

2023

# Valentine's Day Report

Joetta Di Bella and Fred C. Sautter III

Center for  
**Strategic**  
Communication



**What About Love? Does the Over-Commercialization of Valentine's Day on Social Media Leave Us Living in a Sadder, Material World?**

**By: Dr. Jin-A Choi, Dr. Bond Benton, Dr. Yi Luo, Keith Green**





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# Researchers



## Dr. Jin-A Choi

### Assistant Professor, School of Communication and Media

Dr. Choi received her PhD from the Stan Richards School of Advertising and Public Relations at the University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Choi's scholarship focuses on target advertising celebrity/social media influencer endorsements, digital advertising, text mining, and data analytics. Her research has been published in journals such as Journal of Global Marketing, Communication Studies, and others. Dr. Choi teaches a variety of undergraduate and graduate courses such as Social Media Analytics, Influencers and Opinion Leaders and Integrated Communications.



## Dr. Bond Benton

### Associate Professor, School of Communication and Media

Dr. Benton's doctorate is from the University of Vienna with his dissertation focusing on the influence of culture on meaning. A particular focus of Dr. Benton's research is the interaction of media, branding, and cross-cultural communication as it relates to the values and decisions of constituencies. Dr. Benton's essays and research articles have appeared in journals and anthologies including The Journal of E-Learning and Digital Media, Public Relations Tactics, and many more. His first book, The Challenge of Working for Americans: Perspectives of an International Workforce, was released in 2014.



## Dr. Yi Luo

### Associate Professor, School of Communication and Media

Dr. Luo has conducted research in the areas of organizational change, sensemaking, leadership, social media and communication management, activism, organizational justice, and global public relations. Dr. Luo received her Ph.D in Communication from the University of Maryland, College Park. Dr. Luo's research has been published or accepted to be published in Public Relations Review, Journal of Public Relations Research, among many more. Dr. Luo teaches a variety of courses in organizational communication and public relations such as Cases and Campaigns, Communication Theories, Communication Research, Global Public Relations, Public Relations Ethics, New Media Applications in Organizations, and Digital Production.



## Keith Green

### Coordinator of Strategic Communications, School of Communication and Media

Green is a two-time graduate of Temple University, where he earned a B.A. in Journalism and M.Ed. in Sports Administration. Over more than three decades, his career includes executive positions at the Philadelphia 76ers, NASCAR, and Guinness World Records, where he was a creative driving force around promotional, public relations and community outreach efforts for those companies and their clients and corporate partners. In his current role at Montclair State, he also leads Hawk Communications, a student-run firm that allows its practitioners to gain hands-on experience in PR, promotional and social media tactics. He also oversees the operations for the Joetta DiBella and Fred C. Sautter III Center for Strategic Communication.

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# Valentine's Day

Iconic holidays and holiday figures have historically merged with myth, tradition, and cultural preferences. Santa Claus, for example, comes from stories of a man's generosity in Third Century Turkey. As those stories became legend and Nicholas received Church recognition, an emerging and varied set of culturally constructed myths developed that would become what we know today as Santa Claus ("Santa Claus," 2010).

Similarly, the origins of Valentine's Day are equally opaque. For example, the Catholic Church recognizes multiple "Saint Valentines:"

The Catholic Church recognizes at least three different saints named Valentine or Valentinus, all of whom were martyred. One legend contends that Valentine was a priest who served during the third century in Rome. When Emperor Claudius II decided that single men made better soldiers than those with wives and families, he outlawed marriage for young men. Valentine, realizing the injustice of the decree, defied Claudius and continued



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to perform marriages for young lovers in secret. When Valentine's actions were discovered, Claudius ordered him to death. Still others insist that it was Saint Valentine of Terni, a bishop, who was the true namesake of the holiday. He, too, was beheaded by Claudius II outside Rome ("History of Valentine's Day," 2009).

However, even these distinct versions of St. Valentine's history cannot be considered definitive. Other "origin stories" of the holiday suggest that, after being captured, Valentine sent a note to a woman he loved, signing it with the now ubiquitous phrase "from your Valentine." While the stories surrounding the holiday's origin are not clear, several emergent themes about "Valentine" became culturally embedded. Specifically, that he represents a romantic and giving figure whose commitment to love was complete and enduring.

