

Shopping for Sustainability: Whole Foods Market and the Contradictions of Corporate Organics

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Abstract

With the rise of organic products in the past thirty years, the marketing of organics has been an interest amongst recent scholarship. With stores such as Wal-Mart, Safeway and Target carrying organic products on their shelves, it is clear that organic food has broken into the mainstream marketplace. Whole Foods Market (WFM), which is self-titled “America’s Healthiest Grocery Store,” has championed the organic movement and has become a brand associated with clean, healthy eating and locally grown and sustainable models of agricultural production. As consumers cruise through the colorful aisles and read WFM’s pamphlets about the importance of ethical shopping, organic eating is simplified, making political consumerism seemingly easier than ever before. In this study, I conduct a content, discourse and spatial analysis to investigate how the corporate grocery chain markets its organic products. I also reveal the problems associated with “beyond organic” labeling and assess the transition from the original organic movement of the 1960s and 1970s to the domination of the corporate model of agriculture in the organic food processing system today. My findings suggest that the marketing of organic food needs to be more closely examined by researchers, as corporate entities increasingly take advantage of popular ethical and sustainable business practices. The perceived transparency involved in purchasing food has created a false sense of security for consumers that needs to be addressed. The political, social and environmental implications of this study indicate that the business sector needs to play a more involved role in protecting our planet and those who inhabit it. The concept of corporate social responsibility is too often used to drive profits, rather than to truly make a difference in our world. Additionally, this study sheds light on the power that corporations have in influencing regulatory policy.

Keywords: *organic; big organic; corporate organic; social sustainability; Whole Foods Market; organic food policy; marketing; corporate social responsibility; food processing; beyond organic labeling; corporate influence; environmentalism; USDA*

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Introduction: From Our Head to Our Feet, We Are What We Eat

Food has become a contested concept in society; consumers, corporations and government elites struggle and compete to define food production and practices. With fair trade standards, organic labeling, and sustainable farming practices to think about, consumers have a lot to digest when it comes to buying food for themselves and their families. The organic food industry has grown immensely in the past thirty years, turning organic brands and products into household names. The Organic Trade Association (OTA) reports that U.S. consumer sales of organic products in 2014 exceeded \$39 billion in organic sales. \$35.9 billion can be accredited to organic food, up 11% from the previous year. In terms of total U.S. food sales, organic sales represented almost 5% (Organic Trade Association, 2015). While it might be hard to grasp the scale of organic foods in the market by looking at revenue, it is telling that 51% of families are buying more organic products in 2015 than in 2014. An OTA survey on U.S. families' organic attitudes and beliefs revealed that 83% of parents surveyed purchased organic products sometimes and 97% of those parents purchase organic fruits and vegetables (OTA, 2015). Clearly, organic foods have made a mark in our supermarkets.

With the rise of organic products in the past thirty years, the marketing of organics has been an interest amongst recent scholarship (Johnston, 2008; Hall, 2008; Johnston et al., 2009). With stores such as Wal-Mart, Safeway and Target carrying organic products on their shelves, it is clear that organic food has broken into the mainstream marketplace. Whole Foods Market (WFM), which is self-titled "America's Healthiest Grocery Store," has championed the organic movement and has become a brand associated with clean, healthy eating and locally grown and sustainable models of agricultural production. As consumers cruise through the colorful aisles and read WFM's pamphlets about the importance of ethical shopping, organic eating is

simplified, making political consumerism seemingly easier than ever before. This study was inspired by a desire to uncover the clever marketing tactics that are used by corporations whose bottom line is to drive profits. The original organic movement of the 1960s and 1970s is channeled in today's organic marketing practices, but is ignored in the overall food processing system. In order to demonstrate the disconnect between the original organic movement and today's clever marketing tactics, I begin by breaking down the surrounding scholarship of organic products. I then discuss the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) definition of organic in order to shed light on the characteristics of an organic product. I chose WFM for my case study because of its position as America's first national Certified Organic grocer and its multifaceted marketing tactics. I begin by giving an overview of WFM as a company, identifying its origins, competition and growth. My intent is not to vilify WFM for its role in the growth of corporate organics, but to illustrate how corporations use themes present within the original organic movement to help sell their products, bringing into question the concept of corporate social responsibility. After my overview of WFM, I then explain my content, discourse and spatial analysis of the company. For my content analysis, I reviewed a series of emails blasts and blog posts, coding the content for various themes, which will be discussed in detail later on. I supplement my content analysis with a discourse and spatial analysis, in which I draw conclusions from a site visit I made to the Lincoln Park WFM in Chicago, Illinois. Together, my content, discourse and spatial analysis allow me to draw conclusions about WFM's brand voice and marketing tactics, as well as propose suggestions for future research.

My extensive research on WFM and the rise of corporate organics has led me to conclude that our society needs more transparency in regards to the food processing system. The false

sense of clarity that consumers are given through current food labels and marketing suggests that food corporations and grocers are being dishonest about the products on their shelves. This concern is crucial in terms of the health of not only consumers, but also the environment. This paper deconstructs the tactics involved in the marketing of organic products in the hopes that consumers, journalists and researchers will work to guarantee a more transparent food processing industry and will hold corporations accountable for the claims and promises they make consumers. Moreover, this study will expose ways in which corporations can co-opt social movements, such as food and environmental movements, through their marketing techniques.

Literature Review

Consumer demand for organic food is increasing year after year with more consumers seemingly interested in knowing the details of the food they put into their bodies. However, the marketing of organic products has become strategic and predictable, relying on symbols built upon green pastures and sustainable family farms regardless of the actual conditions of farming practices (Hall, 2008; Edible Ideologies, 2008, 149-178; Johnston et al., 2009). Various scholarly research has focused on the dilution of the definition of organic, examining the creation of the National Organic Program (NOP) and National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) within the USDA during the 1990s (Jafee & Howard, 2009, Howard & Allen, 2006). It is important to understand that in the U. S. the term organic is controlled, defined, and distributed by the USDA. Regulations detailing organic production requirements are sophisticated and complex. With the state in control over organic standards and certification, “it leaves the standards highly vulnerable to political interference on behalf of specific industries and even specific companies” (Jaffe & Howard, 2009, 396). Essentially, lobbyists, on behalf of companies interested in

changing organic standards, “bypass the NOSB to cut back room deals that surface only at the last minute in Congressional riders” (Jaffe & Howard, 2009, 394).

The Organic Foods Production of 1990 (OFPA) established the NOSB to formulate the national organic standards and make recommendations to the USDA. The NOSB toured the country, listening to the inputs of various constituents and submitted recommendations to the USDA from 1994 to 1996 (Vos, 2000). Despite the NOSB’s efforts, the OFPA was influenced by “powerful interests who stood to benefit from reducing the transaction costs of dealing with different certifying agencies when marketing nationally” (Jaffe & Howard, 2009, 390).

Therefore, the first draft of the national organic standards rule released in 1997 proposed allowing what is referred to as the “Big Three”: irradiation, sewage sludge, and genetically engineered organisms in certified organic food (Jaffe & Howard, 2009, 390). Not surprisingly, tensions arose between the USDA and organic producers and activists after the release of the first ruling proposal. The organic community came to oppose USDA organic standards, seeing the standards as “being written by and for conventional agribusiness and as an ‘apparent attempt to subvert the organic farming movement by calling into question its most basic premises’” (Getz et al., 2008, 488). After nearly five years, a third draft of the organic rule went into effect as the final rule in 2002. This draft made compromises with the organic community, putting forth a rule that excluded the Big Three and various other unacceptable inputs such as antibiotics, synthetic fertilizers, and pesticides, but at the same time allowing the organic standards to disregard the original defining components and higher ideals of the organic movement (Jaffe & Howard, 2009, 390). In 2002, the original organic movement was officially co-opted by the state and big business through the regulatory process.

The organic movement began as a counterculture to the food industry during the 1960s and 1970s. Scholar Warren J. Belasco traces the origins of this counterculture, rooting the original use of the word organic to three ideas: therapeutic self-enhancement, consumerist self-protection, and alternative production (Belasco, 2007, 69). Living organically meant understanding that everything was inherently connected through nature – especially food. Food production and consumption wasn't a "zone for intense competition but rather...an opportunity for cooperation, 'sharing,' or 'networking'" (Belasco, 2007, 100-101). Belasco documents one strand of the organic movement that viewed food as a fundamental right. The other strand saw food as an individual health issue. Thus, this later group, according to Belasco, opened the way for corporations to use the regulatory process to define health and organics (Belasco, 2007). Johnston et al. connect the dots between Belasco's examination of the counterculture and the eventual passage of the organic standards rule in 2002, defining the political struggle during the path to regulation as a process in which "organic" was transformed from a guiding philosophy with higher principles to a regulatory label (Johnston et al., 2009). Furthermore, the label watered down the foundational beliefs that the counterculture was founded upon. This watering down of organic production and distribution exploited and simplified the organic movement, until it was indecipherable by those who had created the movement in the first place. It also made it easier for global corporations to break into the organic market without changing their fundamental practices of organic production.

A concept largely associated with the original organic movement is food democracy, which is concerned with creating a transparent and sustainable food processing system. Johnston et al. define the core principle of food democracy as active participation in shaping the food system because eating is a political act, and therefore, citizens should have power over food

policies and practices, rather than remaining passive spectators (Johnston et al., 2009, 514). The organic movement acted as a manifestation of food democracy and sought to connect people to their food through the creation of people's meaningful relationships with farmers, communities, coops and urban neighborhoods (Johnston et al., 2009, 514). This stood in contrast to agro-food corporations in which consumption is removed from the process of production. Additionally, Johnston et al. state that universal access to safe and nutritious food, fair wages and living conditions for laborers and farmers, and localization of the food system are components of food democracy.

The meaning of organic shifted from an idealistic set of principles to a set of standards that shed the foundations of an entire culture. Yet, rather than crumble beneath the weight of change, organic products in the U.S. are doing better than ever before. How is this so? The meaning of "organic" has changed on a federal level. The USDA's definition has revolutionized the organic movement, redefining a way of life to a set of standards that have made it possible for corporations to enter the game through influencing and lobbying governmental elites. The original term has essentially been diluted from government regulations and standards, thereby changing the mainstream cultural perception of what organic products entail. For example, various studies have noted the consumer phenomenon of equating organic labeling with environmentally conscious and sustainable practices (Müller et al., 2015; Bauer et al., 2011). This is problematic because consumer's willingness to pay for organic food is based upon their misconceptions of the food processing industry (Janssen et al., 2012). While the original organic movement relied on an adherence to sustainability, the USDA's definition and labeling of certified organic food only pertains to the existence of pesticides, synthetic chemicals, hormones, antibiotics and genetic modifications in food, rather than signifying that the food was processed

using a set of ethical standards. As consumers believe organic products to be associated with environmentally practices, they engage in the behavioral pattern referred to as “green consumerism,” a trend in which consumers seek to buy products that are environmentally friendly and sustainable (Hall, 2008; Pino et al., 2012). A strong influencer in purchasing intention, it is important for consumers to take the time to learn the official meaning behind “certified organic” labels before making their purchasing decisions so that they don’t assume organic labeling represents sustainable or environmentally friendly practices. The ethical decisions in buying organic only go so far, essentially having no influence on labor practices or sustainability (Pino et al., 2012).

