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THE INFLUENCE OF NEGATIVE INFORMATION ON THE CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

A Thesis
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Degree
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Lisa J. Lyon
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Abstract

In this study, the influence of negative information on the consumer decision-making process is experimentally tested. This study examines whether: negative information can have a positive effect on consumer brand-based decisions; and, if consumers can recognize a brand, but not recall accompanying information when this type of decision is made; and if there is a correlation between level of involvement and the likelihood of choosing a service about which negative information was given.

Results suggest that subjects do not prefer a service about which they had been given negative information over other unknown services; subjects had a tendency to recognize the brand and recall accompanying negative information; and, there was a correlation between those choosing the negative-information service and level of involvement.

The findings imply that consumers will not necessarily choose a familiar name over an unfamiliar one, if what they know

about the familiar brand is negative. Also, the correlation between involvement and those choosing the negative information service suggests a relationship between subject relevance and tendency to prefer a familiar brand over an unfamiliar one.

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Chapter I
Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

For decades, the study of decision-making processes has been of great concern to researchers in the fields of consumer research, marketing, public relations, and advertising. With technology increasing the speed of information dissemination and the number of communication outlets, it is increasingly difficult to reach consumers and affect their decision-making processes. Today's consumers are faced with a barrage of conflicting information from a variety of sources. Businesses are faced with the increasingly difficult task of creating brand-name awareness of services and products among consumers.

A recent consumer survey conducted by International Research Associates (INRA) shows that "the real value of a company lies outside the business itself and in the minds of consumers who are potential buyers," according to Jean Quatresooz, President of INRA. The notion of brand-name saliency among consumers has been hailed as the primary, most long-lasting asset of a business (Bovet, 1995).

It may be possible then, that negative information is not as harmful to a company as conventionally thought. Perhaps the old adage rings true: Any PR is good PR.

If, as Edell and Burke (1987) suggested, negative information can elicit attitudes strong enough to be subsequently recognized but not necessarily recalled, negative information might not be as big a threat as we historically have thought. Public relations efforts would be significantly altered if the distribution of negative information does not have the drastic, damaging effect that some companies imagine.

In today's consumer environment derogatory rumors about products, counter-advertising of brand names, widely publicized tests of brand name products, and crisis control situations dealing with negative information all involve how the consumer's opinion about a brand name is formed. How individuals use negative information is an important aspect in understanding how every-day decisions are made, effecting the consumer marketplace.

The notion of preferring familiar names over unknown names is an accepted one in the area of consumer science (Bettman, 1979). It may even be suggested that consumers will

prefer a familiar brand, even if what they heard about that brand is negative. This study will investigate whether this is simply conventional wisdom, or if there is evidence to impact the field of consumer behavior and mass communication.

Purpose of this Study

This study will determine whether the dissemination of negative information about a product, given at the same time as competing neutral and positive information about other products, can create a saliency in the mind of the consumers strong enough to produce subsequent recognition and consumer choice. It will examine the possibility of choosing a product or service about which subjects have heard only negative information, over other unknown brands about which subjects have no prior information.

Additionally, this study will attempt to uncover the role involvement plays in the decision-making process. For example, one study of voters confronted with negative information on political candidates (Garramone, 1984) have shown that highly involved subjects are less likely to rely on the information given. Conversely, if the information was the subjects' only knowledge of the topic, subjects relied more heavily on the information.

This experiment will examine whether this phenomena holds true for consumer decision-making as well.

Method of Study

An experiment was conducted with undergraduate students who will receive positive, negative, and neutral information about several resume service companies, with the negative information acting as the independent variable. After undergoing a distracter task, the subjects were given a questionnaire. In the questionnaire subjects were asked to choose a service company. Of the choices listed was a service about which negative information was given before the distracter task and three fictional services about which no information was given.

Following the initial questionnaire, subjects completed a second questionnaire to determine if they could recall the type of information disseminated about specific service companies.

Research Questions

(1) Can negative information have a positive effect in consumer brand-based decisions? (Might subjects choose a service about which they have only received negative information over services about which they have no other information?) (2) When a memory-based judgment is formed about a product, might

consumers recognize a brand, but not recall whether accompanying information was negative or positive? (3) Is there a correlation between level of involvement and likelihood of choosing a service about which negative information was received?

Chapter II
Literature Review

Cognitive Dissonance

Every day, we make hundreds of decisions. A prominent theory which attempts to explain many of the cognitions that comprise these decisions is cognitive dissonance. We, as individuals, strive for consistency within ourselves (Festinger, 1957). Festinger purports that dissonance, or inconsistency, is a psychologically uncomfortable state of mind that will motivate individuals to achieve consonance, or consistency within themselves. For example, a person who believes that a college education is good will encourage his children to attend college. Overwhelming evidence supports the theory that an individual's personal, political, and social attitudes, will show a consistent pattern. This concept is important when we try to understand what may or may not motivate human behavior and cause decisions to be made.

In particular, this idea is germane to consumer decision-making situations where consumers are faced with an abundance of conflicting and contradictory information each day. Festinger

claims that the very existence of these relations among cognitions, is a motivating factor on its own right. The term "cognition," for purposes of this study, will be defined as any knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself, or about ones behavior (Festinger, 1957).

Cognitive Dissonance predicts that when decisions based on conflicting information arise, people experience a **need** to actively reduce dissonance. This may be as simple as making up one's mind whether to buy a particular brand of cereal after viewing a commercial. However, does not imply that only rational means are used to understand and justify inconsistencies. Nor should it imply that inconsistencies never exist. For instance, many people continue to smoke even though they know it may impair their health.

Festinger believed people will not psychologically accept such situations as inconsistencies. Instead, they will employ various attempts at rationalization to reduce the dissonance and create a sense of consonance. For example, the person may justify smoking with feelings that "(a) he or enjoys it so much it's worth it; (b) the chances of his health suffering are not as serious as some would make out; (c) he can't always avoid every possible

dangerous situation and still live; (d) even if he stopped smoking he would put on weight which is equally bad for his health" (Festinger 1957, p.2).

Strain towards symmetry. Similarly, the underlying premise to Newcomb's concept of "strain toward symmetry," assumes that inconsistency is painful or at least psychologically uncomfortable, and that humans will seek to avoid or reduce it (Newcomb, 1953). A strain towards symmetry exists when two people are both oriented toward the same object. Newcomb states that people who are attracted toward one another will bend their opinions of the object that they are oriented towards until the opinions are somewhat congruent. His findings revealed a tendency for those who were attracted to one another to agree on many matters, including the way they perceived their own selves, and their attraction for other group members (Newcomb, 1953). Thus, if an individual is faced with information inconsistent with previously held beliefs, he may attempt to alter those beliefs to match currently held opinions, or an opinion of a person he is attracted to.