The evolution to the Valentine's Day known currently continued throughout the centuries that followed. Geoffrey Chaucer's erotic poem "The Parliament of Fowls" even included the phrase "For this was sent on Seynt Valentyne's day / Whan every



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foul cometh ther to choose his mate” (“Chaucer, Geoffrey (c.1343–1400) - The Parliament of Fowls: A Modernisation of Chaucer’s Poem” n.d.) when written in the Middle Ages. Valentine’s Day cards and gifts became increasingly noted and common in the centuries to follow with mythology such as Cupid and traditions (e.g., the use of pink) emerged as time went on. Ultimately, like the Santa Claus story, the varied potpourri of history came together to define the holiday we celebrate today.

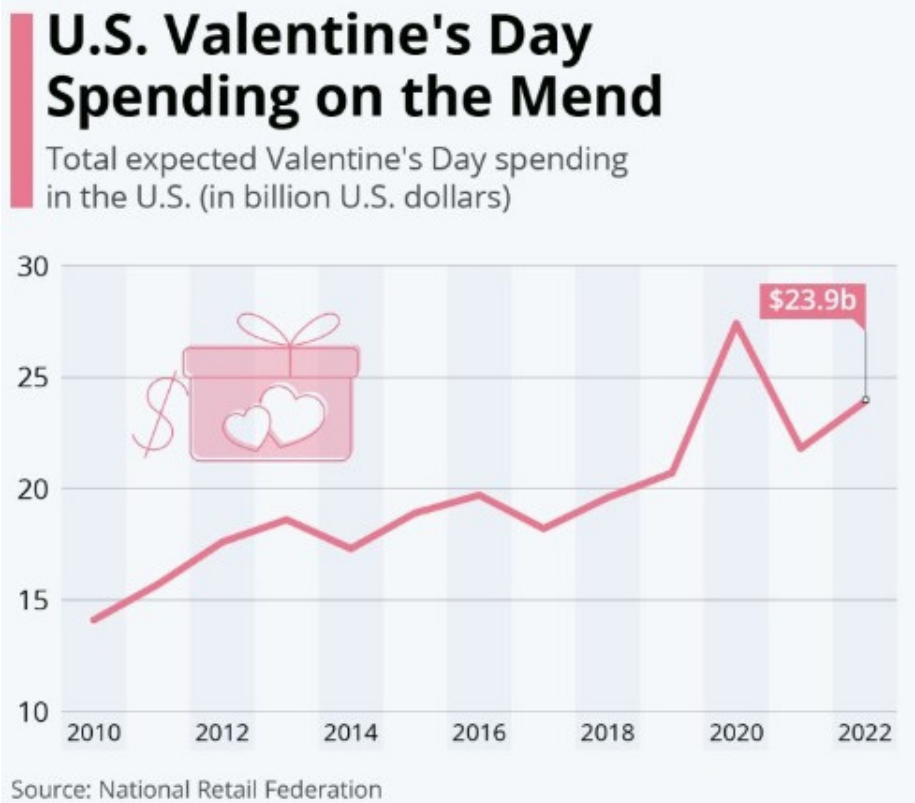
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## Valentine\$ Day: Commercialization and Effects

Despite the origins of the holiday, Valentine’s Day has increasingly become a space of enterprise and commerce. The most recent estimates of the National Retail Federation suggests that the holiday now accounts for over \$23 billion in purchases in the U.S. (Haggerty, 2022).







## Valentine\$ Day: Commercialization and Effects

This emphasis on consumption has potentially had significant psychological effects on individuals consuming discourse related to Valentine’s Day. Commercial messages have been found to negatively affect people’s perceptions of themselves, hence creating feelings of inadequacy (Micu & Coulter, 2012). The linkage between consumption and legitimacy in intimate relationships that Valentine’s Day represents is particularly noteworthy. Lange, Jerabek, and Dagnall (2022) note that the “Valentine’s Day Blues are not an urban myth but a real form of situational depression” (p. 49). Their study of 2000 participants revealed that “generalized depression was greater for those not receiving a gift relative to that expressed by those who did receive a Valentine’s Day gift”(p.49) with depression continuing longer than three weeks after the holiday among participants. This linkage between commercial participation in Valentine’s Day and relational happiness has been validated in multiple studies. Additional research identified Valentine’s Day as a focal point for mental health concerns (Hughes et al. 2022),



## Valentine\$ Day: Commercialization and Effects

a source of relationship friction (Morse & Neuberg, 2004), and a driver of social anxiety (Martin & Quirk, 2015).

In sum, the commercialization of Valentine’s Day and its cultural construction as the linkage between romantic authenticity and market participation appear to have created a context that poses significant mental health challenges. The notion of “noble love” has, in many ways, been replaced by the commercialization of messaging associated with the holiday.