Organic labeling is a very important factor to consumers when choosing which brands and products to buy (Giannakas, 2002). A 2014 market research report conducted by Packaged Facts revealed that “organic” claims can appeal to “consumers’ social consciences by sending a message that the products are better for the environment and for the workers who produce them. Many natural/organic foods and beverages also support other ideals and ethics, such as family farms and human treatment of farm animals” (Porjes, 2014a, 6). In the U.S., organic labeling has a three-tiered system in accordance with the NOP. According to *The Encyclopedia of Lifestyle Medicine and Health*, the three types of organic labeling are to distinguish the various levels of organic content in a product: “The ‘100% organic’ statement may be used on raw products as well as multi-ingredient processed products in which all ingredients, including food additives, are organic. ‘Organic’ may be used on multi-ingredient products in which 95% to 100% of the ingredients are produced in accordance with NOP. In such products, the nonorganic products must be nonagricultural products such as flavoring, coloring, or other food additives or agricultural products that are not available in an organic form. The label ‘made with organic

ingredients' may be used for multi-ingredient products that contain 70% to 95% organic ingredients" (Merrigan & Obadia, 2012).

It is important to note that food stamped with a USDA "organic" label applies to a limited set of ideals present in the original organic movement. Today's labels have no relation to ethical criteria, such as the humane-raising of animals, socially just working practices, or sustainable farming practices. It's more than likely that the organic products you see on shelves at Whole Foods and Wal-Mart are grown in a foreign country hundreds of miles away. Various academic scholars have researched the efforts and implications for "beyond organic" labeling, in which new labeling schemes would provide more telling information to consumers (Allen et al., 2006; Getz et al., 478). These organic labels would alert consumers to other organic criteria such as local, humane, living-wage, US-grown and small-scale, however much consideration has remained on an academic and activist level rather than expanding to testing in the wider consumer market (Allen et al., 2006). Simply by viewing these five criteria, the contradictions already start to come to light. How can corporations promise consumers that food will be grown locally when they sell to grocery stores all across the nation? How are chickens allowed to roam free and graze naturally when a corporation's bottom line is to constantly produce? How can food be made on a small-scale when a national corporation is in charge? The organic industry is not just organic – it's big organic, and the "big" makes all the difference when you're dealing with a set of ideals stemming from the belief in food democracy. New York Times reporter Stephanie Strom examines the oversizing of the organic industry, stating, "The fact is, organic food has become a wildly lucrative business for Big Food and a premium-price-means-premium profit section of the grocery store. The industry's image – contented cows grazing on green hills of family-owned farms – is mostly pure fantasy. Or rather, pure marketing" (Strom, 2012).

Essentially, because organic food is owned by the same corporations of big, processed foods, the organic industry has become big, processed organics. For example, the fuel and energy it takes to transport organic foods in the national market eliminates the original organic movement's stance on only buying local food. Organic food cannot be produced on a local, small-scale farm when the products need to fill supermarket shelves across the nation.

Philip Howard traces the consolidation and co-optation of the organic food-processing sector from 1997 to 2007 by revealing food-processing transactions through discreet acquisitions and strategic alliances (Howard, 2009). The top 30 food processors including Kraft, Pepsi, Hershey Foods, Heinz, Kellogg, General Mills and many others, create an illusion of choice in the marketplace. These food giants fail to make their organic products' ownership ties apparent on the labels, which is a practice referred to as "stealth ownership" of organic products (Howard, 2009). The lack of transparency at supermarkets allows consumers to disassociate organic products with big corporations, effectively rendering the term "big organic" as nonexistent in the minds of consumers. In reality, the truth of the identity of organic parent companies are hidden through strategic marketing tactics. This clever trend creates a supermarket of illusions. We vote with our dollars, but for the same candidates over and over again, believing that our power of choice is greater than ever before. Howard explains that the North American organic processing sector has consolidated rapidly since the USDA's control of national organic standards, stating that "it is increasingly dominated by concentrations of capital, with 14 of the top 20 food processors in North America either acquiring an organic brand (horizontal integration) or introducing one of their own (concentric diversification) (Howard, 2009, 26-27). While co-optation and consolidation are not new concepts in the food processing industry, what makes this

case so interesting is the inherent contradictions present within big organics and the fact that these contradictions are rarely challenged, or even noticed, by everyday consumers.

Organic has become a term with multiple meanings. What started as a complex concept and ideal for the food processing industry became a carefully regulated term by the USDA, stripping it down to a few contingencies. The legitimacy products with the USDA “Certified Organic Grower” label have in supermarkets is significant, but what consumers are not questioning is the meaning of the label itself. While consumers tend not to be aware of food processing mergers and acquisitions, this unawareness is especially important in the organic sector. If a corporation is producing organically grown fruit without pesticides and conventionally grown fruit with pesticides, how can that corporation be truly committed to providing organic products to consumers? Its organic products are merely another source of revenue rather than a product that consumers can look to buy to create the food processing change that they were advertised. This is not to suggest that all corporations are unethical deceivers, but to shed light on the fact that all corporations’ bottom lines are to generate revenue – not to uproot the food processing sector or to create substantial change. Understanding this can help in revealing why the organic movement has been co-opted and why the term organic is so contested in society. Big organic has co-opted the original organic movement, and with more money and power than grassroots food democracy proponents, corporations are the only ones in control.

While organic food does have benefits over conventionally grown food in terms of pesticide levels, there are various implications of big organic food that need to be considered. Journalist and author Michael Pollan asserts that the big disruption model of organics is the only way to get organic products into mainstream grocers so that everyday consumers can partake in

eating less pesticides (Pollan, 2006). While this might be true, Getz et al. site labor violations as one of the prices of organic food. Their study on class politics and agricultural exceptionalism in California's organic agricultural movement reveals an inherent tension between organic food and labor, challenging widely held assumptions that organic agriculture embodies a more socially sustainable form of production (Getz et al., 2008). Get et al. argue that "with respect to stoop labor, conditions may be worse on organic farms, since the work of synthetic chemicals is often replaced by human labor" (Getz et al., 2008, 484). Stoop labor is agricultural labor performed in a squatting or sitting position and is responsible for debilitating back injuries of farm workers. However, because of the rise in labor intensive organic fruits and vegetables and a loophole in legislation from 1975 that banned the short-handed hoe as an occupational hazard, stoop labor persists on many California farms (Getz et al., 2008). Working conditions on these farms do not resemble the marketing of friendly, organic family farms, but consist of back breaking work in the hot California sun. While organic food does have an advantage over conventionally grown food in regards to the level of pesticides present, are the tensions between labor and big organics the mainstream organic culture that consumers want to perpetuate? The pros and cons of our current organic food processing system must be assessed and evaluated in order to examine if organic food truly has advantages over conventionally grown food.

Whole Foods Market: A Big Organics Case Study

It is clear that the foundations of the organic movement have shifted over time, but an examination of how Big Organics operates within our current culture will now be examined. Trademarked "America's Healthiest Grocery Store," perhaps no other corporation has come to represent organic in the eyes of consumers better than Whole Foods Market (WFM). In 2003, WFM became the first national certified organic grocer in the United States. As explained by

WFM on its website, to earn this certification, WFM “must abide by the USDA’s strict National Organic Program standards, and agree to inspection and review by a third-party Accredited Certifying Agent.” According to Market Watch, the supermarket’s sales and revenue were 15.39 billion in 2015 (Whole Foods Inc., 2016). These numbers are up from its 2014 stats in which the company earned 14.19 billion in sales and revenue.

WFM’s website lists not only information about its products and suppliers, but gives consumers information about its core values, mission and how it makes in impact on the communities that its shops are located in. While this added information is typical of other large grocery chains such as Mariano’s and Wal-Mart, the extent to which WFM describes its core values and its commitment to “Whole Foods, Whole People, Whole Planet” is not typical. With the WFM Declaration of Independence, WFM higher purpose statement and WFM plan for a sustainable future, the chain’s self-stated commitment to changing the world is clear to consumers. Michael Pollan describes shopping at Whole Foods as a “literary experience” in his book “The Omnivore’s Dilemma” (Pollan, 2006, 134). As my content analysis will reveal, an artistic mastery of prose is largely involved in the marketing of WFM products. Pollan classifies this newfound literary genre as the “pastoral narrative in which farm animals live much as they did in the books we read as children, and our fruits and vegetables grow in well-composted soils on small farms” (Pollan, 2006, 137). Pollan is implying that our food is not produced in a natural setting, as supermarket marketing would suggest, but is an illusion presented to us in order to distance us from the true conditions of how our food is produced. The imagery produced by the notion of the idealized family farm is strong enough to discourage further investigation of the food processing system. It is convenient, simple and satisfying to imagine the crow of rooster waking up a family farmers who proceed to milk their happy cows and feed their free range

chickens. Supermarkets, such as WFM harness this sentiment when crafting their marketing materials. As the discourse and spatial analysis will reveal, aggressive and strategic in-store marketing tactics evoke colorful illustrations of farmers to embody the pastoral narrative.

WFM empowers its consumers by teaching them that their purchases are making a difference. Shoppers are not simply choosing what to cook for dinner, but are making decisions that have impactful consequences on the way the food processing industry functions. With signage spread throughout the store championing sustainable farming, environmental stewardship and the humane treatment of farm animals, why should consumers be concerned about the purchases they make within the walls of WFM? The underlying answer lies in WFM's central goal as a corporation: to generate revenue. This goal is so inherently separate from the aims of the organic movement, it is almost surprising how seamless the co-optation has been. WFM boasts of its core values and mission statement as part of its unique selling proposition to consumers, but its economic success is tied to serious compromises and strategic decision-making. Examining some common threads in WFM content and signage will help to reveal this deeper contradiction in big organics.

The purpose of this paper is not to discredit WFM as a grocery chain or to paint it as deceptive or mean-spirited, but to shed light on the bigger issue of consumers' lack of knowledge surrounding the organic food processing industry and the ways corporations are able to assert their power through redefining realities. WFM is certainly not the only grocery chain that has co-opted the organic movement, which was built upon the ideals of food democracy, however, WFM success at this discreet co-optation through clever marketing tactics makes it a prime case study. Josee Johnston and Adam Mack use WFM as case studies for their respective research as well. Johnston examines the citizen-consumer hybrid and its ideological tensions through a

discourse analysis on WFM, while Mack conducts an analysis on WFM and its sensory design (Johnston, 2008; Mack, 2012). While Mack's study will be discussed later on, Johnston's findings are particularly pertinent to setting up the WFM content analysis.

Johnston examines a history of consumer activism by defining four waves of consumer behavior. The fourth wave was built out of an anti-corporate, anti-globalization sentiment in which consumers practiced ethical consumption activism (Johnston, 2008, 236-239). With consumers boycotting corporations using sweatshops, GMOs, and unfriendly environmental practices, corporations were forced to adapt and respond to changing market trends. In the case of food, "ethical consumer strategies seem more like niche marketing opportunities allowing corporations to target privileged, conscientious consumers, than a substantive program for health, sustainability, and social justice at a global scale" (Johnston, 2008, 240). The problem today is that corporations have taken advantage of these marketing opportunities and have exploited beliefs that were once defining components of the organic movement without fundamentally changing production practices. As so many involved in the organic movement have pronounced, organic has become a victim of its own success.

WFM quick growth is largely due to various mergers and acquisitions. In 2007, WFM acquired long time natural supermarket chain competitor Wild Oats Markets, which had \$1.2 billion dollars in annual sales. With the addition of 85 stores through the acquisition, WFM not only eliminated their biggest competitor, but gained immediate entry into 15 new markets and five new states (Porjes, 2014b). WFM is still engaging in the planning of strategic acquisitions and in April 2014, it acquired four New Frontiers Natural Marketplaces stores located in Arizona and California (Porjes, 2014a). Unlike big name food processing brands such as Coca-Cola and Cargill, WFM lists its acquisitions on its website, even providing a brief description of the

original company. This transparency is an example of the extra mile that WFM has gone to promote itself as a brand that consumers can trust.

