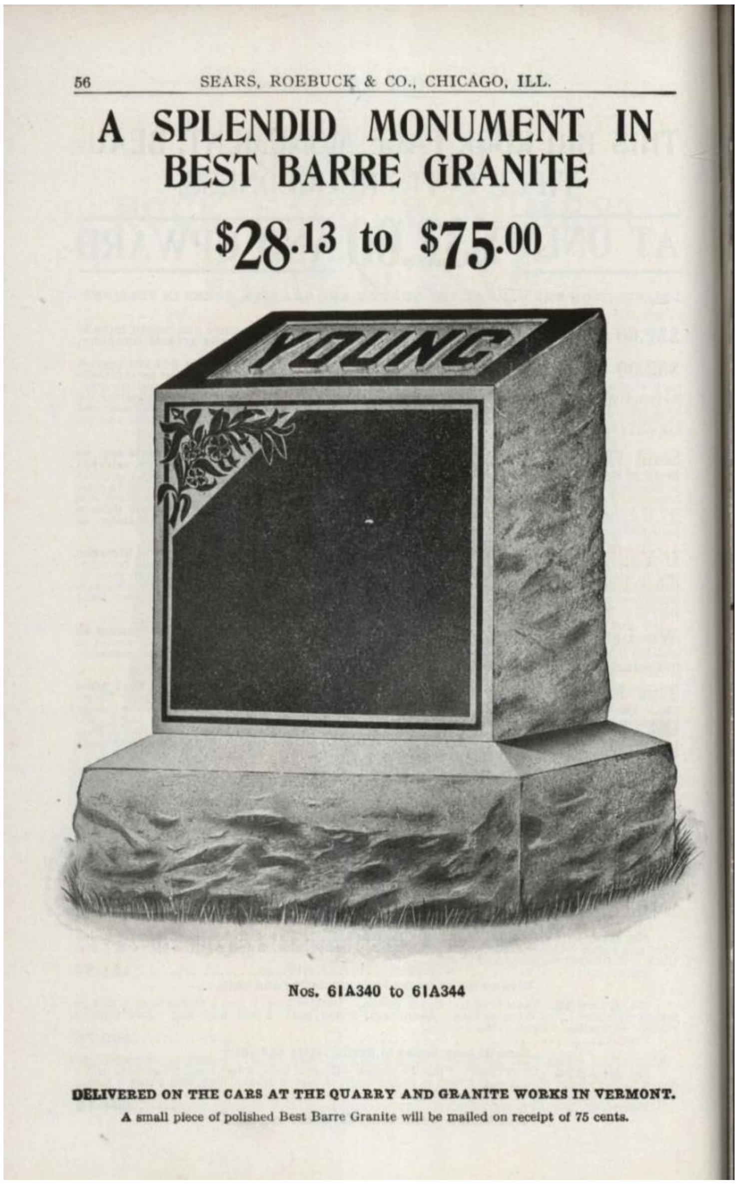

Figure 5- Mail-Order Tombstone. Source: Atlas Obscura

The catalog evolved throughout its century-long publication. The first catalog published in 1888 advertised only watches and jewelry, but had expanded to include men's clothing, bicycles, musical instruments, baby carriages, and firearms among many other items by 1895. In 1886 the catalog added a spring and fall edition as well as grew in size, and by 1897 a color section was added advertising shoes in red, black, and brown. The entrance of Julius Rosenwald led to the catalog including a "Your money back if you are not satisfied" commitment in 1903 (Sears Archives). Flamboyant claims of medicinal cures in its early years were halted with the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. The catalog could no longer use claims such as "Cheapest Supply House" or "World's Largest" unless based in fact, and it now had to use shorter product descriptions (Makowski, 2008). By 1927, the catalog featured over 150 pages of just women and children's clothing, not counting other goods previously available such as bicycles and guns (Gordon, 2016). As opposition to chain stores rose in the 1930s, Sears used the catalog to increase positivity amongst angry rural independent merchants. Sears wanted to position itself not as a chain store but as an American institution, running catalog campaigns to "strike a warmer, friendlier tone, to show readers that great mail-order house had a deep and abiding interest in their (rural Americans) welfare" (Jacoby, 1997).

Sears added the Christmas Wish Book to its collection of seasonal catalogs in 1933, with the term "Wish Book" becoming synonymous with the annual Christmas catalog. In 1934, Sears began placing colorful images depicting inviting Christmas scenes on the cover. While the Christmas catalog is predominantly remembered for its toys, gifts for adults covered more pages than gifts for kids. In 1968, 225 pages featured toys and 380 pages featured gifts for adults. The same year, Sears officially renamed the Christmas catalog to The Wish Book due to its popularity (Sears Archives, 2012).

As claimed within the company's archives, Sears catalogs were frequently referred to within Broadway Shows and Hollywood movies due to each publication's reflection of popular styles and trends throughout the years. The catalog can also be used to research the history of early fraternal organizations as it offered pins for such groups, including the freemasons. Sears Archives also claim that the catalog may be used as a reliable reference for a chronological timeline of the first appearances of sporting goods. While production ceased in 1993, the Sears' catalog remains an integral part of American consumer history and Sears' 20th century retail dominance (Sears Archives).

Chapter Four: Sears' Marketing Strategies Over Time

Although Sears is now all but forgotten, the company's near century-long history of being a leader in the retail industry still holds significance. Despite the financial failures that led to its bankruptcy, Sears was the largest and most profitable retailer in the United States for decades largely due to its marketing presence. To better comprehend Sears Roebuck's collapse in profitability and prominence, it is possible to examine both its rise and fall from a marketing viewpoint.