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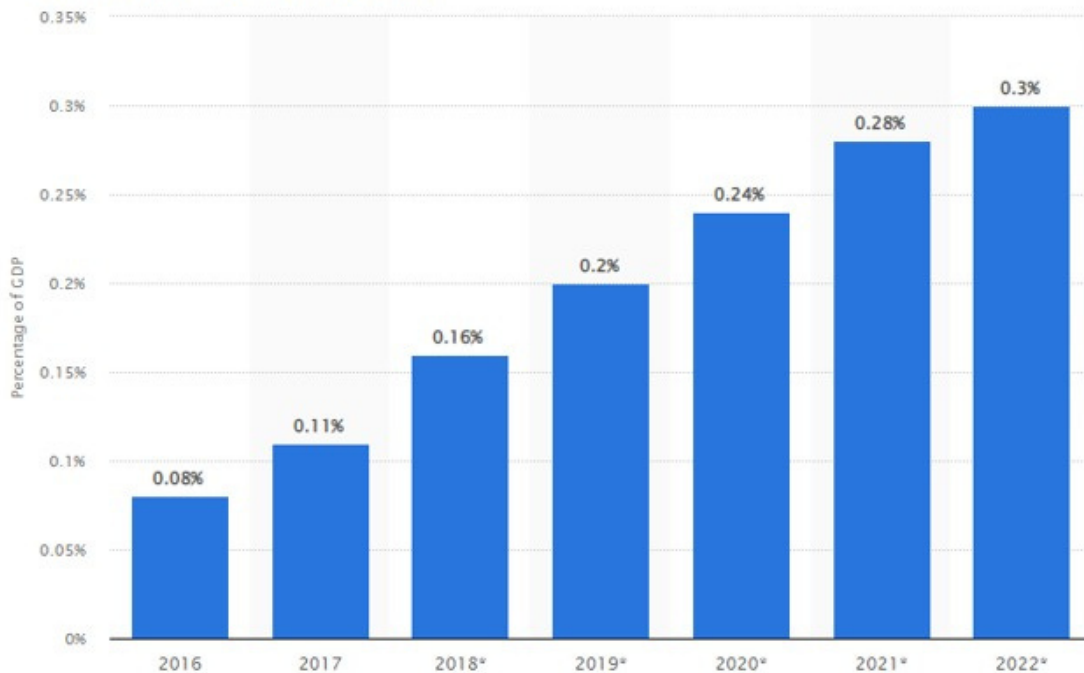




## Social Media Advertising and the V-Day Payday

The economic importance of social media advertising has long been established. When contextualized as a percentage of GDP, the growth of this sector becomes even more pronounced (“Digital Market Outlook: Social Media Ad Revenue as Share of GDP in the U.S. 2016-2022” n.d.).

Social media advertising revenue as percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) in the United States from 2016 to 2022



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## Social Media Advertising and the V-Day Payday

Social media advertising's growth is profound, however its effects on social media users is particularly pronounced. Consumption of social media has been linked to concerns about body image and self-esteem issues (Gori & Topino, 2023). Research also suggests that certain individuals may be susceptible to significant harm to self-concept (Valkenburg et al., 2021). Such results are certainly not surprising. Facebook Whistleblower Francis Haugen noted that internal documents from the company showed that "13.5% of U.K. teen girls said Instagram worsens suicidal thoughts... 17% of teen girls say their eating disorders got worse after Instagram use" (Romo, 2021). Social media advertising, in particular, has been linked to unhealthy perceptions and behavior choices (van der Bend et al., 2022).

When taken together, the current construction of Valentine's Day has been shown to have negative effects on some populations through extensive commercialization and social pressure towards a neo-liberal conception of "love."



## Social Media Advertising and the V-Day Payday

Social media is clearly a commercial space with significant psychological drawbacks for many users.

As such, this study posits that the presentation of Valentine's Day on social media will be largely commercial in nature begging questions of effect for researchers. The study will examine 1) *the extent to which commercial messaging is present in social media posts related to Valentine's Day, and 2) what dominant terms have been used in relation to Valentine's Day on social media platforms.*

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# Method

To investigate the themes of Valentine’s Day messaging on social media, researchers examined 80,000 social media posts collected from various social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. This study evaluated social media posts over a four week period in the runup to Valentine’s Day 2023. The researchers built search queries on social media posts related to Valentine’s Day targeting to both couples and singles using hashtags #Valentinesday and #Valentinesday2023. Analytics results revealed the most popular hashtags, key words, and mentions surrounding this topic.