With the expansion of the WFM brand, its marketing messages have maintained a sense of consistency since the 1990s. Perhaps ahead of its time, WFM has focused on organic and natural products while emphasizing a sense of unrivaled high quality. Packaged Facts' market research on WFM reports that its high product standards, transparency, and business ethics have led to WFM's loyal consumer following. WFM began with a ban on artificial preservatives, colors and flavors and "in March 2013, it announced that that by 2018, it will require all its vendors to label products as to whether or not they contain with GMOs, in part because the USDA has been dragging its feet on issuing rules about labeling" (Porjes, 2014a). Its marketing largely relies on the promotion of "sustainability, responsible sourcing, and the concept that by buying products at its stores, consumers are supporting not just organic foods, but a production model that benefits local farmers, people in third-world countries, and the environment" (Porjes, 2014b). WFM seemingly practices what it preaches through "conscious capitalism," which Packaged Facts describes as when "for-profit businesses work most powerfully by creating a win-win situation for *all* stakeholders including customers, team members, suppliers, investors, society, and the environment" (Porjes, 2014b). In 2015, WFM was ranked 55 on Fortune's annual "100 Best Companies to Work For" list (100 best companies, Fortune). This is WFM's 18th consecutive year on the list.

The organic market's increased success means tougher competition for WFM. As organic products have made their way into conventional supermarket chains, presenting cheaper options for the same "certified organic" food, WFM has seen a dip in their sales. Mackey identifies Trader Joe's as WFM biggest competitor, leading the company to improve price positioning and

promotional activities (Porjes, 2014b). While Trader Joe's generally has a smaller product inventory and exists in a smaller capacity than WFM, its lower price point and original Trader Joe's products have created its own loyal fan base. Trader Joe's quirky personality and similar neighborhood shop feel invite consumers into the store to hunt for treasure, in the form of great deals on food, in the aisles of the store. The competition between these retailers will continue to be fierce as WFM expands its proprietary 365 Everyday Value line of products and begins to open its line of 365 stores by WFM that are geared towards millennial and introduce cheaper organic products into the market. The millennial marketing strategies will be fierce, with 365 by WFM even considering housing tattoo parlors and record shops within 365 stores (Masunaga, 2016).

As the organic market grows, it's important to hold organic grocery stores accountable to the promises they are making customers. WFM acts as a solid case study given its intense and distinct marketing tactics as previously defined. As the next section will demonstrate, WFM has created an experience for shoppers that is reminiscent of food democracy theory concepts, but the chain fails to disrupt the conventional food processing system to the level that its marketing suggests.

Content and Discourse Analysis

Marketing is a necessary component of any business strategy. In a successful company, a marketing strategy will be multi-faceted; messages and images will reach consumers from various different forms of media. WFM's marketing is no different. Its extensive tactics reach consumers from various platforms in-store and out of the store. The following analysis of WFM's marketing tactics is broken down into two parts: The first presents a content analysis of WFM's online communication, including email blasts and blog posts. The second part presents a

discourse analysis of WFM's in-store signage. I have broken up the analysis into two parts given the different timelines of online and in-store marketing. Online marketing can be consistently updated and often WFM posts multiple blog posts in one day. Additionally, email blasts can be sent every few days notifying customers of changing sales and promotions. On the other hand, in-store signage is more systematic. While a large part of the signage is most likely consistent from year to year, new signage is probably implemented on a quarterly or monthly basis. Also, the spatial layout of the store is a more permanent aspect. Given the different time frames, it seemed best to analyze and code email blasts and blog posts while also analyzing the more permanent signage discourse and spatial layout of a WFM store.

Additionally, the discourse analysis examines the language present within WFM's in-store marketing. Language constructs our political and social realities, so an examination of language is critical and essential to a cultural and political analysis (Edelman, 1964). Thus, discourse analysis helps to unpack the power relationships and ideologies that are hidden in the everyday understandings of words in order to decode multiple meanings of texts.

Methodology

In order to limit the scope of materials from the company's email marketing and blog, I examined a 30-day period starting January 13, 2016 and ending February 11, 2016. I chose this 30-day span because I wanted to capture a time period of two months, rather than 30 days of one month, and I wanted to capture the most recent content produced that I could.

WFM email blasts are connected to a WFM store, which the customer identifies, so that the sales and promotional offers sent match the customer with their preferred location. For this experiment, the location used was the DePaul University WFM at 959 W Fullerton Ave, Chicago, IL 60614. I identified this location as the closest WFM to me when signing up for the

emails blasts, however, it can be assumed that the content and messaging of the emails are similar no matter which store the customer identifies, even if the sales and promotions themselves are not. The blog posts are not store specific.

Content Analysis - Email Blasts: Identifying and Assessing the Brand Voice

During the 30-day span, there were exactly 10 emails and 65 blog posts. While emails were mostly centered upon sales and promotions, blog posts gave the company more room to express WFM programs and products. Because of the difference in content and messaging, I used separate coding categories for emails and blog posts. The categories were chosen based upon major themes that were reoccurring throughout the content. The email coding categories are as follows:

Category Title	Definition
Sale/Promotion	Email contained information about a sale or promotion.
Healthy	Email contained the word health or healthy.
Organic	Email contained the word organic or included information about specific organic products.
High Quality/Best	Email contained information stating that WFM or WFM products were of extremely high quality or the best product of its kind.
No Antibiotics	Email listed that a product contained no antibiotics.
No Artificial Flavors, Colors, or Preservatives	Email listed that a product contained no artificial flavors, colors, or preservatives.
No Added Growth Hormones	Email listed that a product contained no added growth hormones.
Vegan	Email contained the word vegan.
Responsibly Farmed/Grown	Email listed that a product was responsibly farmed or responsibly grown.
Recipe	Email contained links or videos to a recipes.
Whole Trade	Email referenced WFM's Whole Trade Guarantee program. This program was created to highlight WFM's "commitment to ethical trade, the environment and quality products sourced from developing nations. Every purchase of Whole Trade products helps fund projects such as new community centers, schools or homes for real people" in the form of a 1% donation to WFM's Whole Planet Foundation (Whole Foods Market, Whole Trade).
Food Democracy	Email referenced elements central to the food democracy themes as

	partially defined by Johnston et al.'s study. Food democracy themes include: reference to small/humble beginnings, use of an "our story" narrative, specific geographic references, personal stories of founders/employees, and connection to family farms (Johnston et al., 2009).
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Figure 1; *Reference Appendix for images of the individual emails.*

Not surprisingly, the most prevalent theme was sale/promotion with all 10 emails mentioning a sale or promotion available at WFM. Email marketing acts as an effective tool for alerting consumers to what is going on in their neighborhood store. Like any retail store, WFM seeks to increase foot traffic in order to increase sales. Email marketing is getting an increased budget in many companies as it continues to become a useful and efficient disseminator of company news, new products, and promotions (Colwyn, 2015). While this category does not reveal much about WFM's organic messaging, it is important to note that the organic grocery chain is concerned with marketing its products as affordable. For example, Email #1 was solely dedicated to WFM's 365 Everyday Value line of products and was sent on January 13, 2016 (*see Email #1 in Appendix*). The email notified customers of a three day sale in which customers would receive 10% off all 365 Everyday Value products. The subhead reads, "It's easier than ever to stock up on the best products for the best price. Go ahead, fill your pantry!" (*see Email #1 in Appendix*). While organic food is generally thought of as more expensive, though WFM's email blasts, the company suggests that with its sales and promotions, customers can get the best products for the best prices. In addition, Email #2, sent January 20, 2016 introduces a one-day 20% off sale on organic cheese and Email #3 markets a sale on beef sirloin steak, providing a link the rest of the week's sales (*see Email #2 and Email #3 in Appendix*). 7 out of the 10 emails highlighted a sale in the header image, explicitly including the word "sale." The remaining emails featured links inviting customers to "see what's on sale" further down within the emails. Regardless of the placement, the word sale was present in every email examined.

The next most common theme in email blasts was the inclusion of a recipe or multiple recipes. This inclusion is important to note because it demonstrates how important producing new content has become to a company's marketing strategy. With the increasing popularity of Google AdBlock and the low click through rates of online advertisements, it is becoming important for companies to generate their own, unique material to draw consumers to their websites and define their brand image (Content Marketing Institute). Recipes and blogs present a simple way for WFM to market its products and brand by the creation of original material. Additionally, recipes have an automatic communal association. The sharing of cooking tips and dishes provides consumers with a community to connect with and also evokes "mom and pop" shop ideals. A personal connection is forged with the individual through the sharing of an original recipe, despite the fact that WFM is a national chain. WFM seeks to maintain a local, neighborhood aesthetic through its creation of original recipes.

The emails examined included a series of three Super Bowl themed emails (Email #6, #7, and #8); the Super Bowl took place on February 7, 2016. Email #6, the first of the series, included links to "Healthier Halftime Snacks" (*see Email #6 in Appendix*). Customers could follow these links to a blog post titled "Healthier Snacks to Win the Big Game," which in turn featured nine original WFM recipes such as Buffalo Cauliflower Bites, Black Bean Hummus, Edamame Guacamole, and Banana-Cocoa Snack Cakes. Even through its recipes, WFM enforces that it is America's Healthiest Grocery Store; WFM has even turned the Super Bowl, a day of eating greasy foods and snacks, into an opportunity to introduce healthy alternatives. That is not to suggest that all WFM recipes paint a picture of health however. In Email #2, WFM provides a

Date	Email Name	Sale/Promotion	Healthy	Organic	High Quality/Best	No Antibiotics	No Artificial Colors, Flavors, Preservatives	No added growth hormones	Vegan	Responsibly Farmed/Grown	Recipe	Whole Trade	Food Democracy
1/13/16	Email #1	X		X	X								
1/20/16	Email #2	X		X							X		
1/21/16	Email #3	X		X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X
1/25/16	Email #4	X	X						X		X		
1/28/16	Email #5	X		X	X		X	X			X	X	X
2/1/16	Email #6	X	X								X		
2/3/16	Email #7	X											
2/4/16	Email #8	X		X			X			X	X	X	X
2/8/16	Email #9	X							X	X	X	X	
2/11/16	Email #10	X		X	X		X				X	X	X

Figure 2

link to an original mac and cheese recipe that does not have anything exceptionally healthy about it (*see Email #2 in Appendix*). That is, until consumers get to the bottom of the online recipe, in which WFM suggests, “stirring in different veggies, cheeses or meats to oomph up the nutrition and make this dish grand” (Whole Food Market, Learn to Cook). Suggesting vegetables such as thinly sliced, kale, spinach, steamed broccoli florets, diced heirloom tomatoes, chopped smoked salmon, and cooked crab cakes broken into pieces, WFM turns your traditional mac and cheese into a gourmet, healthier meal. Ultimately, recipes act as another strategic marketing tool for the grocery chain by creating a personalized, communal impression on consumers and by connecting consumers to healthier lifestyles.

The use of the word “organic” occurred in 6 of the 11 emails, making it the third most popular theme over the 30 days. Surprisingly, only a single email contained the word organic in a context that was outside of a product’s name. Email #2 offered a today only sale of organic cheeses, and encouraged customers to “Find new favorites and celebrate cheeses made with organic ingredients” (*see Email #2 in Appendix*). The remaining five emails let the products do the talking, alerting customer of which organic products the supermarket chain had on sale or in stock. Compared to WFM’s in-store marketing, which is reviewed in the second part of the analysis, “organic” wasn’t as advertised to consumers over email during the time period I examined.