Richard W. Sears founded the mail-order watch company and did not have a focus on product quality. It was not until Julius Rosenwald was named president of the company after Richard Sears retired in 1909 that Sears started prioritizing factory efficiency and a high standard of quality (Bachmann, 1976). Rosenwald, an experienced and successful Chicago clothing merchant and avid philanthropist, solved disorganization issues caused by Richard Sears' lack of experience in the entrepreneurial realm. He decreased chaos within the shipping room and set up the company's organizational structure to include separate departments in order to efficiently control business operations and fulfill mail-orders. Rosenwald also placed great importance in social reform and the welfare of his employees. He also prioritized sharing the wealth by giving employees large amounts of company stock. In 1916, Rosenwald established a profit-sharing plan for Sears' employees which would become one of the nation's "most generous and publicized profit-sharing plans" (Jacoby, 1997). The mail-order business was thriving. However, the depression caused the company to lose over $16 million in sales by the end of 1921. Rosenwald alleviated the company of financial concern by pledging approximately $20,000,000 worth of his own personal assets, yet the company continued to battle efficiency and control issues (Bachmann, 1976).

Despite Rosenwald's attempts, the company still struggled to adapt to market changes that followed the mass migration from small-town U.S.A to urban cities in the late 1920s. Both Sears' and its competitor Montgomery Ward's attempts to compete within the new urban market failed as both companies were continuing to use old strategies such as opening new plants and increasing its advertising footprint (Worthy, 1980). It was not until Rosenwald saw Ward's rejection of General Robert E. Wood that Sears began to reclaim its dominance. General Wood had a fascination with census data and had heavily pushed opening retail spaces as Vice-President for Montgomery Ward. However, the then-president of Montgomery Ward strongly opposed a move from strictly mail-order to both mail-order and retail. These differences proved unreconcilable, and the two parted ways in 1924. Rosenwald saw this as an opportunity, and because Wood was promised a chance at retail, he accepted Rosenwald's offer to work for Sears (Worthy, 1980).

Under Wood, Sears opened the company's first department store on the first floor of the Chicago mail-order plant in 1925. During his first year with Sears, the company opened eight stores in three different locations: inside of the mail-order plants, in mail-order plant cities, and in a city far from any other Sears presence. This was done as a test of each location's success. Wood's retail idea had proved its success by the end of 1926, and 13 additional stores were opened in major cities in 1927 (Worthy, 1980). Wood's attention to census trends continued to give the company a competitive advantage over its competitors, only placing new stores in out-lying areas of cities with over 100,000 occupants. This was due to Wood's belief that the automobile would move people away from the established downtown area of the cities due to traffic changes, and the placement of stores on the outskirts of town would be less costly and provide necessary parking space. By the end of the 1920s, Sears operated more than 300 stores nationwide (Halzack, 2023).

Sears continued to innovate despite the threat of the Great Depression. Executives had decided to rely on the company's financial strength during the depression, choosing to reconceptualize how merchandise would be displayed within stores. The Store Planning and Display Department was created in 1932 as an effort to move internal focus from expansion to selling more merchandise. This was in response to increased competition for a shriveling market due to the depression that forced retailers to pay more attention to displays in order to attract customers (Longstreth, 2006).

Contrary to past availability-based methods held by most retailers, Sears' buyers gave priority to selecting the very best manufacturers for their products. Within stores, listening to the customer in order to understand exactly what they wanted was a key component to the company's strategy. Wood placed a lot of attention on researching the client demographics and market trends. The success of the company at the time indicates how effective it is to pay attention to long-term trends (Hoover, 2019).

Sears remained the leader within the American retail market while diversifying into different market sectors such as insurance and credit. However, sales growth began to decline in the 1970s, and Sears responded by making new organizational changes, some of which took focus away from marketing and pricing authority (Jones, 1977). The company also tried to appeal to the upper class, hoping to find profitability by offering higher-end products. Retail analyst Jeffrey Feiner of New York investment firm Drexel Burnham stated that Sears' decision to shift marketing efforts toward more expensive products and a more affluent social class was a bad move within the marketing division (Jones, 1977).

By the late 1980s, Sears was mostly recognized as being a go-to spot for men's needs. To reposition itself in order to appeal more to women and change its image of being only a tool and appliance destination, the retailer launched the "Softer Side of Sears" campaign in 1993 (Weiss, 1999). An additional aspect of Martinez' turnaround strategy was the discontinuing of the catalog in 1993 due to its losing more than $100 million a year (Halzack, 2023). While the company's financial position improved after the campaign's launch, some analysts debate that this improvement was a result of increased short-term profitability from cutting the catalog and an influx in Sears' credit card holders, not the modernized image (St-James, 2001). Results from the 1996 Chicago Female Fashion Research Project as well as campaign references within pop culture also may disprove the repositioning strategy's success. The 1996 survey examining women's attitudes toward many retail stores found that while over a quarter of the women who participated had recently shopped at Sears, only 3% primarily shopped at Sears for clothing (Store Choice, 1996). Conductors of the survey also acknowledged that in comparison to a previous 1987 study, perceptions of Sears in terms of fashion had become weaker (St-James, 2001). Within pop culture, the campaign had been referenced as a derogatory term in the then-popular television show Buffy the Vampire Slayer, where a character bullies another in the pilot episode because her dress and tights are from "the softer side of Sears" (Kociemba, 2014).