Principle of congruity. Osgood and Tannenbaum's (1955) principle of congruity assumes that frames of reference in

situations where cognitive dissonance occurs will tend toward maximum simplicity. This results in "all or nothing" judgments and increased polarization. When Tinkham and Weaver-Lairscy (1993) studied the impact of negative advertisements on voters, they found that negative ads contribute to greater discrimination between, and attitude polarization towards candidates. They also suggest that a benefit of the negative information being conveyed in the political advertisements is that it may help voters feel greater confidence in their decisions. Also, because voting is the type of behavior where a choice must be made among alternatives, the Tinkham and Weaver-Lairscy study was conducted on the basis of classical decision theory. The basic tenet of which is attitudes and evaluations are grounded in underlying belief structures and cognitions.

The principle of congruity holds that when a change in attitude occurs, the change will always side with the pre-existing frame of reference (Zajonc, 1960). In a study on attitude change, Zajonc (1960) found that, in general, when:

> the original attitudes toward the source and the concept were both positive, no significant attitude changes were observed in the results. When original attitudes towards the source and the concept were negative and the assertion was positive, again, no

> changes were obtained. As predicted, however, when a positively valued source was seen as making a positive assertion about a negatively valued concept, the attitude toward the source became less favorable. Conversely, when a negatively valued source was seen as making a positive assertion about a positively valued concept, attitudes toward the source became more favorable and toward the concept less favorable (Zajonc, 1960 p. 288).

These theories about how conflicting information leads to opinion change obviously have a significant impact on how consumer decisions are made. The question was not directly addressed, however, about neutral original attitudes, a positively valued source, and negative information. This area of opinion formation is worthy of further study.

Verbalizing Mental Processes

Unfortunately, an inherent disadvantage in the evaluation of cognitions directly influencing responses is there may be little or no introspective access to higher order cognitive processes. (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977). Simply put, persons are often unable to verbalize how thought processes effecting their actions. Research has made it increasingly clear that there is almost no conscious awareness of perceptual and memory-based processes (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977). In fact, when persons experience "real-life" decision-making situations, they do not attempt to

interrogate their memories about their cognitive processes when asked questions about them. Instead, studies show people resort to a "pool of culturally supplied explanations for behavior of the sort in question, or failing in that, begin a search through a network of connotative relations until they find an explanation implying the behavior" (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977 p. 249).

A priori causal theories. Nisbett and Wilson report the reason for this is that the true cognitions effecting the response include those that are not available to conscious experience. Evidence to date on the "accurate subjective reports of higher mental processes" (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977, p. 232) indicates that, when asked to describe pertinent mental cognitions involved in a decision making process, people base their reports on a priori causal theories about the relationship between stimulus and response. This means instead of consulting a memory of the mediating process, people tend to make judgments about how plausible it is that the stimulus would have effected the response. These judgments exist prior to whatever stimulus is occurring. This does not mean that when a response to a particular stimulus is an a priori causal theory that it is wrong — in fact, many are correct. However, these judgments are made

entirely independently of any actual contact with a particular stimulus (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977). This presents an obvious obstacle to understanding how cognitions affect decision-making processes.

Attribution theory. Another theory involving the inability to sufficiently and accurately report on decision-making cognitions is attribution theory. This occurs, as Nisbett and Wilson report, because people strive to "discover the causes of attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral responses, and that the resulting causal attributions are a chief determinant of a host of additional attitudinal and behavioral effects" (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977, p.233).

Valins and Ray (1967) conducted a study demonstrating the attribution paradigm. Snake-phobic subjects were asked to watch slides while receiving electric shocks; meanwhile, they were wired for what they believed to be a recording of their heart rate. They listened to amplified rhythmic sounds that they were told were the sounds of their own heart beats. The slides contained pictures of snakes, alternated with the word "SHOCK." After each "SHOCK" slide, the subjects were given an electric shock. Eventually, the appearance of the "SHOCK" slide was

accompanied by an increased "heartbeat." After this segment of the experiment was completed, subjects were asked to approach, and if possible, touch a real snake. Subjects were able to come significantly closer to the snake than other control subjects who were told that the "heartbeat" was just an extraneous noise that had nothing to do with them.

These findings indicate that the subjects believed their "heartbeat" appropriately indicated fear when they were about to be electrically shocked, but remained constant in the presence of pictures of snakes. Subjects deduced that they must not be as afraid of snakes as they had thought. Valins and Ray (1967) claim that because they were armed with this new self-attribution of snake fearlessness, they were more willing to approach the snake (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977).

Along this vein, Bem and McConnell (1970) conducted what was called a counterattitudinal advocacy experiment where they attempted to prove that even though subjects can sometimes report on the existence of a new evaluation, they may be unaware of the fact that their old evaluation has changed. If this is true, subjects cannot be aware of the cognitive process that has occurred because they are not aware that a process has occurred

at all. In the experiment, subjects were asked to write an essay that opposed their own view on a controversial subject, and were subsequently asked to describe their own views on the subject. Subjects who were coerced or bribed into writing the essay showed no change in evaluation on their topic. Subjects who were given insufficient justification, or who were manipulated into thinking that they wrote the essay as a matter of free choice, typically shifted their original opinions of the subject in the direction of their essay.

Further, Bem and McConnell asked the subjects what their attitude of the subject had been one week earlier. Control subjects had no problem accurately reporting their prior views; the experimental (insufficient justification) group reported that their current attitudes were the same as their pre-manipulation attitudes even though they had been substantially different. The subjects changed their attitudes in the absence of any awareness of the change.

Subliminal perception. Although the theory of subliminal perception has been controversial, the basic concept of a person's ability to respond to a stimulus in the absence of his or her ability to report on it, is increasingly supported by research

investigators (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977). Herbert E. Krugman (1986) argues there are picture or image absorption capacities of the right-brain hemisphere that can quickly process and store amounts of information that couldn't be detected by recognition or recall measures. This right-brain picture-taking ability scans the environment and selects what the left side of the brain should actually process. This implies that the human brain is very possibly capable of a type of subliminal learning, therefore, exposure to information may be effective, even if we cannot later recall or accurately report on it.

A biological explanation. Krugman's assessment of the right brain's picture-taking ability, which permits screening of the environment, is vital to a more complete understanding of what causes us to make the decisions we do. Further, in the context of consumer decisions, even the faintest perceptions with the lowest levels of involvement to the consumer may be the ones with the crucial persuasive factor. To put this phenomenon in a biological context, Roger Sperry (cited in Krugman, 1977) attempted to discern the level of independence and specialized functions of the two hemispheres of the brain. In 1973, Sperry examined 56 cases in which the *corpus callosum* connecting the

right and left hemispheres of the brain had been severed. Sperry found that "there was no readily apparent abnormality in the behavior of these 56 individuals with separated hemispheres" (Krugman, 1977 p.8). Additional research has shown that reading and speaking are left-brain functions, while perception images are right-brain functions. Krugman (1977) further speculates that high-involvement is a predominantly left-brain activity, while low-involvement is mostly a right-brain activity.