The fourth most popular category in the emails concerned mentions of WFM Whole Trade program. As described in *Figure 1*, the Whole Trade Guarantee program was created to highlight WFM’s “commitment to ethical trade, the environment and quality products sourced from developing nations” (Whole Foods Market, Whole Trade). Promising customers that Whole Trade products improve lives with every purchase, these products support community

development, the environment, ensure better wages and working conditions for all employees, and with the purchase of these products, WFM will donate 1% of its sales to the Whole Planet Foundation. A hefty promise, the Whole Trade Guarantee program acts as a private label for WFM. Similar to the vein of “beyond organic labeling,” WFM has created a unique sticker for products that go above and beyond organic (Howard et al., 2006). While the program will be discussed in-depth later on, it is important to note the presence of Whole Trade in email marketing because it took precedence over advertising WFM products that are USDA certified organic. Clearly, WFM has redefined organic labeling, making up its own standards. Does this make the USDA’s certified organic labeling obsolete? Definitely not, but herein lies the problem with WFM creating its own label: Whole Trade Guarantee program products include USDA certified organically grown produce as well as conventionally grown produce. How can a product be both Whole Trade and conventionally grown? Is it clear to consumers that not all Whole Trade products are organic? How many pesticides are actually used during the growing process of Whole Trade products that are not considered organic? These questions start to get at the deeper, convoluted problems associated with independent labeling programs. This line of thinking will be expanded upon later in the discourse analysis. Regardless of the contradictions, the content analysis of the emails marketed the Whole Trade program over and over to consumers.

The final two categories I will discuss regarding email marketing tactics are high quality/best and food democracy. These two categories tied for the fifth most popular theme in the content analysis, with four mentions each. In terms of the high quality/best email theme, WFM ultimately seeks to be identified as America’s healthiest grocery store. But, along with the healthy angle comes an artisanal drive to be a gourmet grocer. While this is largely evident in the

spatial and discourse analysis discussed later on, it is also evident by the way in which WFM markets its products as the best. In Email #10, sent on February 11, WFM boasted that customers could “Perfect (their) pout with the highest-quality lipsticks, lip balms and glosses” (*see Email #10 in Appendix*). Featuring Burt’s Bees lip balms, the company also introduced a 25% off sale of all lip care and lip color products. Discounting high quality products is often a point of contention in the marketing industry. As the branding agency Killian Branding suggests, discounting can have an adverse effect on value for established brands. Consumers may get the idea that something is wrong with a product, causing the company to want to sell a larger amount unnaturally. Supply and demand can be brought into question, potentially throwing the concept of quality into freefall. Killian Branding defines quality as “a belief, often difficult to articulate, held by the collective mind of users and prospects” (Killian Branding). The consideration of quality is essential in getting consumers to buy into a product or brand. It is interesting that WFM pairs quality with discounts in Email #10, and also Email #1, in which WFM offers consumers 10% all 365 Everyday Value Products (*see Email #10 and Email #1 in Appendix*). WFM markets itself as a gourmet, organic, high quality brand, but also wants to show consumers that its discounts and deals can help them afford to buy organic. How can gourmet, artisanal products be on sale, week after week? Perhaps, the opening of 365 by WFM is a direct reconciliation of this apparent contradiction. 365 is an organic grocer with an automatically lower price point, created in the hopes that organic will become more accessible for the average millennial consumer. Clearly, WFM relies on its message of high-quality products as a marketing tactic, while also assuring consumers that organic can be affordable — or at least when there is a sale or promotion going on.

Next, I assessed the email content for food democracy themes, loosely basing this term off of a study conducted by Johnston et al. in 2009. This category was particularly interesting because it relates to the values associated with the original organic movement. I was surprised to find that this category was not as popular as I had originally thought it would be. Food democracy themes were used as product descriptors rather than as central messages that pertained to WFM as a grocer. For example, in Email #3, WFM weekly sales were advertised (*see Email #3 in Appendix*). The email called out eight products that consumers could buy at discounted prices. One of the product descriptions connected the company, Late July Tortilla Chips, to its family owned roots, by stating, “Satisfy a snack attack with lightly salted and seasoned crunchy chips from a family-owned company.” While it is unclear whether WFM wrote this product description or it was pre-written by the Late July Tortilla Chips’ marketing team itself, the use of “family-owned” gets at a central food democracy theme. Although there is no mention of a family farm, I think that the family element of the description hits at an important component of food democracy. The concept of keeping food production within the family represents a farm governed on family values, tradition, and ultimately an idealized production system. This attractive model has the potential to resonate with consumer audiences. Additionally, Email #5 presents another important food democracy theme placed within a product description detailing the weekly WFM sales (*see Email #5 in Appendix*). Starkey Spring Water is marketed to consumers by the copy: “Sip single-source geothermal spring water from the mountains of Idaho, known for its silky-smooth taste and gently alkaline pH.” Making a specific geographic reference to the mountains of Idaho, this reference doesn’t connect to a locally scaled community, as Johnston et al. cited in their study, however, the geographic reference also seeks to put the consumer in the place of the product’s origin. Rather than give in

to the detached process of buying food, in which the consumer is removed from the food's, or beverage's, place of origin, WFM provides a geographic location, inviting the consumer to picture where the product was naturally gathered. Although not as prevalent as I had first predicted they would be, the food democracy themes present within the emails is worth drawing attention to. The marketing of organic products does in fact have ties to the original organic movement, subtly inviting people to participate in the co-optation that has stealthy transformed the food industry to one of corporate organic food.

While emails were sent out on an inconsistent basis, they still revealed valuable information about WFM's marketing strategies and provided a comprehensive and broad sample to work with. Next, I turn to WFM's blog to conduct a second content analysis. While this content analysis did not provide me with as many categories as the email content categories, the coding of the blog posts will reveal that the original content featured on the blog was very formulaic.

Content Analysis - Blog Posts: Identifying and Assessing the Brand Voice

There are technically three versions of WFM blogs featured on the website: the Whole Story blog and two CEO blogs; the CEO blogs feature posts penned by CEO John Mackey and CEO Walter Robb. For the purpose of the content analysis, I used only the Whole Story blog, as this blog was the most frequently updated and exhibited more lifestyle content, which means more content pertinent to consumers' lifestyles. WFM posted six times the amount of blogs than it sent out emails during the 30-day period, averaging 2.23 blog posts per day. The blog posts' coding categories are different from the email categories, as the blog posts' content themes were not solely concerned with sales and promotions. The blog post coding categories are as follows:

Category Title	Definition
Recipes	Blog post contained links or videos to recipes.

Health	Blog post contained information pertinent to a consumer's health (be it mind or body).
Educational	Blog post gave information to a consumer (from teaching a consumer about a new ingredient or a new skill in the kitchen to pulling food-related headlines from various news sources and incorporating links into blog posts).
Holiday/National Day	Blog post mentioned a national holiday or special day (i.e. National Blueberry Pancakes Day or National Gluten-Free Day).
Whole Trade	Blog post highlighted WFM's Whole Trade Guarantee program. This program was created to highlight WFM's "commitment to ethical trade, the environment and quality products sourced from developing nations. Every purchase of Whole Trade products helps fund projects such as new community centers, schools or homes for real people" in the form of a 1% donation to WFM's Whole Planet Foundation (Whole Foods Market, Whole Trade).
Responsibly Grown Program	Blog post highlighted WFM's new rating system titled the Responsibly Grown program. This program is designed to help shoppers make informed buying decisions and is currently a tiered system. The program measures a product's soil health, air, energy, climate, waste reduction, farmworkers welfare, water conservation and protection, ecosystems and biodiversity, and pest management. These factors are then scored out of a combined total of 300 points, and then assigned a rating of Good, Better, or Best depending on the total number of points (Whole Foods Market, Get to Know). This system is expected to be simplified by March 31, 2016, with a single Responsibly Grown rating becoming the new standard (LaMacchia, 2016).
Food Standards	Blog post referenced WFM's high food standards and WFM's higher quality food in regards to its products it sells.
Food Democracy	Blog post referenced elements central to the food democracy themes as partially defined by Johnston et al.'s study. Food democracy themes include: reference to small/humble beginnings, use of an "our story" narrative, specific geographic references, personal stories of founders/employees, and connection to family farms (Johnston et al., 2009).

Figure 3

Out of the 65 blog posts coded, one category stood out among the rest. With 52 blogs coded in the educational content category, it is fair to say that WFM seeks to educate its consumers. The brand becomes more than a place to buy organic food. Scholar Mark C. Hall wrote that "organics can easily be looked at in terms of a lifestyle" (Hall, 2008, 8). WFM has created a brand that consumers can turn to for cooking tips, recipes, new ingredient

introductions, and various other food news. For example, the Whole Story blog has a series of posts, entitled “Daily Dish,” dedicated to delivering daily food news to consumers. These blog posts are written by the Whole Story Editors and are always introduced by the same opening: “Every day our plates get filled with news from the world of food. Here’s what our editors found most interesting today.” These emails serve as a way for consumers to learn fun tidbits about global food news. “Daily Dish: Friday,” published by the Whole Story Editors on February 15, 2016, highlighted a 10K wineathlon to take place in Glasgox, Scotland, NASA astronaut’s Leland Melvin’s experience eating in space, and featured a shameless plug for a Whole Story guest blogger and WFM three dollar Green Smoothie sale (Whole Story Editors, 2016). With links to the full stories, these “Daily Dish” emails act as an easy way for WFM to connect with its readers by producing original content linked to secondary stories.

Other forms of educational blog posts can be found in WFM blog series “Get to Know.” This series introduces an obscure ingredient and suggests recipes to incorporate the ingredient in in order to make it more accessible to the average at-home-chef. For example, the post “Get to Know Gochujang” introduces this ingredient as “a red chile paste also made with fermented soybeans and glutinous rice (that) is gaining in popularity as one of the new global food trends” (Myers, 2016). The provided original recipe, Chicken Wings with Gochujang Sauce, combined with the blog’s great ways to add gochujang into other simple dishes, educates consumers, but also plugs a product that is on WFM shelves and might be hard to find other places. This blog series is an especially important marketing tactic to examine. While all the Whole Story blogs function as advertisements for WFM, I find this “Get to Know” series to do the job particularly well. While it is impossible to tell how many of this blog’s readers went out and bought

Date	Title	Author	Recipes	Health	Educational	Holiday/ National	Whole Trade	Responsibly Grown	Food Standards	Food Democracy
1/13/16	12 Snacks to Stash at Your Desk	Megan Myers	X	X						
1/13/16	Daily Dish: Wednesday	Whole Story Editors	X		X	X				
1/13/16	Smoothie Operator	Adriene Mishler	X	X	X					
1/14/16	Daily Dish: Thursday	Whole Story Editors	X	X	X					
1/15/16	Five Must-Try Cheeses	Elizabeth Leader Smith							X	
1/15/16	Double Down on Your Veggies	Kathy K. Downie, RD, LD	X	X	X					
1/15/16	Daily Dish: Friday	Whole Story Editors		X	X					
1/16/16	Get to Know Turmeric	Megan Myers			X					
1/17/16	What to Make this Week	Megan Myers	X							
1/17/16	Superfoods to Boost your Smoothies	Kathy K. Downie, RD, LD	X	X						
1/18/16	Favorite New Recipe: Coconut Breakfast Cookies	Molly Sigler	X	X						
1/18/16	Daily Dish: Monday	Whole Story Editors			X					
1/19/16	Cooking with Bell Peppers	Elizabeth Leader Smith	X	X	X		X			
1/19/16	Support Whole Trade and Save	Paige Schilt			X		X			
1/19/16	Daily Dish: Tuesday	Whole Story Editors	X		X	X				
1/20/16	Cheese is for Lovers	Lindsay Robinson	X			X				
1/20/16	Daily Dish: Wednesday	Whole Story Editors	X		X	X				
1/21/16	Pasta Night, Reinvented	Megan Myers	X		X					
1/21/16	Daily Dish: Thursday	Whole Story Editors		X	X					
1/21/16	Double-Down on Your Veggies, Part Two	Kathy K. Downie, RD, LD	X	X	X					
1/22/16	Get to Know Dulse	Megan Myers	X	X	X					