Having been the company's main source of profits during the mid-1990s, the credit card began to lose its credibility in 1997 after news surfaced of the company's maltreatment of bankrupt customers, costing Sears $500 million in fines and settlements (Kuykendall, 1999). In 2000 Sears announced its partnership with MasterCard International and introduced a new Sears-branded gold card to encourage credit card use from disinterested current cardholders. However, an abrupt departure in 2002 by the head of the credit division, Kevin T. Keleghan, would initiate a quick turn for the worse for the credit division and the eventual sale of the credit card business altogether

(Hays, 2002). Citigroup purchased Sears entire credit card portfolio for $3 billion in 2003, including both Sears' private label cards and co-branded Mastercards. Chairman and chief executive Alan Lacy commented that the sale would allow the company to focus on its retail division and please worried shareholders who had struggled to find value within the company's unusual identity of retailer and credit issuer (Sorkin, 2003). Aside from this, Alan Lacy's 5 years as president and CEO were spent attempting to revamp Sears' retail division during a recession, launching the failed Sears Grand store concept and selling apparel brand Land's End just 3 years after its purchase (Carpenter, 2005).

Because of Edward J. Lampert's success in reviving Kmart from bankruptcy and raising approximately $1 billion for the company, many thought he could be successful in raising the chain from the ashes. Lampert used many different strategies such as starting the Shop Your Way rewards program that allowed shoppers to gain loyalty points by shopping at Sears, Kmart, and thousands of other businesses (Halzack, 2023). He also reduced expenses and allocated more funds to strengthen Sears' online sales power. However, much like the "Softer Side of Sears" era and the failed Sears Grand concept, the retailer struggled to develop a long-lasting strategy. From 2006 to 2008, both the Sears and Kmart websites were "down for hours at a time" on both Black Friday and Cyber Monday, with these outages being expected for the largest shopping days of the year, according to a former e-commerce executive (Halzack, 2023). Additionally, Lampert has been critiqued for his odd strategies and lack of business instinct. For example, a former Sears executive remembered being confused when Lampert wanted to place appliances in Kmart, a store whose research showed that most of its consumers were not even homeowners (Halzack, 2023).

If any retailer knew anything about selling outside of the physical store, it was Sears. However, the company made many mistakes ecommerce and digital marketing. While ecommerce was steadily growing in popularity, Sears waited five years after cancelling the catalog to launch

Wishbook.com and Sears.com. In an opportunity to establish online dominance, they seemingly sat back and watched other powerhouse retailers take over. Although huge sums of money were put into their digital marketing efforts, it was simply too late. Sears failed to commit to the digital mindset, determine the role of integration technology in improving business cycles, and modernize their buying, selling, and distribution cycles to compete within the digital transformation age (Torman). The digital marketing strategy lacked innovation, the modernity needed to stray from an outdated aesthetic, and a sense of newness to lure in consumers. Global president of consumer brands at Landor Mary Zalla completely blames Sears' downfall on their failure to establish their online presence. "If you're not going to do that, the next thing you should be doing is investing in your own stores and your store experience and environment. They didn't do that, either" (Lachance, 2018).

Chapter Five: Survey Results

To gather primary data and gain insight surrounding past Sears' customers perceptions of the catalog, I created and issued a sample survey asking respondents an array of questions relating to both their experiences as a Sears customer as well as their needs and wants as a general consumer. All responses were anonymous, and age groups of the respondents were gathered to obtain a more accurate reflection of what version of Sears they were remembering. My findings are detailed in the following sections.

Out of all responses, 93.20% of respondents were female. Due to most respondents being women, my sample population cannot allow a generalization of men's feelings and experiences to a larger population of consumers. Additionally, 93.20% lived in the Southeast region of the United States, and 65.38% were 46 or older. Because I was solely interested in the responses of those who were Sears customers in its prime, participants were shown a Yes/No question asking if they had personally shopped at a physical Sears location and/or through the catalog before 1993. The year 1993 was included in the question because of the catalog's discontinuation in January of the same year. Of the 106 respondents, 78 selected "Yes" and were permitted to continue participating in the survey.

When asked their preferred method of shopping, 64.47% selected "In-person at a physical store" over shopping online or via Smartphone applications. This was expected as the ages of those who were permitted to continue participating in the survey belong to the Baby Boomer and Gen X generations who were active consumers before retail's massive transition to online shopping. This further solidified my confidence that I had reached my target demographic.

The remaining questions all related to Sears specifically. The two most common words respondents listed when asked what came to mind when they first thought of the store were "catalog" and "appliances" (this was a free response item). Other adjectives such as dead, obsolete, old, and cheap were listed, but in far less frequency to nouns that define physical objects (i.e. items sold or distributed by Sears).

In contrast, respondents had much more common answers when asked what word came to mind when they thought of the Sears *catalog.* Forty-seven percent (37 respondents) all answered with the word "Christmas," with the remaining responses being mostly positive adjectives such as "happy" and "exciting." These results show that the Sears consumer had a clear understanding of the catalog's purpose and still hold positive feelings around it, versus the more scattered results gathered from asking about Sears in general.