The theory of low-involvement suggests that repeated exposure to a stimulus has an effect which may not be apparent until a behavioral triggering device comes along. This may be more prominent with images, where the image may be stored in the brain although it cannot be recalled. This is because no left-brain connections, associations, or thoughts have occurred at the time of exposure. Krugman asserts that, in this case there is only capacity, or increased capacity for recognition of the image.

Attitude/Emotion and Memory

A_{Ad} and A_{Br} schools of thought. Two schools of thought, which have arisen from this recall/recognition debate, primarily in the context of advertising research, are the A_{AD} and A_{Br}. The A_{Br} school believes that "it does not matter what people think of

the advertisement itself; all that matters is what viewers think of the brand as a result of having been exposed to the advertisement" (DuPlessis, 1994, p.76). Advocates of the A_{AD} camp, however, feel that what people think and feel as a result of the advertisement has a bearing on the consumer's actions (DuPlessis, 1994). In support of this theory, DuPlessis reports that commercials with emotional content, or affecting emotions were better recalled, and the greater the emotional intensity, the more likely the ad was to be recalled.

Another germane area of consumer decision-making and memory is the role of emotions and attitudes on consumer cognitions and choice. Edell and Burke (1987) found that both positive and negative feelings can co-occur when viewing an advertisement and that both feelings are determinants of the effectiveness of the ad. This research was prompted by Zajonc (1960) who claimed, in a provocative article, that both thinking and feeling are two independent evaluation systems that occur when viewing an advertisement. Edell and Burke (1987) continued this line of research to evaluate the importance of these emotional feelings in relation to unfamiliar products and services. When an advertisement provides the only source of

information about an unfamiliar product, any feelings that arise (positive or negative) as a response to the ad will have an effect on the attitude about the product. What, exactly, that role is, has been largely untested. (Edell and Burke, 1987).

Machleit and Wilson (1988) conducted a study that investigated the use of emotion to create a favorable attitude toward a brand through a transfer of affect from the attitude to the brand. This type of study closely correlated to the A_{Ad} school of thought. However, Machleit and Wilson claimed that, in addition to traditional A_{Ad} theories, consideration of the emotional feelings experienced during the advertisement exposure may produce a different type of response. A_{Ad} is said to have a direct effect on one's attitude about the brand, but this effect is thought to have a greater effect on unfamiliar brands, and a lesser effect on familiar brands. In a situation where the brand is unfamiliar and the advertisement receives a positive evaluation or is well-liked, one's attitude about the brand is likely to also become positive.

Familiarity and memory. Machleit and Wilson also suggested that when the brand is familiar and effect of prior brand attitude is controlled, one's attitude of the ad will not effect the attitude

about the brand. Edell and Burke (1986) found evidence to support this theory. When subjects were not familiar with the brands being tested, one's attitude of the ad had a greater effect on attitude of the brand. Cox and Locander (1987) found that affective (affect transfer being a relationship between feelings about the ad and attitude toward the brand) feelings for the ad were stronger for a novel product than for a familiar product. Machleit and Wilson report "lighthearted positive feelings" and "negative feelings" both affected one's attitude about the ad. Negative feelings, on unfamiliar brands could elicit a strong subsequent attitude about the brand. What the attitude is, however, has been largely untested. Mitchell (1986) has criticized most advertising research for only considering the effects of pleasant advertising.

Machete and Wilson (1988) studied the affect transfer of both warm and sexually suggestive ads because they believed commercials may be capable of generating diverse positive and negative feelings. They attempted to investigate the process by which emotional feelings and attitudes about the ad affected attitude about the brand.

Some factors they considered when designing their experiment were, that the commercials were promoting a product rather than a service, the product was one such that the participants would normally considering purchasing, and that the commercials would be ones the subjects had not previously seen. In the experiment the following groups of advertisements were used: warm/familiar, warm/unfamiliar, sexually suggestive/familiar, sexually suggestive/unfamiliar.

The test commercials were embedded in a television program with little emotional content in order to simulate a natural viewing environment. Undergraduate students (180) were recruited for participation to watch the program and commercials. Emotional feelings experienced during the ads were measured , and the subjects filled out a questionnaire after the ads were viewed, indicating the emotions they felt and the strength of the emotions.

It was hypothesized that only A_{Ad} would have a significant impact on the attitude about the brand with unfamiliar products—this hypothesis was supported. Also, with the familiar brands, it was much more difficult to change the images and attitudes in the minds of the subjects. This can be described by latent

inhibition, which occurs when a subject has been exposed to a conditioned stimulus several times without the unconditioned stimulus, thereby inhibiting conditioning effects. This could prevent affect transfer in familiar brands. Sexually suggestive unfamiliar brand elicited both strong positive and strong negative feelings. Machete and Wilson (1988) note that when a product brand name is familiar to the subject, do not expect a strong affect transfer to occur.

Short and long term memory. Many of the modern memory theories are a result of the culmination of evidence about short-term memory (STM) and long-term memory (LTM). Evidence that the first word of a series is better remembered is said to demonstrate primacy effect, a result of LTM. Other advertising research shows a tendency for the last word to be better remembered; this is the recency effect, and many argue is a result of the STM (DuPlessis, 1994). Because the primacy and recency effect have shown to be a significant factor in memory, researchers are often careful to rotate ads when testing consumer memory to avoid this phenomenon.

Supervisory attentional system. Baddley (1992) explores another currently accepted model explaining tendencies of human

memory—the existence of a Supervisory Attentional System (SAS). Which explains how information from the television can enter into the realm of consciousness, even when TV viewers are diverting their attention elsewhere.

This is because the SAS system will interrupt what the respondent is doing (eating, talking, etc.), and direct attention to the advertisement. The inverse of this is also true. When a person is supposed to have his attention directed to the TV it may be diverted away, based on the "relative urgency of competition." Baddley believes this is the same phenomena that allows us to converse at a noisy party. We can tune in to the person we are talking to, and still be aware of surrounding noises. Such a process is dependent on a system that can set into motion one activity and continue it with little supervision — and which one can interrupt when attention is required (Baddeley, 1992).

Recognition and Recall

In a study done on recognition and recall of brand name products after advertising, DuPlessis (1994) found an overwhelming trend of high recognition and low recall . In the experiment, 200 respondents were shown 39 TV commercials, then asked a) to identify had they seen the ad, and b) to identify

the brand. Of the respondents, 53 percent claimed they had seen the ad, but 41 percent could not name the brand (27% named the wrong brand and 31%, or 15% of the total sample, correctly identified the brand). This would seem to indicate that while the average consumer may be able to recognize a name-brand they "have seen somewhere before" rather easily, only a small percentage can correctly recall the name of the brand and/or what was said about that particular brand. This correlates to Krugman's (1977) assertion that visual unmasked recognition will always prove a higher presence in memory than recall.