Date	Title	Author	Recipes	Health	Educational	Holiday/ National	Whole Trade	Responsibly Grown	Food Standards	Food Democracy
1/22/16	Daily Dish: Friday	Whole Story Editors	X	X	X					
1/23/16	Our Next Steps on Responsibly Grown	Edmund LaMacchia		X	X			X		
1/24/16	What to Make this Week	Megan Myers	X							
1/25/16	Six-Ingredient Harissa-Turkey Chili: Freshly Made	Marie Guggedahl	X							
1/25/16	Daily Dish: Monday	Whole Story Editors		X	X					
1/25/16	Probiotics: The Bacteria with a Good-for-you Reputation	Kathy K. Downie, RD, LD	X	X	X					
1/26/16	Get Creative with Cauliflower	Alice K. Thompson	X	X	X					
1/26/16	Daily Dish: Tuesday	Whole Story Editors	X		X					
1/27/16	Get to Know Gochujang	Megan Myers	X		X					
1/27/16	Daily Dish: Wednesday	Whole Story Editors	X	X	X	X				
1/27/16	Healthier Snacks to Win the Big Game	Megan Myers	X	X						
1/28/16	Aromatherapy Appreciation	Adriene Mishler		X	X					
1/28/16	Daily Dish: Thursday	Whole Story Editors	X		X	X				
1/28/16	Kite Hill: Traditional Cheese-Making Takes a Plant-Based Turn	Paige Schilt								X
1/29/16	Red Produce: Pretty and Nutritious	Kathy K. Downie, RD, LD	X	X	X					
1/29/16	Daily Dish: Friday	Whole Story Editors		X	X					
1/30/16	Smart Protein Picks for Vegetarians	Kathy K. Downie, RD, LD	X	X	X					
1/31/16	What to Make this Week	Megan Myers	X							
1/31/16	Valentine's Day Essentials: Oysters	Elizabeth Leader Smith	X		X				X	
2/1/16	Favorite New Recipe: Crispy Baked Oyster Caesar Salad	Molly Sigler	X							
2/1/16	Full February for Foodies	Kara Chiles			X					
2/1/16	Daily Dish: Monday	Whole Story Editors	X		X					

Date	Title	Author	Recipes	Health	Educational	Holiday/ National	Whole Trade	Responsibly Grown	Food Standards	Food Democracy
2/2/16	Cooking with Broccoli	Alice K. Thompson	X	X	X					
2/2/16	How I Celebrate Lunar New Year	Jennifer Cheng	X		X	X				
2/2/16	Daily Dish: Tuesday	Whole Story Editors	X	X	X					
2/3/16	A Recipe for Mardi Gras Party Success	Lindsay Robinson	X		X					
2/3/16	Pick Whole Trade Roses for Valentine's Day Value	Paige Schilt			X		X			X
2/3/16	Daily Dish: Wednesday	Whole Story Editors			X					
2/4/16	Spa Gifts for Your Valentine	Paige Schilt		X	X		X			
2/4/16	Daily Dish: Thursday	Whole Story Editors	X	X	X					
2/4/16	One Bakery Shows Their True Colors with Plant Based Dyes	Paige Schilt		X	X					
2/5/16	Best Desserts for a Vegan Valentine's Day	Alice K. Thompson	X		X					
2/5/16	Daily Dish: Friday	Whole Story Editors	X	X	X					
2/6/16	For the Love of Oysters	The Nature Conservancy		X						
2/7/16	What to Make this Week	Megan Myers	X							
2/8/16	Panna Cotta: Freshly Made	Marie Guggedahl	X							
2/8/16	Daily Dish: Monday	Whole Story Editors			X	X				
2/9/16	Get to Know Harissa	Megan Myers	X		X					
2/9/16	Daily Dish: Tuesday	Whole Story Editors	X	X	X	X				
2/9/16	Tuna Recipes for Everyday	Megan Myers	X		X				X	
2/10/16	Digital Coupons: A New Way to Save at Whole Foods Market	Elizabeth Leader Smith		X						
2/10/16	Daily Dish: Wednesday	Whole Story Editors	X		X					
2/11/16	Exfoliate with DIY Rose Facial Scrub	Paige Schilt	X	X	X					
2/11/16	Daily Dish: Thursday	Whole Story Editors	X		X					

Figure 4

gochujang after reading the post and watching the accompanying YouTube video embedded within the post, this advertisement fits in with the brand's lifestyle image. WFM is more than just shopping; it is about educating consumers and changing their eating habits. From introducing consumers to a new ingredient to informing them about global news trends, WFM is creating its own way of life for consumers to take part in. This lifestyle, in which you plan out all your meals the week before (see the blog's "What to Make this Week" series), try new ingredients, and find ways to "double-down on your veggies," is very desirable for those who seek to be healthy and live sustainably (Downie, 2016). Tess Wicksteed, the Executive Vice President of Pearlfisher, a brand strategy company, argues that the "lifestyle journey has begun to deliver us from cookie-cutter to the carefully curated and now to a new and next generation of closeness and original creativity. Today we have begun to treat brands as having personalities of their own (Wicksteed, 2013). WFM is a living brand, and its marketers have made sure that it embodies the personality of an educator.

While WFM certainly provides its consumers with new information through its blog posts, does its sample of 52 blog posts define it as an educator in terms of the original organic movement of the 1960s and 1970s? The answer is a resounding no. WFM's educational posts are carefully orchestrated. Education revolves around "safe" messages of trying new ingredients and learning new cooking techniques. As Johnston et al. write in their study of the corporate-organic foodscape and the struggle for food democracy, using the organic brand Kashi (owned by Kellogg's) as an example, "The apparent contradiction between the basic purpose of the Kashi (website) — to promote a brand that sells processed commodities made with grains sourced globally and distributed through global commodity chains — and the politics of local food provisioning, supports the view that corporate organics represent a complex case of hybridization

rather than a simple, black and white instance of ideological obfuscation” (Johnston et al., 2009, 522). What Johnston et al. are essentially pointing out is the unavoidable contradiction of an organic company championing food democracy. If organic companies were to truly educate the consumer about food democracy, then they would be disrupting the exact food processing system they directly benefit from. Instead, organic companies, including WFM, seek to educate their consumers with much less harmful ideas, such as new recipes and cooking techniques. Nothing in this vein is controversial, and the messages remain consistent with business objectives. While WFM seeks to educate consumers, this education is to a very controlled and calculated extent.

Similar to the content analysis of the email blasts, the blogs also contained recipes as an original form of content. Out of the 65 blogs, 45 of those contained at least one recipe. Again, these recipes act as a concentrated form of education, as well as contribute to the brand image by the ingredients the recipe contains. In the blog post “A Recipe for Mardi Gras Party Success,” Fat Tuesday undergoes a healthy transformation through recipes such as Creamed Collard Greens with Kielbasa, Red Beans and Rice Soup, and Gluten-Free Muffaletta Party Sandwiches (Robison, 2016). This is not to suggest that all of the recipes provided in the Mardi Gras themed blog post had a health-like quality to them, but to highlight the brand’s consistent image as an advocate for a healthy lifestyle. The Mardi Gras post also includes a shameless plug for WFM: “And, don’t forget to pick up my favorite Mardi Gras treat of all — a king cake! This buttery cake is a Mardi Gras tradition, and whoever finds the hidden trinket gets to be king or queen for the day. Our stores carry a variety of king cakes made without artificial flavors, artificial colors or hydrogenated oils” (Robison, 2016). Ultimately, recipes are an effective way for WFM to subtly reinforce its core values to customers.

Health is also directly emphasized in the blogs posts, with 30 blogs out of the total 65 containing information pertinent to consumers' health. Posts such as "Get Creative with Cauliflower," "Superfoods to Boost your Smoothies," "Cooking with Broccoli," and "Probiotics: The Bacteria with a Good-for-you Reputation" demonstrated the brand's ability to produce content that was consistent with its brand image and core values. Staying true to its self-proclaimed title of "America's Healthiest Grocery Store," WFM aligns its content to match its promise.

While health is often times associated with organic food, "there is no strong evidence that organic and conventional foods differ significantly in nutrient content" (Hall, 2008, 3). Regardless of the unknown nutritional benefits, consumers may buy organic products for a wide variety of reasons. Organic food is associated with lower pesticide levels, which is important because high levels of pesticides have been linked to toxic, cancer causing chemicals. So beyond its nutritional content, consumers may view organic food as an overall form of cleaner eating compared to conventionally growth food which is covered in pesticides. A 2014 market research report conducted by Package Facts cited a Harris Poll of 2,276 adults, which found that "more than half of Americans (55%) believe that organic foods are healthier than non-organic and 41% think organic foods tastes better and/or fresher than non-organic" (Porjes, 2014a, 45-46). While we can't measure WFM's influence in contributing to the idea that organic food is more nutritional than conventionally grown food, WFM's brand associations between its products and health benefits are certainly notable. The health themes present in the blogs represent a strategic appeal to WFM's target audience.

While none of the other blog categories stood out as consistent themes during the 30 day span examined, it is worth examining the Whole Trade Guarantee and Responsibly Grown

program blogs. As mentioned previously during the email content analysis, the Whole Trade Guarantee program was created to highlight WFM's "commitment to ethical trade, the environment and quality products sourced from developing nations (Whole Foods Market, Whole Trade)." Promising customers that Whole Trade products improve lives with every purchase, these products support community development, the environment, ensure better wages and working conditions for all employees, and with the purchase of these products, WFM will donate 1% of its sales to the Whole Planet Foundation.

In the blog post "Support Whole Trade and Save," published January 19, 2016, Whole Trade is further explained using Whole Trade bananas and Whole Trade Organic Kent Mangoes as examples. Buying a Whole Trade Organic Kent Mango is described not through the delicious taste or high quality of the mango, but through the social repercussions the purchase will have: "To help empower farmworker communities, Whole Foods Market pays a 'social premium' for each Whole Trade product. Local farmers and farmworkers identify their community's most pressing needs and decide how to use the funds. In Peru, where many Whole Trade Organic Kent Mangoes are sources, the funds go to a cooperative of small-scale mango growers. Recently, the co-op used Whole Trade funds to dig new water wells for their community." (Schilt, 2016). This marketing tactic leverages consumers' desire to make a bigger impact than just filling their own belly when purchasing products. WFM makes an effort to associate its product with social and environmental responsibility. The Whole Trade program is explained on a smaller, more specific scale. The blogger identifies that small-scale mango growers in Peru have used the funds given to them from WFM to build new water wells for their community. This detailed case of corporate social responsibility can be influential on consumers. Increasingly, many consumers choose organic out of concern for the environment (Porjes, 2014a). This blog post demonstrates

WFM's desire to be seen as a socially responsible company — so much so that the grocery chain is not afraid to create its own food label, which is in direct competition with the USDA's certified organic label.

The contradiction between having organic products and having Whole Trade Guarantee products is quite ironic; WFM is essentially proclaiming that organic products cannot deliver on the four components that the Whole Trade Guarantee promises. Also, the Whole Trade Guarantee applies only to select products that have to be in season for consumers to see them on shelves. So does that mean that if consumers want to buy eggplants at WFM during the summer, a season in which they are not in season, they'll have to go somewhere else? No, because WFM still has the option to carry USDA certified organic eggplants or even conventionally farmed eggplants. This gets to the root of the problem of WFM's organic promise. While the company's marketing implies consumers can join the fight to disrupt the unsustainable food processing system by shopping at WFM and buying Whole Trade Guaranteed products, WFM just barely disrupts the system or scratches the surface of the original organic movement of practicing food democracy and food transparency.