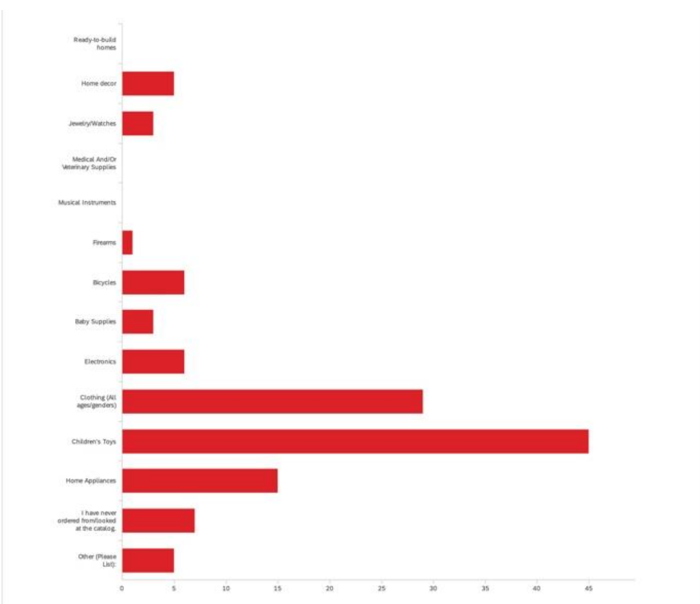

Chart 1- Preferred Purchases via Catalog of Survey Participants

Continuing with comparing Sears and the Sears catalog, 36.59% said to have most likely purchased children's toys when ordering from the catalog, with clothing coming in second at 23.58%. In contrast, when respondents were asked what they were most likely to purchase in-person at a physical Sears location, 41.23% selected home appliances. Results are shown in Chart 2. This is a difference of 30 percentage points from the 11.38% of people who said they were likely to purchase home appliances through the catalog. Additionally, clothing was selected 21.05% of the time when referring to buying in-person.

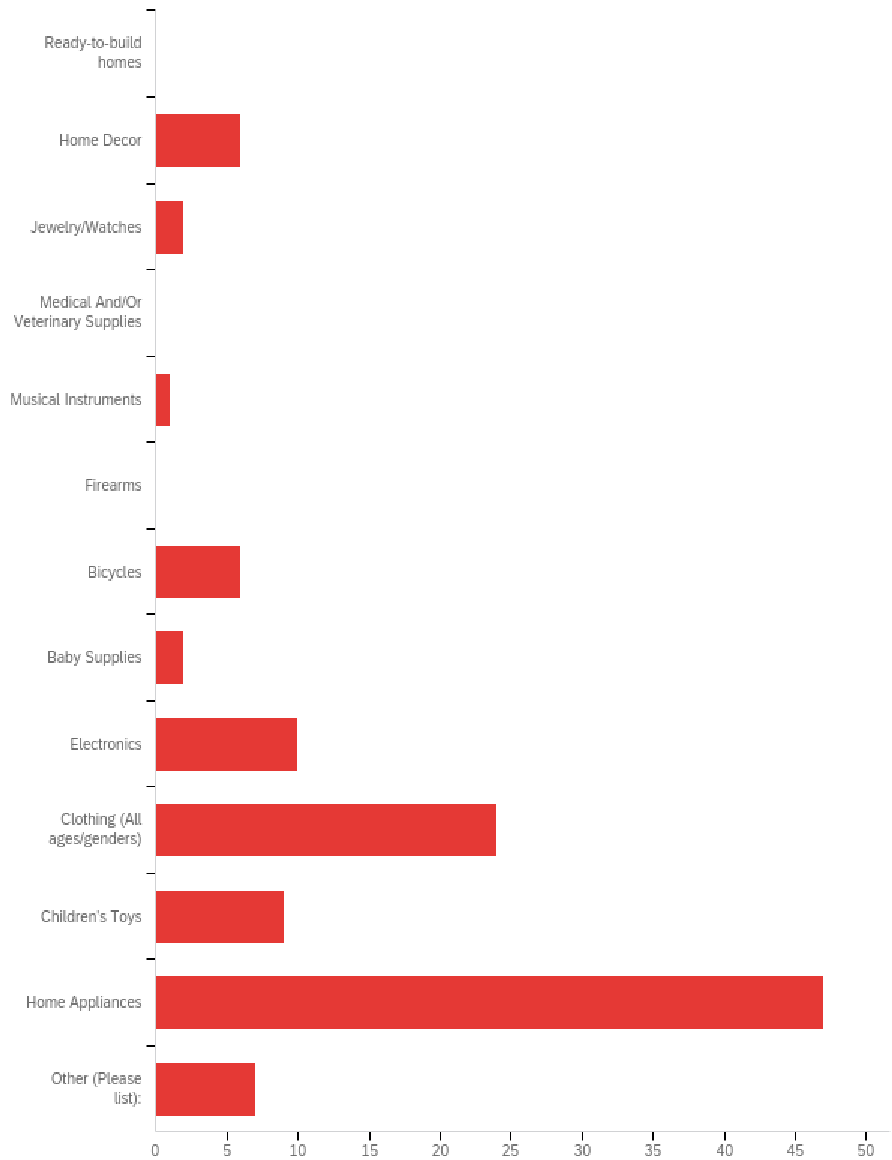

Chart 2- Preferred Purchases Made at a Physical Sears Location by Survey Participants

Relating to Sears in general, 47.30% said they were most likely to shop with Sears during the Winter season, and 88.73% said they did so only once a month or less. This may further illustrate the role the catalog played during the Christmas season and within Sears' overall retail branding strategy. Shown in Chart 3, when asked why one stopped shopping at Sears, 22.88% selected "the catalog was discontinued" and 33.05% said that there was no physical store in their area.