Varying levels of processing. Memory's various levels of processing can range from simple sensory processing to complex cognitive elaborations. In consumer-type situations, people often rely on external memory, which is information available to the consumer outside of memory (shopping lists, coupons, etc.). It appears that a common pitfall in consumer research is failure to establish an environment like consumers' actual experience in the grocery store. Rote memorization, for example, may support theories in a controlled environment, but is rarely used by consumers in a natural environment. Decision processing in the store may involve memory only to the extent of recognition of

those brands to be processed further from some larger set of brands (Bettman, 1979).

If there is no external information available Bettman, believes the consumer will rely more heavily on recall. However, when consumers have little prior knowledge of the brands in question or when the decision is difficult, consumers will tend to rely more heavily on recognition than on recall. If the choice is an easy one or if consumers are very familiar with the products, they will rely more heavily on recall. This is because they will only be able to recall information and make recall-based choices where the information is readily available and familiar (Bettman, 1979). If this is true, in such as setting consumers may choose a recognized product, if the information to recall is negative and cannot be recalled, over an unrecognized product. In this sense, recognition is "easier" than recall, where one must reconstruct the stimulus, rather than just discriminate or differentiate (Bettman, 1979).

Varying types of impression formation. Lichtenstein and Srull's (1987) study of how mental representations are formed shows that recency effects and involvement levels are essential elements in impression formation. Subjects were read a series of

behavior statements about a target person under three conditions: memory set, impression set, or comprehension set. Half of the group received unfavorable information first, while the other half received favorable information first. Some subjects were told to remember the given information as well as possible (categorized as a memory set of subjects), other subjects (under what was called the impression set) were told to form a coherent impression of what the target subject would be like; and, finally, subjects (in what was called the comprehension set) were told simply to comprehend the material and judge how coherently and grammatically the sentences were written. Following a distracter task the subjects were asked to rate the likability of the target subject.

Results of the experiment showed subjects who learn under the objective of simple comprehension seem to store the facts in a layered bin-type memory. This causes recency effects because the most recent information is the first to be retrieved from the "bin." Additionally, because this type of recall involves a minimal amount of rehearsal, or "attempt to integrate the information into any type of higher order person schema," overall levels of

recall were lower than when remembered under the objective of impression or memory (Lichtenstein and Srull, 1987, p.111).

This means that subjects who memorized sets under the objective of comprehension with negative information first and positive information last were more likely to recall less traits overall, and to have a more favorable impression of the target subject. This is assumed to be true because the type of memory used is different from that used for impression or memory objectives. This supports the notion of correspondence between judgments that are made and the facts that can be recalled when evaluations are made at the time of information acquisition (Lichtenstein and Srull, 1987). This similarly supports the theory that the initial cognitive processing-type of information can have a significant effect on how it is remembered. Bettman argues that individuals have various strategies for how and what to process. This includes what goes into LTM, and what goes into STM, and how the information is retrieved. Bettman calls them "control processes" (Bettman, 1979).

Levels of involvement. Involvement levels can have a significant impact on memory processing and retrieval.

Although recognition and recall, or facets of the direct

memory are the most commonly used form of testing marketing awareness, indirect tests also require the subject to retrieve prior knowledge, but do not demand that the recollection was associated with a specific place or time (Duke, 1995). The recent interest by marketing researchers in indirect memory measures is attributed to its similarity to real-life purchase situations, which are not reliant on high levels of learning or memorization.

Therefore direct memory tests may not always be appropriate. For example, choice of one brand over another in a grocery store could be considered indirect if the consumer is not aware of the information that led to the choice. And as Nisbett and Wilson discussed (1977), consumers usually are not aware of this information. In such instances, brand name or product features may be neither recallable nor recognizable. Krugman (1986) claims this may be related to the consumer's level of involvement.

A study by Duke (1995) shows that purchasing situations rarely rely on intentional retrieval of episodic data, evaluations, or judgments, and that more accurate purchasing situations are tested with indirect memory measures. Duke explored these differences in brand processing and non-brand processing. Brand

processing stimulates higher levels of product message processing, because subjects are forced to evaluate the product information deeply, while non-brand processing requires lower levels of processing because attention is focused on surface levels of the advertisement.

This may be compared to Lichtenstein and Srull's (1987) examination of the memory differences when learned under comprehension objective as compared to impression or memory objective. In both experiments, the subject is hypothesized to experience different memory processes as levels of involvement are altered.

Brand processing versus non-brand processing. In Duke's study (1995), subjects who were told to evaluate the ad according to factors such as being distinctive in its category or preferable in comparison to its competitors, were categorized as learning under a brand processing objective, while other subjects were told to pay attention to clearly filling white space, use of color, and attractiveness, and were categorized as learning under non-brand processing. The difference between the two groups is brand processing subjects were required to think about the actual

brand as part of their evaluation, while non-brand processing subjects' attention was diverted to more extraneous matters.

Next, subjects were asked to list as much as possible about the products (the brand name and product category were given as cues). The mean recall for brand processing was twice as high as for that of non-brand processing. Duke also noted that recall of brand names was extremely difficult after one-time exposure and 48-hour delay. In conclusion, as supported and noted previously, recognition scores were effected by the subject's processing strategy, and high processing levels led to significantly higher levels of awareness (Duke, 1995). Duke noted that a limitation of the experiment was in its inability to simulate the actual environment (alike many of his colleagues experiments) in which consumers would normally view print ads and make consumer-based purchasing decisions.

Gardner, Mitchell and Russo (1985) hypothesized that low involvement (non-brand processing) yielded not only inferior memory for brand information, but also a more positive attitude toward that brand. Gardner et. al said that non-brand strategies do not fully activate the subject's schema for the brand and product category, and subjects cause fewer inferences about

product attributes and performance. This is the reason non-brand processors typically remember less about a product than those who have employed brand processing strategy. Similarly, Gardner asked some subjects to evaluate ads as if they were planning to purchase a product in that product class, while non-brand processors were asked to pay attention to assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia, etc. Product categories were pens, automobiles, shoes and tires. After a verification task, subjects were asked to write down everything they could remember about the products.

Results showed that (as supported by Duke and Lichtenstein and Srull's findings) subjects in non-brand groups exhibited inferior memory and lower data retrieval ability. Also predicted but not fully supported, was the hypothesis that non-brand respondents would form favorable beliefs toward the products depending on counter and support arguments. Although Gardner et. al found no significant results regarding this hypothesis, the possibility that consumers may hold products learned under non-brand processing strategy in a more favorable light is one that should be pursued.

When examining experiments intended to test and study consumer behavior, we must remember the inherent weaknesses. The problems studied in memory research are often "simplistic and narrowly focused, using digits, letters, nonsense syllables, or words as stimuli" (Bettman, 1979 p.44). This type of research has been criticized because some say it isn't directly applicable to consumer research problems. That is, humans do not intentionally try to memorize items, and that laboratory experiments use such methods to examine consumer memory strategies (Bettman, 1979).