On WFM's Whole Trade Guarantee promise posted on its website, there are three testimonials from beneficiaries of the program. Titled, "Whole Trade Helps Real People," the three real people featured are from Ecuador, Haiti, and Mexico (Whole Foods Market, Whole Trade Helps). While these workers may very well benefit from the Whole Planet Foundation and better working conditions than conventional farms, it is hard to believe that WFM can live up to its promise of practicing environmental responsibility. The fossil fuel it takes to deliver Whole Trade Guarantee products into over three hundred stores across the nation contradicts the purpose of bettering soil health management, restricting pesticide uses, protecting water

resources, natural vegetation areas, and wildlife. WFM has again taken concepts from the original organic movement and co-opted them; labeling produce that is grown hundreds of miles away as environmentally responsible is misleading to consumers. Food democracy arose out of a desire to eat locally grown and responsibly farmed food. Taking half of this desire and labeling it as something better than the USDA's certified organic label (which also doesn't take into account the travel distance of organic) is a potential problem that "beyond organic" labeling can have. Furthermore, Whole Trade products are not solely organic products. Conventionally grown food can also have a Whole Trade label. The Whole Trade Guarantee program only states that produce must have "restricted pesticide usage." If the WFM certifiers deem that a product fits this requirement, then it becomes Whole Trade certified. However, this doesn't mean that the product fits the pesticide usage standards set up by the USDA. This represents the complexities inherent in supermarkets, non-profits, and other organizations creating their own "beyond organic" labels. It becomes difficult for consumers to identify the different labels and compare them against the USDA's label, which already has confusing standards as it is.

It is important that "beyond organic" labels are extremely clear in what they represent, especially because there is no governmental entity involved. There is a credence quality to all foods; we cannot tell if food is organic by looking at it or tasting it (Müller and Gaus, 2015). The consumer places an enormous amount of trust in the role of the labeler. If the label on a banana represents that the workers growing the bananas were treated fairly and the soil used to grow the bananas were healthy and will remain healthy, then that should be the case. Labels should be looked at as more than just a clever marketing ploy and their importance is of serious concerns to consumers and the general marketplace.

Another label program that WFM has produced is the Responsibly Grown label. Although there was only one blog referencing this program, I find this theme worthy to take note of. As was mentioned in *Figure 3*, the program is designed to help shoppers make informed buying decisions and is currently a tiered system. The program measures a product's soil health, air, energy, climate, waste reduction, farmworkers welfare, water conservation and protection, ecosystems and biodiversity, and pest management. These factors are then scored out of a combined total of 300 points, and then assigned a rating of Good, Better, or Best depending on the total number of points (Whole Foods Market, Get to Know). The blog post, "Our Next Steps on Responsibly Grown" revealed that the program is expected to be simplified by March 31, 2016, with a single Responsibly Grown rating becoming the new standard (LaMacchia, 2016). This blog is particularly interesting because of its author. While other posts are written by a team of reoccurring bloggers, this post is written by Edmund Lamacchia, the Global Vice President of Perishable Purchasing and primary executive sponsor of the Responsibly Grown program at WFM. Edmund only has a total of four blog posts on the Whole Story blog, including "The Safety of Meat at Whole Foods Market," "A Perspective on Cattle Growth Promotants," "UPDATE: Cattle Growth Promotants – New Development Unfolds," and the current blog in discussion. As demonstrated by the titles of his posts, Edmund also writes informational blogs about company policy and news. While this blog can be considered as an outlier, given the inconsistency of Edmunds posts within the past nine years, it still should be examined.

Edmund begins his blog by recapping the original Responsibly Grown program and then shares the enhancements being made to the program over the next year (LaMacchia, 2016). The most surprising factor seems to be the abolishment of the three tiered rating system of Good, Better, and Best. Edmund states in his blog post, "Based on feedback we've received as the

program rolled out, we recognize the need to simplify how we communicate its value to our customers. To that effect: all Good, Better and Best Responsibly Grown rating logos will be removed,” (LaMacchia, 2016). Herein lies another problem with “beyond organic” labeling. With non-governmental entities setting their own rules, changes can come at a moment’s notice with only a vague “feedback received” as an explanation. Consumers are responsible for learning the labeling change and then comparing it to the other existing labels present at WFM. Additionally, I question if this simplification translates into more relaxed Responsibly Grown standards. It seems to be in WFM’s best interest to certify as many items as they can with its own private labels; these WFM proprietary labels can create an additional unique selling point to distinguish its products from other grocers, organic or conventional.

The blogs ultimately demonstrated themes that were consistent with WFM’s brand image and core values. While the email blasts alerted consumers to specialized sales and promotions in accordance with their neighborhood WFM, the blog dealt with broader topics as WFM’s programs and tips on eating and cooking healthier. Both the blogs and the emails complimented and reinforced each other, revealing how the brand emphasized its qualities and characteristics through the production of original content, sales, and promotions. The content analyses leads me to conclude that WFM online content strategy has three pillars:

1. **Education:** WFM seeks to educate its consumers through providing them unique cooking tips and ingredients. The brand engages its audience through teaching them about new skills and knowledge. The brand is an educator, but only to an extent; WFM lessons are carefully curated and do not touch on greater ways to practice sustainability, such as buying produce locally.

2. **Affordability:** With the consistent alerts of WFM sales, the brand seeks to appeal to consumers through offering deals and discounts. The brand notifies consumers of which products are being discounted for the week in the hopes to increase sales in store. This also serves as a message of affordability. With the higher price of organic food, WFM cannot always compete on price point. However, with the aid of discounts and sales, WFM can alert consumers of its active effort to decrease prices.
3. **Creation:** WFM original recipes most likely produce a high amount of traffic to its website. This content serves as a creative representation of the brand as whole. Consumers can engage with WFM by buying WFM products to make healthy, gourmet dishes, as seen on the WFM website and blog. This enhances the creativity of the brand, and adds fresh, original content to break up the educational and affordable advertisement material.

WFM's content strategy's three pillars guide its online marketing design. While the content analyses revealed prevalent themes that allowed me to define the brand voice and content strategy, the next section will provide a detailed discourse and spatial analysis of the brand's in-store marketing. It is important to separate the in-store marketing tactics from the online marketing tactics because the spaces are so diverse. It is possible that some consumers who shop at WFM have never read the WFM website. It is also possible that those who consistently read the website rarely shop at WFM. Defining both can also help examine WFM's marketing on a deeper, more holistic level.

Discourse and Spatial Analysis: Roaming the Aisles of the "World's Healthiest Grocery Store"

I have decided to supplement my content analysis with a discourse analysis because of the importance of examining language and its implications on the consumer. Language constructs our political and social realities, so an examination of language is critical and essential to a cultural and political analysis (Edelman, 1964). Thus, discourse analysis helps to unpack the power relationships and ideologies that are hidden in the everyday understandings of words in order to decode multiple meanings of texts. Without a discourse analysis, it would be impossible to situate WFM into a greater political or social context.

In-store food marketing has become a significant part of food marketing strategies since the economic crisis in the 1930s, in which “Supermarket designers admired how their predecessors in mass retailing — Chicago’s Marshall Field and Philadelphia’s John Wannamaker, for instance — made shopping fun and exciting by appealing to women’s eyes with lavish show windows, elaborate displays, and bold signage” (Mack, 2012, p. 88). Glanz et al. acknowledge how in-store food marketing “warrants increased attention given the dramatic rise in obesity. Descriptive and experimental studies of key marketing components have been conducted by consumer scientists, marketing researchers, and public health experts” (Glanz et al., 2012, p. 503). Consumer behavior can be a contested area of study as researchers seek to uncover how they can get consumers to purchase more. The current discourse surrounding food marketing has undoubtedly been influenced by the increase of organic products in stores. This can be seen through the role the use of buzzwords, such as GMO free, healthy, natural, organic, sustainable, and family farm, play into various marketing tactics of food. In Johnston’s study of the citizen-consumer hybrid, he examines the contradictions present between satisfying personal desires while simultaneously fighting social and ecological injustices (Johnston, 2007). Reviewing the citizen-consumer hybrid in light of an ethical consumer discourse, Johnston

defines discourse as a “shared way of understanding the world that is unavoidably connected to political power; as such, discourse shapes how social agents do and do not respond to social and ecological issues, and constructs normative boundaries of accountability and responsibility” (Johnston, 2007, p. 234). He categorizes WFM’s ethical consumer discourse as instilling a “change the world” mentality into consumers. My own visit to WFM reinforced Johnston’s analysis of the citizen-consumer hybrid, as well as Adam Mack’s analysis on WFM’s sensory design. Together, the discourse analysis and spatial analysis reveal challenges and discrepancies present within the marketing of organic products.

I chose to conduct my analysis using the Lincoln Park WFM located at 1550 North Kingsbury Street, Chicago, IL 60642. The store is open seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. and is approximately 75,000-square-feet. One of the largest WFM in the world, I thought that the Lincoln Park WFM would provide an abundance of signage and pamphlets to examine. The location certainly did not disappoint. Before walking into the Lincoln Park WFM, consumers are greeted by a life size three dimensional sculpture created by artist Phil Schuster (*see Picture #1 in Appendix*). The front of the sculpture is of a large globe surrounded by evergreen, but the back reveals a deeper message that the artist wishes to convey. The back of the sculpture features a giant, rugged hand that slightly cups the sprawling evergreen, suggesting that man supports the environment (*see Picture #2 in Appendix*). This sculpture is not only eye catching, but impossible to ignore. Its placement at the front of the entrance is a strategic marketing tactic, meant to market the brand to customer before they even take one step into the store. Of course, not everyone will look behind the statue to see the giant hand or read the statue description placed on the building itself, but regardless, the globe and evergreens send a message of earthly sustainability to customers. I find this statue to be an extremely effective marketing

tool for the brand. The artistic statue is a subtle form of advertising, similar to the original recipes present within the emails and blogs. The statue acts as a much more clever way for the brand to associate itself with the betterment of the world than a sign stating this fact would.

This is not to suggest that WFM solely uses art to convey its core values to consumers; signage lines every crevice of the store, creating a framework to examine the ethical consumer discourse. My store visit and observation session took place on Saturday, February 20, 2016. I thought that the store would be busier on the weekends than on weekdays and I wanted to visit WFM after Valentine's Day has passed so the store's holiday themed promotions and displays would be gone. When consumers walk into the store through the main entrance, they are immediately greeted by the produce section. The strategic placement of produce allows WFM to invoke images of family farms and the local origins of its produce within the first few seconds of entering the store. A sign hanging near the door read, "Proud to be America's First National Certified Organic Grocer... Whole Foods Market fulfills strict handling standards so that the organic goods you purchase from us stay organic from the farm to your shopping cart" (*see Picture #3 in Appendix*). Another sign boasted the number of organic items currently available at the store (over 108). While WFM is proud of its organic status, there were fair amounts of conventionally grown food featured in the produce section. Conventional Orange and Yellow Bell Peppers were on sale for \$2.49 per pound (51 cents less than usual), Conventional Roma Tomatoes were labeled "value" and were sold for 85 cents per pound, and Conventional Haas Avocados were on sale for 4 for \$5.00. These products were labeled clearly; they were not organically certified by the USDA or WFM. WFM indicated these were not rated by the chain through the placement of an "unrated" label in the top right hand corner of the product sign (*see Picture #4 in Appendix*). However, some products were not as clearly labeled. The WFM Cubed

Pineapple was priced at \$5.99 per pound (*see Picture #5 in Appendix*). It was conventionally grown, which means it does not fit the USDA's standards of certified organic. The Cubed Pineapple also was unrated by the WFM Responsibly Grown Program, yet, the Costa Rican Cubed Pineapple was also given the prestigious Whole Trade Guarantee sticker, with the added not that the product was "In House Made." If the pineapple was grown in Costa Rica, how can it be considered "In House Made?" In this case, WFM has considered the cubing of the pineapple an in house process that contributes to the added freshness of the product. In other words, although the Cubed Pineapple is not organic, grown locally, or rated on the Responsibly Grown tiered system, the Cubed Pineapple can still be given the Whole Trade Guarantee. Deciphering the somewhat contradictory labeling can get confusing. I'm still unsure as to what qualities make the Cubed Pineapple Whole Trade worthy. How can the average consumer distinguish the discrepancies and contradictions present within WFM's labels? Additionally, which label tells us the most about a product? WFM's system leaves much to be desired and presents the troubles associated with "beyond organic" labeling.