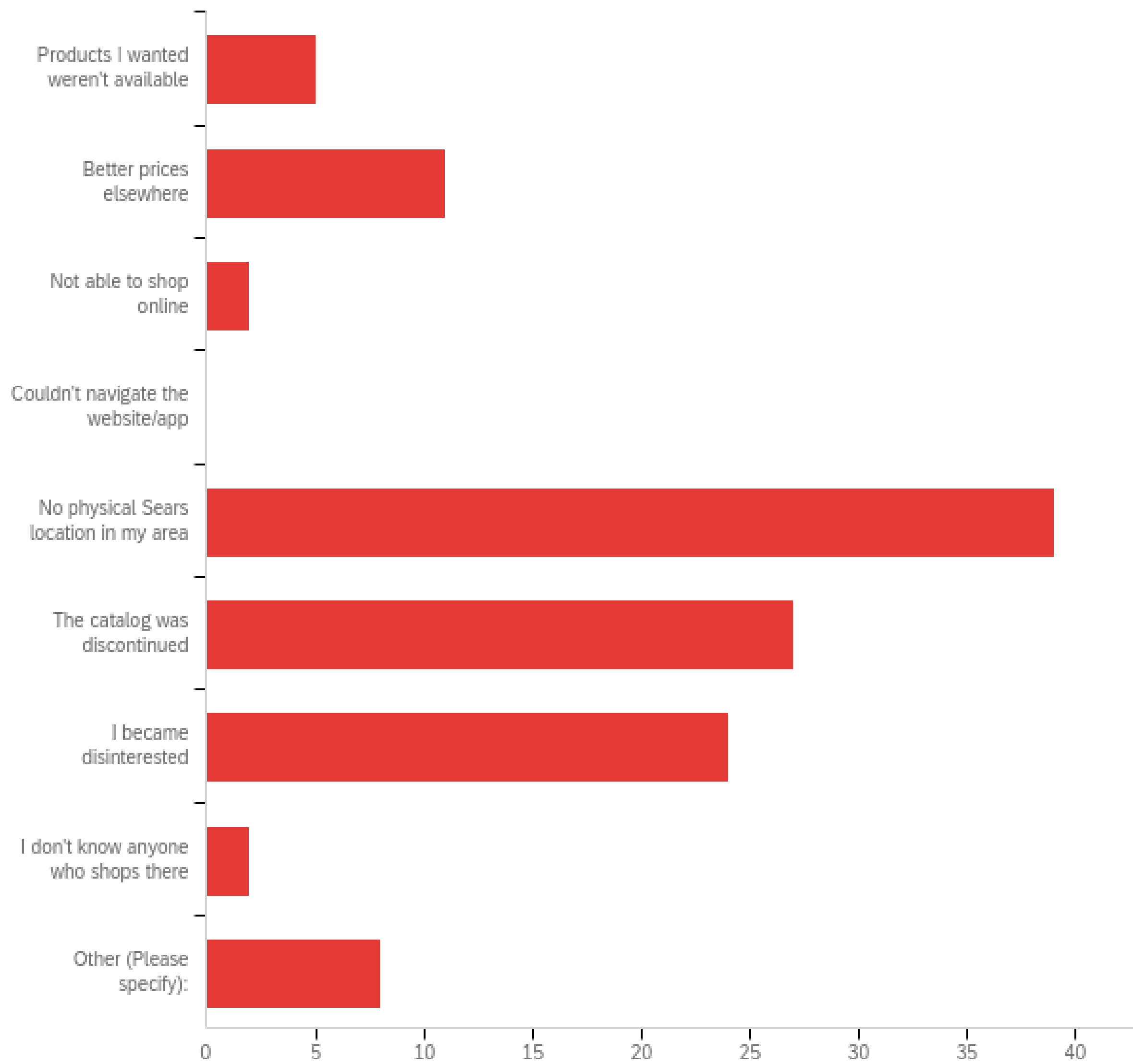

Chart 3- Survey Participants' Reasons for Not Shopping at Sears

Lastly, respondents were able to select from a list of companies that if not Sears, they would want to shop whether in-person or online. Amazon was the most popular replacement with 47.95%, followed by Walmart with 17.81%. It must be noted that other choices that fall under the “anchor store” category that Sears once occupied, such as JC Penney and Macy’s, were only selected a combined 6.85% of the time. Stores known for home appliances, such as Home Depot and Lowe’s, were only selected a combined 21.92% of the time. When asked to give a brief explanation of their choice with an open answer write-in format, most respondents said that they valued ease, convenience, and an expansive selection, in addition to fast delivery. This may reflect how for women, Sears represented value and convenience more than a vast selection of home appliances and tools.