Memory versus stimulus based judgments. Recent investigation into memory-based versus stimulus-based judgments indicate that consumers often make judgments on the basis of information that isn't available at the time of the decision. These decisions are called memory-based judgments (Lynch and Srull 1982). In the instances of memory-based judgments, prior experience with the product, recognition of the product, experience with competing products, and knowledge of the choices of other people may effect the consumer's decision. Lynch and Srull report instances where lingering traces of the original information is "available," because of the interjection of

lists that caused "forgetting," the information could be obtained with some externally provided cues. Lynch and Srull (1982) suggest that "forgetting" is another name for information retrieval failure.

Inference making. Free recall involves a situation where a subject must independently produce previously stored information; recognition involves indicating a previously presented stimulus out of several possible choices. Even in memory-based judgments often only a portion of the original information can be recalled. When this happens, consumers tend to base their decisions only on the portion of information that they can bring to free recall. The information recalled is often that which was deemed most important at the time the material was stored into memory. This is interesting because the information may not be used in the same context as it was originally presented. This phenomena is called inference making.

For example, if a consumer wants to buy a car, he or she reads *Consumer Reports*, talks to friends, and shops around on weekends. He or she has a pretty good idea of which car would best suit his or her needs and budget and makes a mental list of the top few choices, but never actually ends up buying one.

Sometime later, he or she reopens the possibility of buying a new car and shops around. When he or she tries to remember which cars were rated best by *Consumer Reports* he or she will re-constructively infer the missing information from the information that is accessible in his or her memory.

Unfortunately, the criteria he is currently using may not be the same that he checked for in the past. Consumer research shows that because of such intervening variables as time constraints, the consumer is often likely to only rely on what can best recalled. In doing this, consumers will attribute values that are missing, either because they were never acquired in memory to begin with, or because they can no longer be recalled.

Mizerski reports on a similar effect concerning negative information in forming impressions about people. Unfavorable information given by a source on a central attribute caused the individual to put more faith in the information received and, in turn, caused stronger inferences about other related attributes (Mizerski, 1982).

Disproportionate Influence of Negative Information

Another memory phenomenon is the disproportionate influence negative or novel information has on memory. According

to Lynch and Srull (1982) "almost any technique that served to increase the novelty of items or led them to be unexpected, enhanced subsequent recall of those items." There is strong support that unexpected information not only captures attention better and can be more easily recalled, but also will do so at the expense of other information, replacing items that have been stored in the STM (Lynch and Srull, 1982). Fiske (1980) concluded from a study investigating the weight assigned to negative information in person-impression judgments that relatively extreme or negative behaviors were given more attention for longer periods of time, which will eventually help determine weight given to the overall judgment.

Mizerski (1982) supported the commonly held notion that unfavorable or unusual information has a stronger influence than common or expected information. Despite the widespread implications for the field of mass communication, there has been little empirical testing of this assertion (Mizerski, 1982). In today's consumer-oriented world, the effect of this type of information seems to be of great importance. Derogatory rumors about brands, counter-advertising, and widely publicized tests of

certain brand-name products are important to how consumers' opinions are formed.

Negative information and impression formation. Much of the previous research regarding the disproportionate influence of unfavorable information has studied how negative attitudes effect impression formation. Some suggest that the reason for this influence is the surprise factor, while others claim that it may be because negative information is seen as less ambiguous (Mizerski, 1982). Perhaps less ambiguous information leaves less room for evaluation and the likelihood of cognitive dissonance decreases. In a study by Mizerski (1982), which measured the influence of negative information on brand-impression formation, and noted four criteria for choosing the products to be used in the study: 1) Two types of products should be used. Ones that represent both an "important" and an "unimportant" purchase. 2) Products should be items that the subjects (students) would plausibly purchase. 3) They should be products on which individuals would reasonably express on opinion. 4) Other individual's opinions should have a strong impact on the evaluation of these products.

In selecting which adjectives to use, Mizerski chose from the list provided by Myers and Warner (1968) who determined the psychological meanings of 50 adjectives commonly used for evaluating products (Mizerski, 1982). The modifiers used must have an equally polarized but opposite psychological meaning to the respondents. The products chosen were a movie and a car. Following exposure to the experimental adjectives, the subjects were asked attribution, belief, and overall effect questions, before they were asked how much each of the products appealed to them personally.

Results showed that more extreme or stronger affects were formed with the unfavorable information for all attributes tested, with both products. Mizerski said the results "strongly suggest that there are attributional differences between the way individuals process favorable and unfavorable information" (1982). Other ambiguous results in this experiment suggest that perhaps when the expectancy of favorable information is strong, unfavorable information isn't considered as credible (Mizerski, 1982).

Negative information and political advertising. The concept of dismissing a source as non-credible and disregarding

subsequent information is seen in the analysis of political advertising. In an arena where negative advertising is so prevalent, how audiences perceive negative information and how it effects voters' behavior is crucial. Although voter responses are never 100 percent predictable, Garramone (1984) suggested that backlash or boomerang may be the most common effect. She found that the perceived truthfulness of the candidate touting the negative advertisement may determine the impact of the ad. A strong attack on a candidate, if perceived as untruthful, unjust, or undocumented in any way, may create negative feelings toward the sponsor, rather than the target (Garramone, 1984).

Additionally, Garramone found low involvement levels often led to a less careful evaluation of the message or source. Involvement is defined as "personal relevance or meaning that a particular message ... has for the individual" (p. 251). Under such circumstances, Garramone claims, advertising may be more valuable than for highly involved subjects, who are less likely to display the intended effects of the advertising (Garramone, 1984).

Krugman's theory about involvement may also play a decided role in voter's perceptions. When involvement level is low, the

voter may process the information from a candidate without scrutinizing the message or source as they would if their involvement levels were high. In a telephone survey of 367 Michigan voters, Garramone found that the majority of the respondents (45%) preferred the target of the negative political advertisement, while only 23 percent preferred the sponsor.

Garramone accounted for intervening variables such as initial popularity of a candidate, by asking the subjects to self-report on their attitude change. More research is needed to discover if this occurrence is particular to political advertising, or if consumers are equally cynical when negative information is presented about a product. But a widely supported belief is that negative messages derive their impact from a broader range of intervening variables than positive messages do. And exclusively positive messages may limit their ability for persuasion due to their limited criteria for judgment (Tinkham and Weaver-Lairscy, 1993).

Cognitive economy principle. Psychologists have long touted the cognitive economy principle in the context of memory and decision making. In forming memory-based judgments, as

previously discussed, level of involvement has a considerable effect on the final judgment of the product.

However, when a memory-based product judgment must be made, consumers will search memory for the first available piece of information available about the product. Because consumers are what psychologists call "cognitive misers," they will only do as much searching as necessary, and stop the cognitive retrieval process as soon as the information retrieved is deemed sufficient. Park and Hastak (1994) found this to be the case in an experiment that measured involvement levels and memory based judgments. They found if a previously formed judgment is available and accessed from memory, it will be used as the sole basis for judgment if it is deemed sufficient; otherwise the search for more product information will continue.