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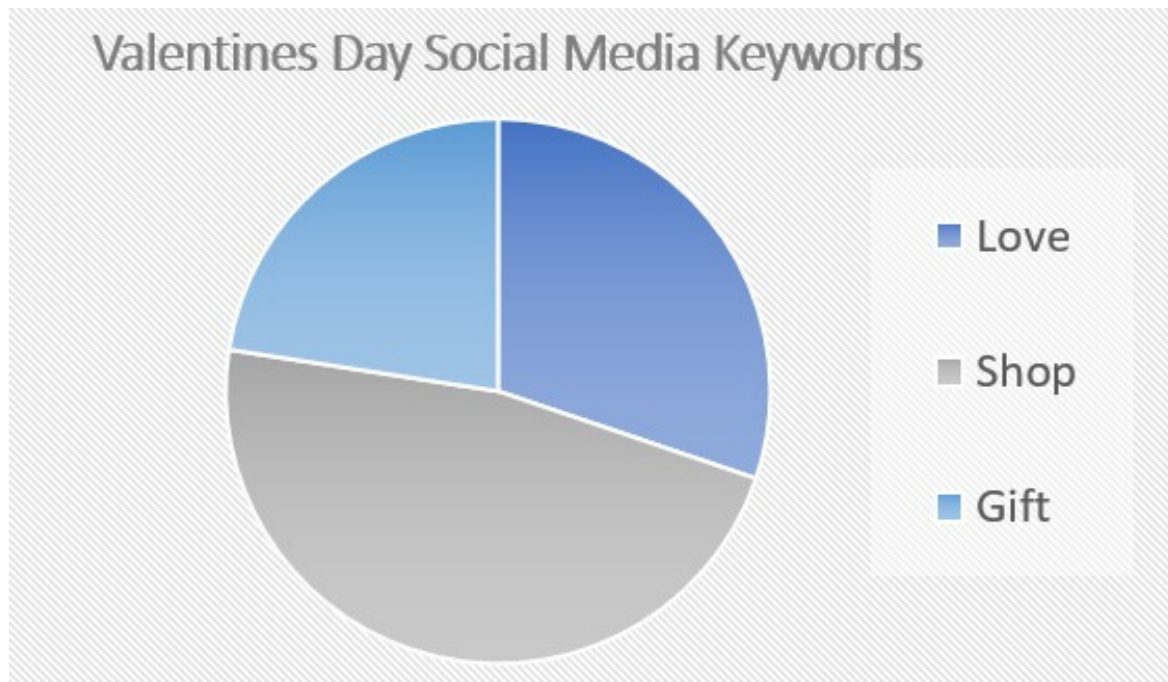
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# Results

Results indicate that commercial messages were the dominant theme in posted social media content in the period studied. Keyword analysis of social media posts show that the most commonly used term was “shop” along with “available,” “gift,” “special,” “give,” etc. targeted to couples. Particularly, the terms “shop” and “gift” identified 131.17% more frequently than the term “love.”

The most



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# Results

The word cloud generated to show term use frequency in the studied data set further reveals the extent to which commercial and advertising messages are embedded in social media messaging about Valentine’s Day.



Interestingly, among the Valentine’s Day social messages targeted toward singles, the popular hashtags included “#selflove,” “selfcare,” “valentinesgift,” “#chocolate day,” “#roseday,” and others (see the chart below).