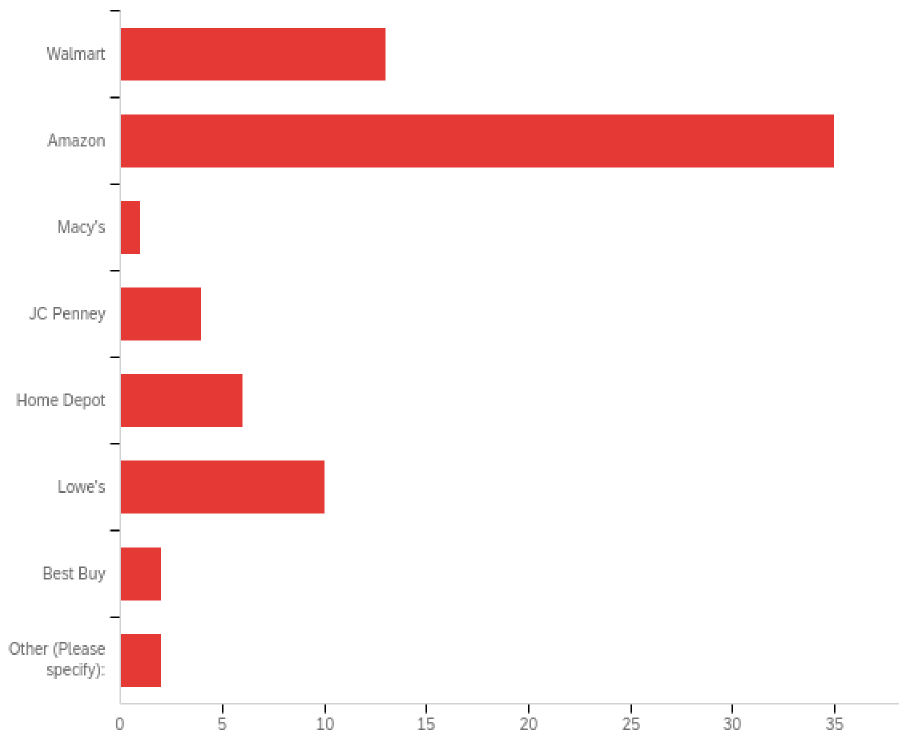

Chart 4- Survey Participants' Preferred Alternative to Sears

Conclusion

Sears, Roebuck & Company's failure to maintain its retail dominance can be better understood by analyzing its marketing behaviors using an Integrated Marketing Communications approach. The integration of marketing, advertising, public relations, social media, and consumer analytics encourages better communication of the brand's image between the company and the consumer. While Sears fulfilled some aspects of an IMC campaign, it was the failure to place equal focus on all necessary communications tools that allowed the brand to fade from the minds of the American consumer.

While social media marketing did not exist, Sears had succeeded as early as the 1960s by using other integrated marketing practices. The Vincent Price Collection of Fine Art is a perfect example of the company's administration using multiple communication channels to convey a more upscale image to its consumers. Not only was there a direct marketing effort through a collection-specific catalog, but Sears incorporated the collection into retail spaces by placing the art throughout the stores. Company leaders also began to place an emphasis on public relations at this time, another IMC touchpoint, through its use of sponsorships.

Many additional lessons can be learned through the failure of the "Softer Side of Sears" campaign and the years following. While emphasis was placed on advertising mediums such as television commercials, the integration of the campaign within stores was weak and received poorly by the public. Additionally, the catalog's cancellation was a direct marketing step in the wrong direction. Both instances illustrate a missed opportunity for consumer research. A necessary aspect in the beginning stages of an integrated marketing communications campaign, researching the target audience provides crucial insight needed to establish the strategies used within a well-executed campaign. The decision to stop catalog distribution instead of modernizing it or using its reputation to the company's advantage was a quick decision that could have been prevented had company leaders paid attention to their customers perceptions of the brand.

The decisions made by Sears executives leading up to its bankruptcy were not consumer focused. Sears failed by carrying out marketing efforts that were not based in research, lacked a multi-platform communication strategy, and were motivated by short-term profitability. Maintaining focus within the retail division and adopting multi-channel marketing strategies could have prevented the company from being forced to make cost-cutting decisions that further prevented its success, such as the selling of Craftsman, Land's End, and neglecting its stores' need for aesthetic updates.

The importance of utilizing integrated marketing communications can be learned through Sears and Roebuck's story. The company rose through direct marketing efforts yet fell due to a lack of a cohesive strategy across its other communications channels. By being too diversified, Sears was not able to create and execute an integrated plan necessary for attaining retail sales growth in an evolving market. Today, the company is still trying to pick up the pieces as the remaining Sears outlets battle to stay afloat. Sears is fighting its way out of quicksand, and Amazon just shipped a holiday toy catalog to millions of American households.

Bibliography

Auslin, M. (2008, July 16). Tears for Sears | American Enterprise Institute - AEI. *American Enterprise Institute.* Retrieved May 5, 2023, from https://www.aei.org/articles/tears-for-sears-2/

Bachmann, L. P. (1976). Julius Rosenwald. *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 66(1), 89–105. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23880425.

Berkun, A. (n.d.). Parcel Post Stamps. *National Postal Museum*. Retrieved March 25, 2023, from https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibition/about-us-stamps-special-use-stamps/parcel-post-stamps#:~:text=On%20August%2024th%2C%201912%2C%20the,parcels%20throughout%20the%20United%20States.

Brown, E. N. (2021, June 10). Sears once offered mail-order tombstones. *Atlas Obscura*. Retrieved April 21, 2023, from https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/sears-once-offered-mailorder-tombstones.

Burch, C. (2022, November 10). Sears emerges from bankruptcy with 22 stores left: Here's where they're located. *NJ.* Retrieved March 20, 2023, from https://www.nj.com/business/2022/11/sears-emerges-from-bankruptcy-with-22-stores-left-heres-where-theyre-located.html.

Carpenter, D. (2005, March 15). Report: Sears seeking buyer for Lands' end. *The Seattle Times*. Retrieved May 4, 2023, from https://www.seattletimes.com/business/report-sears-seeking-buyer-for-lands-end/

Cooper, C. (2022, January 23). Sears, Roebuck catalogs changed retail a century ago. *Orleans Hub*. Retrieved March 12, 2023, from https://orleanshub.com/sears-roebuck-catalogs-changed-retail-a-century-ago/

Davis, S. G. (2001). Shopping. In R. Maxwell (Ed.), Culture Works: The Political Economy of Culture (NED-New edition, Vol. 18, pp. 163–196). *University of Minnesota Press.* http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.cttts95w.9

Davidson, R. A. (2011). Parks, Malls, and The Art of War. *Yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers*, 73, 27–51. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24043308.