Interestingly, Lingle and Ostrom (1979) found that when a memory-based judgment is formed, subjects are likely to combine a first-impression judgment of that person with a selective memory search for negative stimulus information. This would contradict assertions that subjects store the information in a bin-type fashion and simply retrieve information in inverse

order of how it was stored. It would support, rather, studies on the disproportionate influence of negative information.

Because in many day-to-day decisions, judgments about people and products are memory based, we rely on a set of previously stored information to help us make decisions. Our judgments are based on "a selective sampling of information from a cognitive representation of the person or thing that the perceiver has built up and stored in memory" (Lingle and Ostrom, 1979 p.180).

The Lingle and Ostrom (1979) study assumed that judgments about others are based on prior memory of that person. In the study, subjects were asked to form an initial impression based on one dimension, while continual information was available. Next, the same subjects were asked to make another judgment of the person without any of the stimulus information available. The subjects' judgment times decreased as the size of the set of negative traits increased. This indicates that in addition to recalling their initial judgment, the subjects went through the trait list searching for negative information to disqualify the subject from an overall positive impression (Lingle and Ostrom, 1979). Whereas for negative homogeneous sets, the ease and

speed with which a subject could recall negative information items to disqualify the person being judged increased. Simply put, the more negative information available, the easier (and faster) it was for a subject to deem him disqualified.

Research Questions

Findings from studies investigating cognitions, emotions, and memory—as well as the disproportionate influence of negative information—suggest that all things are not equal when a consumer is confronted with a decision involving negative information. Although we are far from a clear understanding of the decision-making processes, individuals have a tendency to react unpredictably to negative information, which warrants further study.

If individuals strive to reduce cognitive dissonance and, as some have suggested, negative information is interpreted as less ambiguous, then perhaps people unknowingly gravitate toward such information. Additionally, if perception is possible without remembering (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977), then one's tendency to gravitate toward that which is preferred or familiar is an important factor in consumer decision-making, even if the respondent cannot recall accompanying information (DuPlessis,

1994), or verbalize his/her thought processes (Nisbett and Wilson, 1977). Furthermore, although prior studies support the notion that consumers can more easily recognize product names than can correctly recall specific given information, it remains to be seen if this is true for negative information.

If it is possible to recognize a company or product name without recalling anything about that particular company, it seems possible to choose a recognized or familiar name over an unrecognized or unfamiliar name, even if the information to recall was negative.

Consumers rely on recall-based choices when information is "readily available", and recognition-based choices when the name brands are relatively unfamiliar (Bettman, 1979). The effect various types of information about unfamiliar brands is worthy of further study. It remains to be seen if a consumer will prefer a product about which negative information was given, if the decision is made on a recognition-based basis. Because consumers will rely more heavily on recognition of a name brand than of recalling pertinent information if there little prior knowledge of the brands in question, further study should be directed to the disproportionate influence of negative information on a product

about which only negative information was given (Mizerski, 1982).

Studies of effects of advertising on consumers indicate that feelings about advertisements can affect one's opinion of the product (Machleit and Wilson, 1988), but researchers in this area have been criticized for neglecting the implications of negative information on consumers' opinions (Mitchell, 1986). While research shows there are differences in the way we process positive and negative information (Mizerski, 1982), and that negative ads may be effective because they are better remembered, more attention is needed to determine the precise differences and similarities of the effects of positive and negative information.

Perhaps not "liking" an advertisement evokes initial negative feelings toward and ad, but "remembering" the ad has little to do with the message itself and more to do with levels of involvement, familiarity with the product, and other external memory devices (Tinkham and Weaver-Lairscy, 1993). This suggests the possibility of high recognition levels for a product about which only negative information was given.

Because we are often unable to accurately vocalize our cognitions, and we are unaware of the cognitions affecting our behavior, we may falsely attribute information to explain that behavior (Valins and Ray, 1967). In light of Bem and McConnell's (1970) findings, how far could one bend his or her own beliefs in order to reduce the dissonance without the awareness of even doing so? It may be possible that consumers reduce dissonance on a regular basis by making minor alterations to originally held beliefs without any awareness or ability or verbalize the phenomenon.

Additionally, the idea of a Supervisory Attentional System, which allows us to hear, even if we are not listening, indicates the possibility of subsequent recognition. Krugman reaffirmed the need for mass communicators to concentrate more on getting the message out in the environment, rather than grabbing and holding the attention of "captive" audiences (Krugman, 1986).

A notion suggested by Gardner et. al (1985) and continued by Garramone (1984) is that subjects with lower involvement levels will evaluate incoming information less carefully and tend to rely on that information more heavily. Perhaps lower involvement

levels alter a subjects' data retrieval ability or memory concerning negative information.

The literature review leads to the following research questions: (1) Can negative information have a positive effect in consumer brand-based decisions? (Might subjects choose a service about which they have only received negative information over services about which they have no other information?) (2) When a memory-based judgment is formed about a product, might consumers recognize a brand but not recall whether accompanying information was positive or negative? (3) Is there a correlation between level of involvement and likelihood of choosing a service about which negative information was received?

Chapter III
Method

An experiment was selected to test the effect of negative information on decision-making and comparing the results with those of a control group. The independent variable is negative information about an unknown service company (couched among positive and neutral information about other companies who offer the same service).

According to Wimmer and Dominick (1983), experiments are commonly used in studies concerned with cause and effect. This allows the researcher to control the experimental situation and manipulate the experimental treatments. Additionally, Campbell and Stanley (1963) note the researcher "should deliberately seek out those artificial and natural laboratories which provide the best opportunities for control" (p.34). A laboratory experiment was deemed necessary because the hypotheses demanded some degree of internal control.

Because of an inability to control the *when* and *to whom* of exposures, quasi-experimental designs are appropriate (Campbell and Stanley, 1963).

Experimental Design

A Posttest-Only Control Group Design was chosen for this study because it accurately controls all eight sources of internal validity (Campbell and Stanley,1963).

Wimmer and Dominick (1983) explain that the Posttest Only design is preferred when "researchers are hesitant to use a pretest because the possibility of subject sensitization" is an issue (p.81). Martin Orne, in a research paper on the psychological experiment says that college students, in particular, are sensitive to the measures being tested, thus creating a possible confounding variable. "If a test is given twice with some intervening treatment, even the dullest college student is aware that some change is expected, particularly if the test is in some obvious way related to the treatment" (Orne, 1962, p.779).

Although the Solomon Four Group Design was considered for this experiment, as Wimmer and Dominick note, four separate groups are required. Due to time and financial constraints, this was a luxury that this researcher could not afford.

