

Students from Three Universities Compete for Socionomics Foundation Prize

By Matt Lampert

For the second consecutive year, college students competed in a socionomics paper-writing contest. At stake was a \$1,000 scholarship courtesy of the Socionomics Foundation. Participants hailed from a record three universities, and their paper topics ran the gamut from advertising to epidemics to footwear to Frankenstein.

The entries came from students in Peter Atwater's 2018 classes at the College of William & Mary and the University of Delaware, as well as Dennis Elam's students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Atwater and Elam are both longtime socionomists who are pioneers in introducing socionomics to the next generation.

"I'm like a kid on Christmas morning when the students submit their papers," remarked Atwater. "The topics are always a surprise. I love seeing the students choose something that really excites them and then dig deep to uncover fresh insights."

And there were fresh insights aplenty. Want to know when to launch a snowboarding company, how to sell cleaning products in a bear market, what kinds of shoes take off when social mood is positive or how the field of genetic engineering will likely shift when mood becomes more negative? The students have you covered.

The Socionomics Foundation was impressed with the engaging content of the entries, along with the efforts the students took to marshal evidence in support of their socionomic theses. The Foundation recognized Michael Fairbanks from the College of William & Mary for writing the most outstanding paper.

On receiving the award, Fairbanks said, "I am honored to have been selected as the winner of the 2018 Socionomics Foundation Scholarship. I personally believe that the emerging field of socionomics has tremendous room for growth both in the academic and professional worlds. In the future I plan to further pursue my interest in the field through my own personal research as well as my career choices."

"This competition is a terrific opportunity for students to be recognized for their work," said

Elam. "It's an honor for our ten-year-old campus to compete with universities with hundreds of years of history. I would strongly encourage professors interested in socionomics to share the theory with their students. We all win when there are more socionomists in the world."

You can read summaries of the winning paper and several other submissions below.

From the College of William & Mary

Energy Drinks—Michael Fairbanks' prize-winning paper examined the history of popular energy drinks dating back to the introduction of Glucozade in the UK near the positive mood extreme of the late 1920s. Like socionomists before him, Fairbanks determined that the public's thirst for energy drinks is greatest when mood is extremely positive, whereas a window of opportunity opens for "anti-energy drinks" and beverages that aid relaxation when mood becomes negative. Fairbanks also included a brief but utility-packed case study on the failed launch of an upscale energy drink targeted at the nightclub crowd during the 2008 financial crisis, when the public was in no mood to spend on luxury, clubbing or jolts of caffeine.

Conspiracy Theories—Ana Zuffi used the gold-adjusted Dow Jones Industrial Average as a sociometer to explore the timing of popular conspiracy theories. Zuffi found that negative mood trends offered fertile ground for the flowering of these unorthodox perspectives, as the public's trust in government and other mainstream institutions waned.

Nickelodeon—How did a fledgling, low-rated, unprofitable educational channel transform itself into the largest children's entertainment network in America? Hannah Scanlon's paper suggests that Nickelodeon did so by harnessing the power of a wave of positive social mood. With hits like *All That* and *Kenan & Kel* in the mid-1990s and the network's longest-running and most successful

series, *SpongeBob SquarePants*, which premiered in 1999, Nick has consistently capitalized on the opportunities positive mood has afforded. Scanlon also evaluated the channel's programming during negative mood environments along with its merchandising and marketing efforts aimed at opening up revenue streams beyond the small screen.

Disasters—Socionomists have found that airline crashes and other human-caused industrial accidents are more likely to occur when mood is negative. In her submission, Sarah Snipes presented a series of case studies on five human-made disasters, including the Three Mile Island meltdown, the Tennessee coal ash spill and the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and concurred that such disasters happened more often when mood was negative.

From Texas A&M University-San Antonio

Genetic Engineering—Arthur N. Cadena identified a completed Elliott wave impulse and correction in 28 years of data from the National Human Genome Research Institute on grants it received from the U.S. government to perform genomic research. Cadena used this analysis to forecast that a new bull market in genetic research is likely upon us. He observed dramatic cost-saving advancements in genomic technology in recent years along with efforts scientists have made to use genetic engineering to aid in food production. Cadena reviewed socionomist Alan Hall's forecast for a rise in pro-eugenic ideas and proposed that genetic engineering is a probable outlet society will use to implement such ideas when the mood trend becomes conducive.