DeLuca, L. (2023, January 26). Before folding 30 years ago, the Sears Catalog sold some surprising products. *Smithsonian*. Retrieved March 10, 2023, from https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/before-folding-30-years-ago-the-sears-catalog-sold-some-surprising-products-180981504/

D'Innocenzio, A. (2004, November 18). Retail Giants merge. *Spartanburg Herald Journal*. Retrieved May 6, 2023, from https://www.goupstate.com/story/news/2004/11/18/retail-giants-merge/29738842007/

Gigantino , A. (n.d.). Suburban Sprawl: The Greatest Social Change of Post-World War II America. *La Salle University Digital Commons*. Retrieved March 20, 2023, from https://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1099&context=the_histories

Gordon, R. J. (2016). WHAT THEY ATE AND WORE AND WHERE THEY BOUGHT IT. In The Rise and Fall of American Growth: The U.S. Standard of Living since the Civil War (REV-Revised, pp. 62–93). *Princeton University Press*. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvc77bwm.6.

Halzack, S. (2023, April 8). The big missteps that brought an American retail icon to the edge of collapse. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved March 20, 2023, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/capitalbusiness/the-big-missteps-that-brought-an-american-retail-icon-to-the-edge-of-collapse/2017/06/01/19f4bee4-35a3-11e7-b4ee-434b6d506b37_story.html

Hays, C. L. (2002, November 10). Business; a bet on credit cards becomes messy at Sears. *The New York Times*. Retrieved March 24, 2023, from https://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/10/business/business-a-bet-on-credit-cards-becomes-messy-at-sears.html

Hilton, M. (2009). Cold War Shoppers: Consumerism As State Project. In Prosperity for All: Consumer Activism in an Era of Globalization (1st ed., pp. 51–74). *Cornell University Press*. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt7v8zp.6.

Hoover, G. (2019, January 31). Marketing lessons from the slow death of Sears. *Apogee Results*. Retrieved March 26, 2023, from https://www.apogeeresults.com/the-marketing-lessons-of-sears-roebuck/

Hoover, G. (2022, November 28). Magnanimous merchant: Julius Rosenwald. *Archbridge Institute*. Retrieved May 3, 2023, from https://www.archbridgeinstitute.org/magnanimous-merchant-julius-rosenwald/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=magnanimous-merchant-julius-rosenwald

Hortaçsu, A., & Syverson, C. (2015). The Ongoing Evolution of US Retail: A Format Tug-of-War. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 29(4), 89–111. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43611012

Howard, V. (2017, July 25). The rise and fall of Sears. *Smithsonian*. Retrieved March 1, 2023, from https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/rise-and-fall-sears-180964181/

Howland, D. (2022, November 10). 12 digital natives that have learned to love old-fashioned retail. *Retail Dive*. Retrieved March 25, 2023, from https://www.retaildive.com/news/DTC-digital-natives-expand-traditional-retail-brick-and-mortar/635796/

Jacoby, S. M. (1997). Changing Styles: Sears Roebuck. In Modern Manors: Welfare Capitalism since the New Deal (pp. 95–142). *Princeton University Press*. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7sb1n.9

Jones, W. H. (1977, November 8). Telling selected chairman in surprise move at Sears. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved March 26, 2023, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/business/1977/11/08/telling-selected-chairman-in-surprise-move-at-sears/888d65c5-5146-4a16-b65b-636f2bfc1bd6/

Kelleher, K. (2018, October 15). The rise and fall of Sears: A timeline from its founding to its bankruptcy. *Yahoo!* Retrieved March 25, 2023, from https://www.yahoo.com/video/rise-fall-sears-timeline-founding-234747651.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAACbAvcig1KwAqwwnQjWhaexW2PfYxsx81H-Be9RvSQ-wuBU-oNdkgZnhXJ9bO4DO4R83GIOQgJe8JNOKpIDcjTrS9DByUlqxXN9TP3xy5iQyKnvogT_n91i2P__X47YwIxMgjyINWMQdz9NsZrmJowmGWLHJ9O1cOnXIPVNfkVbW

Kociemba, D. (2014). From Beneath You, It Foreshadows: Why Buffy’s First Season Matters. In R. V. WILCOX, T. R. COCHRAN, C. MASSON, & D. LAVERY (Eds.), Reading Joss Whedon (pp. 22–39). *Syracuse University Press*. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1j2n7v0.7

Kuykendall, L. (1999). The software side of Sears. *Credit Card Management*, 12(7), 26-35. http://umiss.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/software-side-sears/docview/201186852/se-2

Lachance, D. (2018, October 18). Why the Sears Digital Marketing Strategy was a bust. *CMSC.* Retrieved February 12, 2023, from https://www.cms-connected.com/News-Archive/October-2018/Why-The-Sears-Digital-Marketing-Strategy-Was-A-Bust

Library of Congress. (n.d.). Guide to People, Organizations, and Topics in Prosperity and Thrift. *Prosperity and Thrift*: Guide C-F. Retrieved March 24, 2023, from https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/coolhtml/coolencf.html

Logie, J. (2020, July 31). The Great Marketing Deregulation. *Medium*. Retrieved March 20, 2023, from https://bettermarketing.pub/the-great-marketing-deregulation-2125a0efe094

Lublin, J. (2000, September 11). Sears Taps Insider Alan Lacy To Be New President and CEO. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved May 4, 2023, from https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB968620776678235700

Longstreth, R. (2006). Sears, Roebuck and the Remaking of the Department Store, 1924-42. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 65(2), 238–279. https://doi.org/10.2307/25068266

Makowski, E. M. (2008). Sears, Roebuck Catalog. In M. WALKER & J. C. COBB (Eds.), The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 11: Agriculture and Industry (pp. 196–198). *University of North Carolina Press*. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469616681_walker.63

McKean, H. (2014). Catalogs, Consumerism, and Catering to the Middle Class: How Sears Sold Fine Art in the 1960s (Order No. 1554322). Available from ProQuest One Academic. (1518116296). http://umiss.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/catalogs-consumerism-catering-middle-class-how/docview/1518116296/se-2

Meyer, Z. (2017, March 22). Timeline: Sears' Rise and Fall as Nation's Top Retailer. *USA Today*. Retrieved 2023, from http://umiss.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/timeline-sears-rise-fall-as-nations-top-retailer/docview/1879778372/se-2.