Pretest of Experimental Procedure

A pretest was conducted before the actual experiment. A small sample of subjects, chosen from an intermediate-level

class at a large southeastern public university in the College of Communications, were presented with the stimulus materials followed by the posttest questionnaire.

The service chosen was resume service. In an attempt to incorporate the field of public relations and expand the research in this area of study to include the implications of negative information, the researcher chose to test the effect of negative information about a service, instead of a product in a consumer situation. The service selected was based, in part, by the criteria set forth by Mizerski (1982). A resume service was chosen because it is: a) an item that the subjects (students) would plausibly purchase, b) a service on which individuals would reasonably express an opinion, and c) a service upon which other individuals' opinions should have an impact. It is also a service with which students are likely to have varying levels of involvement. The questionnaire items were independently reviewed to avoid leading questions, implicit negatives, misapprehension, or experimenter bias.

Choosing the names of the resume service companies was modeled after a process used by Duke (1994), where the unfamiliar names were screened by pretest subjects to test for

any obvious name biases. The familiar names used of widely known national companies (Kinko's and Sears Resume Service) were obtained from the yellow pages of the local phone book.

Experimental Procedure

Experimental and control groups were determined randomly by a coin toss. The experiment involved two large introductory level classes. The administrator stated that the purpose of this experiment is to measure students' perceptions and opinions of resumes and the post-college job search.

Orne (1962) recommends that the subjects not perceive what is really going on. If cues which convey the experimental hypothesis to the subjects (also known as demand characteristics) become apparent, Orne warns that "college students tend to share the hope and expectation that the study in which they are participating will in some material way contribute to science and perhaps ultimately to human welfare in general" (Orne, 1962, p.778). The subjects, therefore, may have "a tendency to lean over backwards to be honest" (Orne, 1962, p.780), thus creating a confounding variable. Campbell and Stanley confirm that "there is no need to know that the experiment is going on" (Campbell and Stanley, 1963, p.21).

The experimental administrator then mentioned four allegedly local resume services. Of the services mentioned were two familiar national services and two fictitious services. See Table 1. Either positive, negative or neutral information will accompanied each of the service names. The mention of the services came in the following order: Kinko's (familiar/positive information), Job Right (unfamiliar/neutral information), Gold Star (unfamiliar/negative information), and Sears Resume Service (familiar/neutral information). Subjects' exposure to the unfamiliar service about which negative information was given (Gold Star Resumes) served as the independent variable.

Following the subjects' exposure to this information, they viewed a distracter task (a 3-5 minute video). This served several purposes. Because the video pertained to the subject matter (importance of a good resume in the post-college job search) it established a context for the experiment and a need for the posttest. The video also served to provide additional ecological validity (appropriate generalization from the laboratory to non-experimental situations).

Table 1. Familiarity & Type of Information About Each Service

	familiar	unfamiliar	neutral	positive	negative
Kinko's (familiar/positive)	X			X	
Job Right (unfamiliar/neutral)		X	X		
Gold Star (unfamiliar/negative)		X			X
Sears (familiar/neutral)	X		X		

Xs denote familiarity with the service and type of information

That is, in a non-laboratory situation it is likely that intervening cognitions would occur between the time the consumer is exposed to information and the time when he/she is confronted with a decision. After the stimuli was presented and the video was viewed, the effects of the negative service information were tested through a questionnaire. In order to have ecological validity a multiple choice format was chosen. Similar to voting, where a choice among alternatives must be made, consumer behavior commonly relies on the selection of a product/service from an array of possible choices. As Bettman explains, "to recognize a stimulus from among a set of distracting stimuli, information allowing one to *differentiate* or *discriminate* the previously encountered stimulus is necessary" (Bettman, 1979, p.45).

Also, to avoid experimental bias, the key experimental question was neither among the first questions nor the last (DuPlessis, 1994). Among the four alternative answers to this experimental question, the negative/unfamiliar service, Gold Star (previously mentioned by the administrator), was similarly neither the first nor last choice. The first experimental question asked the subject: "If you were going to use a resume service,

how likely would you be to use the following?" A five point Likert scale was used; with 1=not likely and 5=very likely. Among the choices was the service about which only negative information was given; all other choices were fictitious/unfamiliar. This measured the first research question. Can negative information have a positive effect in consumer brand-based decisions? (Might subjects choose a service about which they have only received negative information over services about which they have no other information?)

Other questions pertaining to the usefulness of a good resume in the post-college job search were included in the questionnaire. This technique of using other irrelevant questions in the questionnaire was modeled after Machleit and Wilson's (1988) experiment. In their questionnaire other questions irrelevant to the study were added to minimize any association with the independent variable.

After this questionnaire (page one) was completed and collected, (treatment) subjects detached the first page from the second page which was stapled closed. They handed in the original questionnaire and completed the next questionnaire, testing their ability to recall the type of information given about the services

mentioned. Here, the negative service company, along with the fictitious service companies and the aforementioned companies were listed. Next to the name of the company, subjects were asked to check whether the information mentioned earlier was 1) negative, 2) neutral, 3) positive, or 4) don't know. This tested whether subjects can recall if the information about independent variable was negative. This measured the second research question. When a memory-based judgment is formed about a product, might consumers recognize a brand, but not recall whether accompanying information was negative or positive?

To measure the third research question (Is there a correlation between level of involvement and likelihood of choosing a service about which negative information was received?) subjects were asked "How likely would you be to use a resume service?" This question was on the original questionnaire. A Likert scale was used to measure how likely subjects are to use a resume service. This information was used to measure the relationship between level of involvement and likelihood of choosing a service about which negative information was received. (See Appendix 1 for a copy of the questionnaire)

The control group simply assembled, watched the video without first receiving any information about resume services, and completed the first questionnaire. They did not receive the second questionnaire page asking them to rate the type of information given because they were not given any information about resume services. Following the questionnaires, both groups were debriefed and dismissed.

Selection of Subjects

A total of 268 subjects were used from two large introductory classes. One group of 161 subjects constituted the treatment group, and the control group was a second class comprised of 107 subjects. To obtain a rough guideline concerning sample size, the author reviewed sample sizes of: Duke (1995), Garramone (1984), Tinkham and Weaver-Lairscy (1993), Mizerski (1982), Machleit and Wilson (1988), Park and Hastak (1994), Lichtenstein and Srull (1987), and DuPlessis (1994). Also, class roles were checked to control for duplicate subjects.

Subjects were not given any extra-credit as incentive to participate in the study. The population is a non-probability, convenience, or available sample (Singletary, 1994). Singletary notes that "This sample is widely used in social research, despite

the fact that it risks poor external validity. It is used because many academic research projects require only that two groups of respondents be comparable, not representative of the population" (Singletary, 1994, p.57). Also, Wimmer and Dominick note that "Proponents of the available sample claim that if a phenomenon, characteristic, or trait does in fact exist, it should exist in *any* sample" (Wimmer and Dominick, 1983, p.60).