Accounting Regulations—A pair of submissions addressed social mood and the history of accounting rules in the U.S., a topic that Professor Elam addressed at the 2016 Social Mood Conference. Both entries noted the tendency for regulations to tighten when mood grew negative. Jose Marquez's paper covered the timing of the creation of the Federal Reserve, the Securities Act of 1933, the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, accounting regulatory committees such as the Accounting Principles Board and the Financial Accounting Standards Board, and the more recent Sarbanes-Oxley and Dodd-Frank legislation. A submission co-authored by Bethel Alesheshet and

Oscar Hernandez further noted the repeal of Glass-Steagall near a positive mood extreme, examined efforts to crack down on fraudulent corporate accounting and international transactions, and considered the timing of the Sherman Antitrust Act and the establishment of earlier central banks in U.S. history.

Epidemics—Social mood's reach extends well beyond the stock market and even impacts our physical health. Sage C. Woods and Ernesto Aguilar discussed the socionomics literature on epidemic disease, which has found a substantial increase in epidemic risk when social mood is negative. They reviewed the socionomic timing of a sample of major epidemics in Asia, North America, Africa and South America, including H7N9 and H1N1 flu, SARS, Ebola, malaria and Zika.

Misbehaving Banks—Socionomists have illustrated how negative mood impels the public to seek out scandals. Ercilia Diaz looked at scandals involving three "too big to fail" banks since the financial crisis and the hundreds of millions of dollars the banks lost to fines and legal settlements after the scandals broke. Diaz also considered recent efforts to break up big banks as well as the roles that bad loans, regulatory issues and risk management decisions played in bank failures before and after the 2008 crisis.

From the University of Delaware

Shoe Design—The connection between social mood and fashion trends is well-walked ground in the socionomics literature, but Mary Rose McArtor found room to make an original contribution with a decade-by-decade strut through the history of American women's shoe designs from the 1920s to present. McArtor found that popular shoes in positive mood periods tended to have thinner heels, more synthetic materials and less coverage, whereas shoes tended to have thicker and shorter heels, be more comfortable and be composed of more natural materials when mood was negative.

Hitting the Slopes—Jack Swift studied how positive mood motivated society's interest in adrenaline-pumping extreme winter sports. He compared the rising popularity of snow skiing in the positive mood of the 1960s to the enthusiasm for snowboarding in the euphoria of the 1990s. Swift also discussed trends in the opening of ski

resorts and periods of innovation in the winter sports industry.

Commercials for Cleaners—One way to craft a successful commercial is to produce an ad that resonates with the current social mood trend. Isabel Wolfenbarger reviewed print and television advertisements for popular American household cleaning products from the 1920s to present and found that in periods of positive social mood, ads contained more text and more often emphasized the product's advantages relative to its competitors, whereas ads that appeared when mood was negative more often emphasized simplicity and how the cleaner would improve users' lives.

Frankenstein—Mary Shelley's story has inspired numerous cinematic adaptations. Tatenda Mlambo traced the history of Frankenstein films from the iconic 1931 movie starring Boris Karloff

to more recent iterations like 2008's *Igor* and the 2012 remake of *Frankenweenie*. Through the decades of Frankenstein re-imaginings, sequels, spinoffs and spoofs, Mlambo noted that the films tended to emphasize horror and realism when mood was negative and were more often humorous, futuristic or adventure-themed when mood was positive. These conclusions are compatible with socionomists' earlier observations about Frankenstein films and horror movies in general. The horror genre tends to see its greatest innovations and successes in negative-mood periods, whereas positive-mood horror movies tend to be less horrific, hokier and more derivative.

Are You Ready to Throw Your Hat in the Ring?

If you're a college student or professor who would like to stay up to date on the Socionomics Foundation's plans for its 2019 scholarship contest, drop a line to foundation@socionomics.org.