Plaza, S. (2020, September 14). The history of malls in the U.S. *Sunset Plaza*. Retrieved March 21, 2023, from https://sunsetplaza.com/the-history-of-malls-in-the-u-s/

Pham, M. T. (2011). The Right to Fashion in the Age of Terrorism. *Signs*, 36(2), 385–410. https://doi.org/10.1086/655979

Provost, S. H. (2021). The Great American Shopping Experience: The history of American retail from Main Street to the Mall. *Craven Street Books*.

Pruitt, S. (2018, October 16). An ode to the massive Sears Catalog, which even delivered houses by mail. *History*. Retrieved March 2, 2023, from https://www.history.com/news/sears-catalog-houses-hubcaps

Rahman, N., & Eisner, A. B. (2007). KMART-SEARS MERGER OF 2005. *Journal of the International Academy for Case Studies*, 13(3), 113-133. http://umiss.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/kmart-sears-merger-2005/docview/216277167/se-2

Rumore, K. (2021, September 16). Sears Timeline: Rise, fall and restructuring of a Chicago icon over 130 years. *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved March 20, 2023, from https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-sears-company-history-timeline-htmlstory.html

Sofrep. (2022, May 23). The time when George Patton bought WWII supplies from Sears with his own money. *SOFREP*. Retrieved March 15, 2023, from https://sofrep.com/news/the-time-when-george-patton-bought-wwii-supplies-from-sears-with-his-own-money/

Sorkin, A. R. (2003, July 16). Sears to sell card portfolio to Citigroup for $3 Billion. *The New York Times*. Retrieved May 4, 2023, from https://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/16/business/sears-to-sell-card-portfolio-to-citigroup-for-3-billion.html

Store choice. (1996). Chain Store Age, Suppl.Section 3)*Shopping Chicago*, , 10B-12B. http://umiss.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/store-choice/docview/222093957/se-2

St-James, Y. (2001). Retail Brand Positioning: An Historical Analysis. *OJS Library*. Retrieved 2023, from www.ojs.library.carleton.ca

Strom, S. (1993, January 26). Sears eliminating its catalogues and 50,000 jobs. *The New York Times*. Retrieved March 5, 2023, from https://www.nytimes.com/1993/01/26/business/sears-eliminating-its-catalogues-and-50000-jobs.html

Thomas, L. (2018, October 12). Here are 5 things Sears got wrong that sped its fall. *CNBC*. Retrieved February 20, 2023, from https://www.cnbc.com/2018/10/11/here-are-5-things-sears-got-wrong-that-sped-its-fall.html

Torman, M. (n.d.). Blog: The slow burn of digital transformation and the downfall of Sears. *Cleo*. Retrieved March 15, 2023, from https://www.cleo.com/blog/downfall-of-sears#:~:text=It%20also%20prioritized%20selling%20some,came%20to%20Sears'%20online%20services.

Transform SR Brands, LLC. (2012, March 21). Sears Archives, history. Sears Archives Home Page. Retrieved March 10, 2023, from http://www.searsarchives.com/catalogs/history_wishbook.htm

Tuttle, B. (2014, August 15). 8 amazing things people said when online shopping was born 20 years ago. *Money*. Retrieved March 18, 2023, from https://money.com/online-shopping-history-anniversary/

Weiss, A. M., Anderson, E., & MacInnis, D. J. (1999). Reputation Management as a Motivation for Sales Structure Decisions. *Journal of Marketing*, 63(4), 74–89. https://doi.org/10.2307/1251975

Worthy, J. C. (1980). Sears Roebuck: General Robert E. Wood's Retail Strategy. *Business and Economic History*, 9, 61–73. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23702671

Witkowski, T. H. (1998). The American Consumer Home Front During World War H. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 25(1), 568–573.

Wynn, N. A. (1996). The "Good War": The Second World War and Postwar American Society. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 31(3), 463–482. http://www.jstor.org/stable/261016.

Appendix

IRB Determination

Savannah:

This is to inform you that your application to conduct research with human participants, “Honors Thesis: In the last 10 years, the purchasing habits of the American consumer have changed drastically. Was the demise in the popularity of Sears a reflection of their inability to adapt to consumer trends?" (Protocol #23x-248), has been determined as Exempt under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2). You may proceed with your research.

Please remember that all of The University of Mississippi’s human participant research activities, regardless of whether the research is subject to federal regulations, must be guided by the ethical principles in The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research.

It is especially important for you to keep these points in mind:

• You must protect the rights and welfare of human research participants.

• Certain changes to your approved protocol must be reviewed and approved before initiating those changes. These changes include the addition of a vulnerable subject group (children, persons with disabilities, and prisoners), as well as the addition of research materials, such as the addition of surveys or interview questions and test articles, the addition of the use of deception, or any changes to subject confidentiality. Personnel amendments for exempt protocols are no longer required. Instead, PIs are responsible for keeping an up to date record of all active personnel and for ensuring that personnel have completed the necessary training to be on their protocol.

• You must report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others.

• If research is to be conducted during class, the PI must email the instructor and ask if they wish to see the protocol materials (surveys, interview questions, etc) prior to research beginning.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the IRB at irb@olemiss.edu.