As previously discussed, the Responsibly Grown rating system is also featured in the produce section. With cartoon images of recycling bins, a farmer holding a rake, a sunrise, and more, the farm is portrayed as happy and colorful. The program is broken down into three factors on the signage through a question and answer dialogue. A sign asks, "What is responsibly grown?" to which the other half of the sign answers, "Reward farmers who work hard to protect human health and the environment, prohibit the most harmful chemicals; measure and reduce the rest, and provide shoppers with an at-a-glance Good, Better or Best rating for sustainable farming practices." The standards of each of the categories are then broken down on other signs. It is interesting to imagine how this signage will change once the tiered system is abolished.

With its already simplified explanation, perhaps, the program will be explained in even broader terms. One Responsibly Grown sign read, “Standards you won’t find anywhere else. All rated produce and flowers are grown on farms that must take major steps to protect human health and the environment.” This sign appeals to the competing forces of citizen and consumer; it reveals that with WFM products, the citizen can satisfy their role in protecting human health and the environment and the consumer can get products with standards that the competition cannot match. Appealing to both of these competing forces, WFM creates a win-win situation for shoppers.

WFM signage is text heavy; is it realistic to assume that consumers take the time to read the lengthy descriptions of programs and values? I find it hard to believe that the mom with her three children, one on her hip and the other two crisscrossing paths throughout the produce section, has the time and patience to systematically examine each sign. But, even if she only reads one sign in the entire store, what is the message conveying? The signs are all a part of the same brand and marketing strategy; appealing to consumers as America’s healthiest grocery store, WFM does not only strive to be considered healthy in terms of food, but also in terms of the environment and the well-being of workers. One sign in the Lincoln Park store, shaped in the state of Illinois, read, “Reduce distance from farm to plate. Buying closer to home reduces transportation costs and environmental impacts” (*see Picture #6 in Appendix*). While some consumers might infer from this message that WFM buys produce from Illinois, it seems to be more of a best practice tip for consumers rather than a descriptor of the produce present within the store. The fact is that if WFM did advocate for buying solely from the state in which you live to reduce transportation costs, then its whole business model would fall apart. The chain imports various produce from all over the world; its signage even reveals this, as a Whole Planet

Foundation sign reads, “Our mission is to create economic partnerships with the poor in developing world communities that supply our stores with product.” Consumers are being told to buy local food to reduce transportation costs through one sign, when five feet away they are being told to purchase products from developing world communities. The contradiction of the signage is apparent. Furthermore, a large water-tank-like structure sits on top of the refrigeration cases in the produce section of the store (*see Picture #7 in Appendix*). With artistic elements of graffiti on the water tank, a huge, white “Buy Local” encourages customers to buy produce from origins that are close to home. The spray painted, rebellious aesthetic of the water tank presents the concept of buying local as almost a radical act; it is as if buying local is an insurgent thought. While WFM does buy a fraction of its produce locally, it most certainly does not buy all of it locally. When WFM asks its customers to buy locally, it is essentially asking them to shop elsewhere. These competing ideals are representative of the problem with big organics. As WFM grows, it is forced to take on capitalistic business practices, cutting costs by buying globally, rather than locally. This also gets at the heart of the citizen-consumer hybrid; WFM strives to serve fresh, organic food that helps the environment (citizen) at a competitive price point in comparison to other grocery chains (consumer). Eventually, there must be compromises and sacrifices made.

Littered throughout the produce section are round, colorful signs that tell consumers that by shopping at WFM, they are “improving lives with every purchase” (*see Picture #8 in Appendix*). A tremendous assertion, the framing of the overall shopping experience is transformed into an experience in which consumers have the chance to make a difference in the world. The do-good notion that purchasing goods can start a chain reaction is a powerful message to choose to convey to consumers. Eating has become a political act; signs around the

store challenge consumers to vote with their dollars more aggressively than ever before. It's important that the claims and assertions present within this marketing material are accurate to the company's actual promise. But unfortunately, this accuracy is not always guaranteed, as the self-proclaimed overseer of the organic food industry is not always being overseen itself. It is up to curious consumers to point out the discrepancies between WFM's promises and WFM's actual deeds. A task that is not only inconvenient, but also unattractive. Who would want to question the "change the world" mentality set up by messages rooted in ethical consumer discourse? The illusion of being able to transform the world through picking out which supermarket to shop from is exactly what it sounds like — too good to be true.

Moving beyond the produce section, the Lincoln Park WFM provides a one stop shop for eating, shopping, and drinking. The Red Star Bar and Da'Vine Wine, combined with the various food "eateries" spread throughout the first floor, classify this location as more than your average grocery store. With a second floor eating area that overlooks the entire first floor, it is more than a plausible option to treat the Lincoln Park WFM as a dinner destination. Fresh food options are prepared right in front of you at the Pilsen Taqueria, River View Diner, or Chi-Town Wok. Dessert isn't far behind with WFM's Gelato Bar featuring house-made gelati and sorbetti. The Lincoln Park location also provides cooking classes for adults, children, and families. With classes such as Basic Skills, Entertaining at Home, Kid's Cook After School, Smoothie Master Class, Raw Foods, and Paleo 101, WFM consumers can become health food experts as they interact with the brand in a classroom setting. These classes last around an hour to two hours and cost about \$20 to \$30 depending on the class, duration, and ingredients used. The kitchen "classrooms" are located on the second floor of the store, and the space can even be rented for private parties. The desire to be known as the neighborhood's grocery store is prevalent through

the store's inclusion of so many points of interaction. The eateries, seating areas, and cooking classes present food as a collective experience. WFM encourages people to mingle with each other and learn from each other, again playing the role of an educator. Mack defines WFMs as places that bring "shoppers together in contexts that encourage socializing...Whole Foods sought to fuse gustatory pleasure with liberal politics" (Mack, 2012, 92). Commenting on the flirtatious behavior of consumers at WFM, Mack includes a quote from the New York Sun: "'New Yorkers shopping at Whole Foods Bowery are turning grocery shopping into a thriving pick-up scene'" (Mack, 2012, 92). The sensory innovations of WFM have certainly changed the landscape of the supermarket; whether or not it fosters romantic relationships between consumers remains to be seen.

While there is a multitude of signage to examine within WFM, I found the produce section to be the most telling. The ethical consumer discourse was positioned in terms of the citizen-consumer hybrid, as the brand sought to appeal to both people as citizens and people as consumers. The overall marketing tactics within the store reflected the content marketing pillars identified by the content analysis, but also went deeper to reveal the problems associated with "beyond organic" branding. While the Lincoln Park WFM is one of the biggest WFM in the world, I think that it presents a great case study for the brand and I don't think the signage will differ drastically from store to store. The neighborhood elements, such as the Lincoln Park themed names of eateries and the Lincoln Park stamped food crates might shift, but the central messages, programs and guarantees will remain the same from store to store.

Discussion

Food affects our lives in more ways than we realize. It influences our health, environment, economy and politics. As Americans have become disoriented with their fast food

nation, many are beginning to turn to organic food as a solution to better and healthier lifestyles. Transparency is becoming a desirable component of the food industry, but only to a certain extent. While the FDA's decision to approve menu labeling and trans fat mandates gives diners access to more nutritional information and the USDA's certified organic label signifies the level of pesticides and organic content in a product, consumers are still largely removed from the food processing system (Craig, 2016). This fundamental removal is why accurate marketing of food is so important. Terms such as free range, family farm and all natural begin to become contested concepts with no real definitions. Does free range chicken mean that chickens were given room to roam freely about? Or, does it mean that chickens were allowed to go outside of the coop, but hundreds of them had to share a five-foot by five-foot space. What truly constitutes a family farm? Does the family farm even exist any more? How has big organic changed organic food and the terms associated with organic food? These questions will continue to be asked as organic food is incorporated into the marketplace in higher and higher amounts.

So how can consumers be sure about the conditions that their food was grown in? For some, the answer is "beyond organic" labeling (Howard & Allen, 2006). Producing labels with more descriptive standards or criteria can increase a product's transparency. Those who advocate for new labeling on organic products assert that "new labeling schemes with strong consumer interest may provide a new way for growers committed to ecological and ethical practices to cope with the changing organic industry" (Howard & Allen, 2006, 441). However, the content analysis and discourse analysis have demonstrated the problems involved with "beyond organic" labeling in light of WFM's attempt. "Beyond organic" labeling can be unclear and contradictory when standards are determined by a company who seeks to make a profit off of sales. These labels can become oversimplified as well. WFM's explanation of the Responsibly Grown

program constituted a few paragraphs online with some accompanying illustrative charts and photographs; in comparison, the USDA's text for its organic "regulations approaches 600 pages, with detailed, specific standards covering agricultural production, handling, transport, processing and certification" (Porjes, 2014a, 1-2). Additionally, while the government has its fair share of lobbyists and other special interest groups at hand, what other entity would be big enough and powerful enough to make such important and far-reaching societal decisions such as food labels? While non-profits could solve the issue of objectivity when it comes to certification, it is unrealistic to think that a non-profit organization could create a new label without serious funding, legal involvement and a well-known and respected reputation.

Consumers who shop at WFM are being fooled by the extent to which their purchases make an impact in the world. While the supermarket chain certainly started out as a revolutionary concept, its immense growth has diluted the progress and transformation it originally set out to accomplish. Similar to the organic movement itself, WFM's popularity has forced it to adapt corporate practices and policies as it becomes more mainstream and sells to a larger market. It is unrealistic to think a company of WFM's size can exist selling only local produce and strictly organic food and products. While WFM is an impressive company, it has become an idealized version of a supermarket, struggling to keep its original promises it made to consumers during its inception.

The rise of organics has strayed far from the principles that the original movement was associated with. Food democracy and the counter-culture were co-opted by corporations who took advantage of a marketing opportunity. Today, as corporations such as Coca-Cola buy out organic brands such as Odwalla and Honest Tea, the true variety of organic products in the marketplace begins to decrease (Howard, 2009). Further research can work on deciphering the

integration and consolidation of the organic food processing sector, as well as explore consumer knowledge regarding corporate ownership of organic brands. Horizontal integration of this sector has often occurred through ‘stealth’ ownership, which can be deceptive to consumers (Howard, 2009). With an enhanced knowledge of parent companies, consumers may become more hesitant to accept claims from organic companies. Additionally, avenues for “beyond organic” labeling should be examined. A stronger oversight function is needed on companies such as WFM who propose their own labeling standards. Consumers’ trust in labels is a significant factor in purchasing decisions (Müller & Gaus, 2015). Those who abuse and exploit this trust should be identified and prohibited from creating such rating scales.