Commercialization of Valentine’s Day among singles has manifested through





# Results

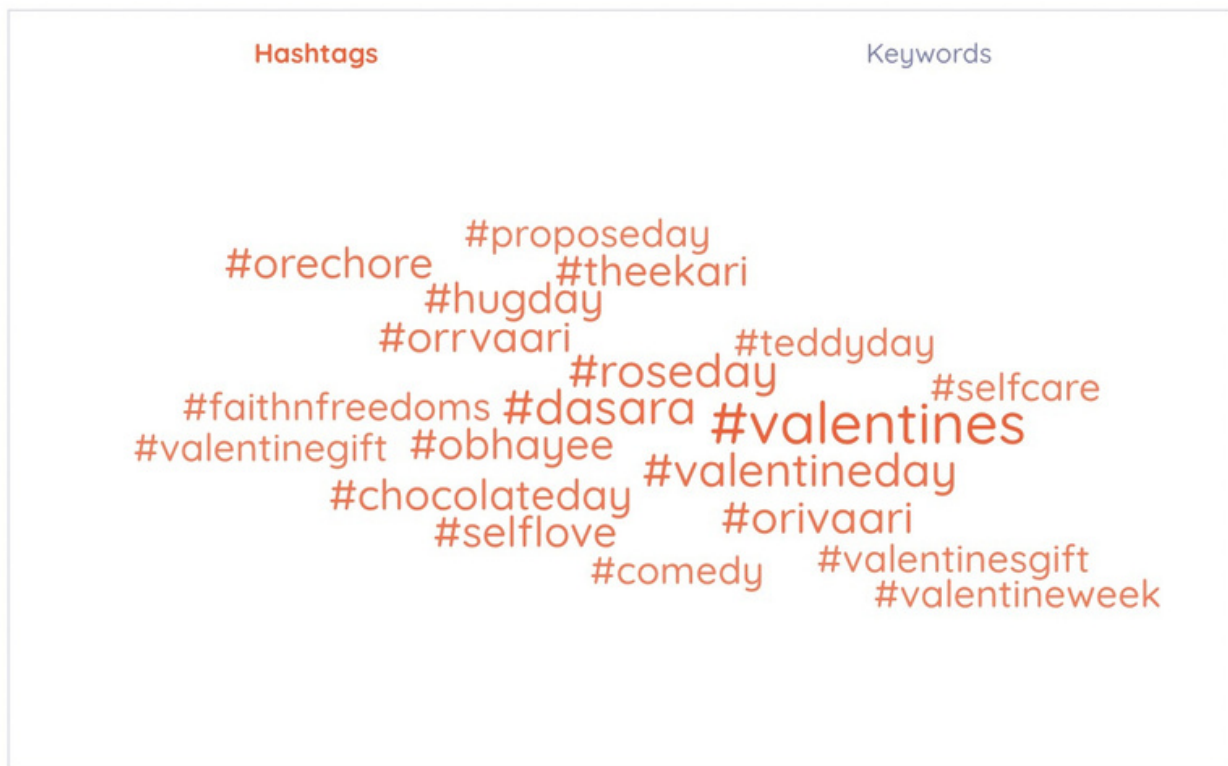
advertising messages about purchasing products/services (e.g., flowers, books, music, cakes, candies, spa services, etc.) to demonstrate self-love. Invariably, advertisers seized this holiday to encourage consumptions of feel-good products for individuals not in a romantic relationship. In addition to the purchase-centric representations of self-love for singles, a few salient themes emerged surrounding the social conversations about self-love for non-romantically involved individuals during Valentine's Day. Particularly, supportive messages encouraged singles to focus on setting healthy boundaries, focusing on mental health, prioritizing personal goals, launching positive changes, seeking love from friends and families, purchasing personal dreams, learning strategies to manage loneliness, seeking balance by turning inward, staying physically active, etc.

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# Results



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# Discussion

Cumulatively, the collected data reveals that the primary driver of Valentine’s Day posts in social media have significant linkage to sales and purchases. As the social media posts demonstrate that social media is reinforcing the commercial focus of the Valentine’s Day holiday, a particular concern is the potential linkage between the effects of advertising messages on self-image (Micu & Coulter, 2012), the mental health stressors associated with Valentine’s Day (Lange, Jerabek, & Dagnall, 2022; Hughes et al., 2022; Morse & Neuberg, 2004; Martin & Quirk, 2015), and the dangers of social media posts for self-esteem (Gori & Topino 2023; Romo, 2021; Valkenburg et al., 2021). This danger appears to be most acute for young people accessing social media. Unrealistic romantic expectations can have consequences for establishing fulfilling relationships. Lange (2022) noted that the most at-risk population for adverse psychological effects of the holiday and the “greatest clinical concern” (p. 49) are individuals under the age of 40. With the same population more inclined to social media usage, clarity about the intent and reality of social media messaging is more salient.

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# Discussion

consumers looking to brighten a loved one's day, when such commercial messages drown out legitimate statements of love and connection, potentially negative consequences follow.



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2023

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*Thank You!*



About the School of Communication and Media: Founded in 2012, the School of Communication and Media offers a range of dynamic programs in communication and media to a talented and diverse student population of over 1,500. Offering degrees in film and television, social media and public relations, advertising, journalism and digital media, sports communication, animation and visual effects, and an MA in public and organizational relations, the School prepares the next generation of communication and media practitioners and leaders. The School houses award-winning student programs that include WMSC Radio, The Montclarion newspaper, Hawk Communications PR Agency, the Red Hawk Sports Network, Hawk+ OTT streaming platform, and News Lab, as well as the Center for Cooperative Media, which serves the public by working to grow and strengthen local journalism. Recent national School recognitions include an Edward R. Murrow Award, several Marconi Award nominations, and a College Television Award from the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences.

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