The contradictions present in the growth of big organics beg a series of questions that are difficult to answer. Many smaller scale farmers remain unhappy with the USDA’s certified organic label and certification process, and challenge the government to consider factors such as sustainability and working conditions when doling out labels (Howard & Allen, 2006; Getz et al., 2008). Additionally, the National Organic Standards Board has been called out by numerous farmers and journalists for being corrupt and having a revolving door policy (Strom, 2012). The New York Times reported in 2012 that “BIG FOOD has also assumed a powerful role in setting the standards for organic foods. Major corporations have come to dominate the board that sets these standards. As corporate membership on the board has increased, so, too has the number of nonorganic materials approved for organic foods on what is called the National List” (Strom, 2012). The NOSB’s role in government is to consider and make “recommendations on a wide range of issues involving the production, handling, and processing of organic products,” according to the NOSB’s official website (National Organic Standards Board). The board is composed of 15 public volunteers from across the organic community who are appointed by the

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture for a five-year term. The 15 members must come from the following categories: “four organic farmers/growers, three environmental/resource conservationists, three consumer/public interest representatives, two organic handlers/processors, one retailer, one scientist (toxicology, ecology or biochemistry), and one USDA accredited certifying agent” (National Organic Standards Board). Currently, the board includes representatives from Driscoll Strawberry Associates, Zirkle Fruit Company, Vital Farms and Clif Bar and Company. These corporate companies carry organic and conventional products and can be classified as companies that operate on a national scale. Although four members out of 15 is far from the two-thirds majority needed to add a substance to the National List, this number is telling of the influence that corporations have in defining organic food standards and production practices. The lines between government regulation and those who are being regulated are nonexistent to an extent. Government bodies, like the USDA, are influenced by corporate elites and lobbyists who end up helping to define the health standards of the foods the public eats. Although the board asserts that nominations are made with regards to the individual and their own contributions to organics, it is hard to ignore the fact that some members work for quite large corporations. The special interests present in their decision-making cannot be ignored. Does the public want corporations to play a part in how they are regulated? Based upon the silence of consumers in regards to challenging what has become Big Organics, it may seem that way. Consumers are continuously told that their dollars can help make a difference and that they should research the companies they make their purchases from. However, the concept of voting with one’s dollars is a concept that companies are becoming increasingly aware of, causing these companies to strategically market their products as socially responsible, even if they are not. Marketing messages can be overblown and can assert that a company is more sustainable or

socially responsible than it actually is. These “dollar votes” lack the power that the consumer believes it does.

While consumers have played a part in the rise of organic products in supermarkets by buying organic products, the dollar can only stretch so far when it comes to supporting social causes. Money only supports what is already made available in the market, thus, consumers cannot vote for radically sustainable business practices at their local Wal-Marts or Safeways. This study has proven that even WFM, a champion of the organic movement, has its faults. It is up to consumers to play a more active role in investigating the food processing industry – the state of their health is on the line. However, with the existing ethical consumer discourse and marketing tactics of stores such as WFM, consumers are fooled into thinking that by making certain purchases, they are making a difference. This belief, among others, needs to be addressed.

Journalists need to further investigate the role of corporate influence in government in order to determine its true effects on consumers. The food processing industry plays a huge role in our everyday lives, and by ignoring the contradictions and challenges it presents, we are creating a path towards failure. The food we eat is slowly killing us; from conventionally grown produce with high degrees of pesticides to meat and poultry that is coated with ammonia, people all over the world will have to grapple with what they love, facing the challenges that come with confronting hard questions and learning to make healthier choices. Consumers can no longer sit back and accept at face value what self-proclaimed sustainable companies promise them. It takes time and effort to navigate today’s market, however, a failure to further examine the foods and products available to us will result in a failure to protect the health of our environment and ourselves.

Appendix



Find A Store On Sale Shop Online

YOUR STORE:
DePaul
(773) 868-5200

3 DAY SALE 10% OFF

ALL 365 EVERYDAY VALUE® PRODUCTS

It's easier than ever to stock up on the best products for the best price. Go ahead, fill your pantry!

CHECK OUT THE SALE

VALID 1/15 - 1/17. WHILE SUPPLIES LAST. ASSORTMENT VARIES BY STORE.

Hurry, Stock Up and Save with this 3-Day Sale



Organic Cage-Free Large Brown Eggs >



Organic Blueberry Waffles >



Organic Unsalted Butter >



Email #1; Sent January 13, 2016



[Find A Store](#) [On Sale](#) [Shop Online](#)

YOUR STORE:
DePaul
(773) 868-5200

TODAY ONLY!
20% OFF ALL ORGANIC CHEESES
Find new favorites and celebrate cheeses made with organic ingredients.

CHECK OUT THE SALE

VALID 1/20 ONLY. WHILE SUPPLIES LAST. ASSORTMENT WILL VARY BY STORE.

The banner features a dark background with various types of organic cheeses, including wedges, shreds, and crumbles, arranged around the central text.

Recipes for Cheese Lovers



[Grilled Cheese and Greens >](#)



[Classic Mac and Cheese >](#)



[Spinach with Pears, Walnuts and Goat Cheese >](#)

Email #2; Sent January 20, 2016



[Find A Store](#) [On Sale](#) [Shop Online](#)

YOUR STORE:
DePaul
(773) 868-5200

A promotional banner for Beef Sirloin Steak. The background is a dark, textured surface with a cooking scene. A large piece of beef sirloin steak is being cooked in a black skillet, topped with sliced garlic and fresh herbs. To the left, a small metal bowl contains a dry rub seasoning mix, and a blue and white striped kitchen towel is partially visible. The text "ON SALE \$6.99 PER POUND" is prominently displayed in white and yellow at the top. Below it, "BEEF SIRLOIN STEAK" is written in large, bold white letters. A green button with white text says "EXPLORE THIS WEEK'S SALES". At the bottom right, it states "VALID THRU 1/26" and "U.S. ONLY. WHILE SUPPLIES LAST".

ON SALE **\$6.99** PER POUND

BEEF SIRLOIN STEAK

EXPLORE THIS WEEK'S SALES

VALID THRU 1/26
U.S. ONLY. WHILE SUPPLIES LAST



Responsibly Farmed Salmon Fillets

\$8.99 per lb

Tender, mild salmon is raised with no antibiotics or added growth hormones.



Email #3; Sent January 21, 2016

[FIND STORE](#) [SALES](#) [RECIPES](#) [SHOP](#)**DePaul Store**

(773) 868-5200



One Table, Many Dinners

Got a crew with lots of different dietary needs? You can customize dinner without feeling like a short-order cook. Make-your-own meals like tostadas and mini pizzas are a great way to ensure that everyone's dietary preferences have a place at the table.

[9 Meal-Time Solutions >](#)



Blender Trends

Get a registered dietitian's take on trending smoothie ingredients such as hemp, turmeric, maca powder and chia seeds.

[Spice Up Your Smoothie >](#)

12 Snacks to Stash at Your Desk

Power through your day with healthier snacks you can prep at home. Whether you have a sweet tooth or savory cravings, we've got ideas to help you munch mindfully.

Email #4; Sent January 25, 2016



Find A Store On Sale Shop Online

YOUR STORE:
DePaul
(773) 868-5200



Starkey Spring Water

2 for \$3 500 ml

Sip single-source geothermal spring water from the mountains of Idaho, known for its silky-smooth taste and gently alkaline pH.

[FIND STORE](#) [SALES](#) [RECIPES](#) [SHOP](#)**DePaul Store**
(773) 868-5200

Fast Faves for Game Day

Score more time to relax with friends and family! Watch our 60-second guacamole video to learn to dice an avocado before you remove the peel, and check out our time-saving chili tutorial featuring a simple, pre-mixed spice blend.

[Superfast Guacamole >](#)[6-Ingredient Harissa-Turkey Chili >](#)



Healthier Halftime Snacks

With the big game just around the corner, snack planning is at an all-time high. If you're hoping to serve something more wholesome than stadium food, get cooking with our plant-packed recipes for everything from Buffalo Cauliflower Bites to Banana Cocoa Snack Cake.

[Make a Healthy Game Plan >](#)

Why We Love Red Fruits and Veggies

Between Valentine's Day and American Heart Month, you may be seeing red (in the best possible way) this February. It's a great time to explore the beauty, flavor and nutrition benefits of red fruits and vegetables, from beets to grapefruit to pomegranates and more.

Email #6; Sent February 1, 2016



[Find A Store](#) [On Sale](#) [Shop Online](#)

YOUR STORE:
DePaul
(773) 868-5200

ON SALE **\$3.99LB**

FULLY COOKED CHICKEN WINGS

Cheer on your favorite team with some winning wings in hand.

GET GAME DAY READY

VALID 2/3 - 2/9/16. AVAILABLE IN PREPARED FOODS. WHILE SUPPLIES LAST. SELECTION VARIES.

The advertisement features a black plate of sauced chicken wings, celery sticks, and carrot sticks on a wooden surface. A glass of beer is partially visible in the top left corner.

ON SALE **\$5.99 EACH**

AMY'S FROZEN PIZZAS

VALID 2/3 - 2/9/16. WHILE SUPPLIES LAST. SELECTION VARIES.

The advertisement shows two slices of Amy's frozen pizzas with different toppings, including vegetables and meat, on a wooden background.

For daily inspiration, connect with us on:

Email #7; Sent February 3, 2016



[Find A Store](#) [On Sale](#) [Shop Online](#)

YOUR STORE:
DePaul
(773) 868-5200



Amy's Organic Frozen Pizzas

\$5.99 11 - 14 oz

Feed hungry fans in a flash with plenty of pizzas from the freezer.

[FIND STORE](#) [SALES](#) [RECIPES](#) [SHOP](#)**DePaul Store**
(773) 868-5200**ORDER GROCERIES ONLINE**
FAST DELIVERY OR PICKUP

Valentine Value: Whole Trade® Roses

This February 14, skip the trip to the florist and swing by your local Whole Foods Market® for a bouquet of Whole Trade® roses. While you're at it, pick up everything you need for Valentine's Day—from dinner and a card to chocolate and a bottle of wine—all in one convenient place.

[Discover Whole Trade® Roses >](#)

.....



Spa Gifts for Everyone on Your List

Because everybody can use a little TLC, bath and body products make great Valentine's Day gifts. Bonus: Our luxurious rose-scented soaps, bath salts and lotions pair well with a bouquet or a single long-stemmed rose.

[Give Tender Loving Care >](#)

Romance on the Half Shell

Are oysters really aphrodisiacs? We don't know, but we do know that we're crazy about their fresh taste and sensual texture. Our new video shows you how to shuck like a pro so you can dazzle your date with a plate of Responsibly Farmed oysters.

[Fall in Love with Oysters >](#)



Find A Store On Sale Shop Online

YOUR STORE:
DePaul
(773) 868-5200

ON SALE **2 FOR \$5**

THEO ORGANIC CHOCOLATE BARS

EXPLORE THIS WEEK'S SALES

VALID 2/10 - 2/16/16
WHILE SUPPLIES LAST. SELECTION VARIES.

THIS WEEKEND ONLY!

25% OFF ALL LIP CARE & LIP COLOR

Perfect your pout with the highest-quality lipsticks, lip balms and glosses.

VALID 2/12 - 2/14/16. WHILE SUPPLIES LAST. SELECTION VARIES.



Wild-Caught White Shrimp

\$12.99 lb

Stock up on tender sustainable shrimp with no artificial additives allowed. Sold raw for you to prepare with your favorite dish.
(16-20 ct)

Email #10; Sent February 11, 2016



Picture #1; *Green Revitalization* by artist Phil Schuster outside of the Lincoln Park Whole Foods Market



Picture #2; the reverse side of Picture #1



Picture #3; Sign featured inside the Lincoln Park Whole Foods Market



Picture #4; Conventional Orange & Yellow Bell Peppers



Picture #5; Conventionally grown Cubed Pineapple, Whole Trade Guarantee Certified, unrated on the Responsibly Grown program



Picture #6; Illinois shaped sign



Picture #7; Water tank decor



Picture #8; Sign hanging from ceiling

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