Also, Wimmer and Dominick reiterate that "sample size is almost invariably controlled by cost" (p.68), therefore the goal of sample size is to "have as large a sample as possible, within the economic constraints of the study" (p. 68).

Selection of Stimuli

The video viewed by the subjects contained 3-5 minutes of generic information about the value of a resume in the post-college job search. (See Appendix 2 for a script of the video).

Machleit and Wilson report that Mitchell (1986) "has criticized most advertising research for only considering the effects of 'pleasant' advertisements" (1988, p.29). Also, Bettman claims that too often this type of research is done using nonsense syllables, digits or letters, and that "humans outside the laboratory do not deliberately rehearse and attempt to memorize

items" which reduces the validity for such experiments when attempting to understand "how consumers make real-life decisions" (Bettman, 1979, p.45). Additionally Duke confirms this idea:

> Because many purchase situations are not dependent upon high levels of learning or elaboration, direct measures that depend on purposeful thoughts or actions may not be appropriate. Purchase situations that tend to show little or no intentional retrieval of episodic data, evaluations or judgments may be more appropriately tested with indirect measures of memory (Duke, 1995, p.21).

In determining how to present the "negative" information, the researcher chose positive, negative, and neutral adjectives from those presented by James Myers and Gregory Warner in their research paper entitled "Semantic Properties of Selected Evaluation Adjectives" (1968). Myers and Warner presented a methodology for determining the psychological meaning of several commonly used adjectives for evaluating products and advertisements. Their paper includes an inventory of the items scaled for immediate use (Myers and Warner, 1968, p.409).

Mizerski, in his experiment on the disproportionate influence of negative information said that in order to control "for the effect of the rating adjectives alone and to test for

perceived differences ... the modifiers denoting favorable an unfavorable values must have equally polarized but effectively opposite psychological meaning to the respondents" (Mizerski, 1982, p.305). Therefore, in order to insure that the information presented in the independent variable has this polarized value, the inventory of adjectives created by Myers and Warner (1968) was used to describe the positive, negative, and neutral resume companies.

Because Bettman (1979) claims that 2-5 seconds devoted to an item is all that is needed to later recognize that item, the experiment administrator elaborated on the particular resume service company and display on overhead with the written name of the company for approximately that amount of time. This helped insure the possibility of subsequent recognition (on the questionnaire) of the service about which negative information was generated.

Chapter IV
Results

All subjects in the treatment group were given the same, scripted, stimulus information, and watched the same video. Additionally, subjects in the control group received no stimulus information (as previously noted) and watched the same video as did the treatment group. The data were analyzed using SPSS, and in some cases, SAS. Statistical results are as follows.

Description of the Sample

The subjects for this experiment were undergraduates at a state-supported university in the southeast. A total of 268 subjects were used the experiment; 161 subjects were in the treatment group (60%), and 107 (40%) subjects were in the control group. The mean age for the sample was 19.93 years old (20.26 in the treatment group; and 19.45 in the control group). The majority of respondents were freshman (37.7%), with ample representation also from sophomores (28.3%) and juniors (25.3%). Forty-three percent of the sample was male; and 56 percent was female.

Research Question Number One

Will subjects would chose a service about which they have received only negative information over services about which they have no other information? All subjects, in both groups, were asked to rate in a five-point Likert scale (1=not likely, 5=very likely) their likelihood of using four different fictitious resume services as shown in Table 2. Only the treatment group received negative stimulus information about the independent variable, Gold Star resumes.

Initially, SPSS for Windows was used to conduct the repeated measures ANOVA. With this program, however, if a significant difference does lie somewhere in the four groups (service companies among treatment group) the program will not show where the difference lies. The researcher conducted a MANOVA once with the independent variable—which showed a significant difference— and then again without.

This crude approximation was expected to show, that without the independent variable, no significant difference resulted. However, this was not the case. In order to determine **where** the significant difference among control services was, the data was converted to SAS program, using a Single Degree of

Table 2. Difference Levels of the Four Service Companies in the Treatment Group.

	Gold Star resumes	Crown resumes	Quality Writing resumes	Customized resumes
Gold Star resumes		p<.000*	p<.000*	p< .000*
Crown resumes	p< .000*		p< .430	p< .016
Quality Writing resumes	p< .000*	p< .430		p< .091
Customized resumes	p< .000*	p<.016	p< .091	

* Significant at p<.001 level

Mean responses to all four service companies (treatment group only).

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Gold Star resumes	2.09	1.00
Crown resumes	2.66	1.10
Quality Writing resumes	2.71	1.19
Customized resumes	2.80	1.06

Freedom Contrast test. Here, a significant difference between Crown and Customized resumes in the treatment group was found. Because all subjects in the treatment group heard exactly the same stimulus information, this difference could either be a result of name bias (as will be discussed later) or perhaps primacy effect (Crown resumes was the first service listed. In both groups (treatment and control) Crown resumes was an unpopular choice.

A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted since each subject answered all four questions. In the treatment group, response for Gold Star was statistically different ($p<.05$) from the other three services, using a Wilks' Lambda test to measure the levels of significance.

A Single Degree of Freedom Contrast measure indicated that there was also a significant difference among two of the control services. The following table illustrates the significance levels for all four service companies in the treatment group. Not surprisingly, the difference between Gold Star resumes and the others was the most marked ($p<.001$).

As mentioned, however, the repeated measures ANOVA also indicated a significant difference between two of the unfamiliar

service companies. Crown resumes was significantly different from Customized resumes ($p<.016$). Although this difference is not as strong as that between Gold Star and the others, it does merit comment. This relationship and others like it in the control group are discussed in further detail in the discussion section.

In order to additionally illustrate whether subjects in the treatment group were more likely to chose Gold Star resumes, a t-test was used, comparing the treatment and control group responses to the question: How likely would you be to use Gold Star Resumes. The t-test for independent samples of the treatment group showed a mean of 2.09 on a five-point Likert scale (1=not likely, 5= very likely).

This, compared with a mean of 2.99 for the same question with the control group, demonstrates a significant difference ($p<.000$). The treatment group was nearly a full point lower than the control group. Equal variances between the two groups was proven, using a Levene's Test for equality of variance ($P=.346$). This indicates, as expected, that the differences in treatment and control group independent variable means are significant.

In addition to comparing the treatment group responses to Gold Star with control group responses and comparing treatment

group responses to Gold Star with the other fictitious treatment group services, the distribution within the Gold Star responses was examined. This helps illustrate, without comparing it to other choices, the range of responses within only Gold Star. The control group exhibited a bell-shaped curve (over the 5-point response) in response to the question: How likely would you be to use Gold Star resumes. The treatment group, however, did not exhibit such a nicely balanced distribution in response to this question. See Table 3.

A little more than 60 percent of the treatment group chose either 1 or 2 in response to this question, whereas only about 30 percent of the control group answered 1 or 2 on this question.

Research Question Number Two

Will treatment-group subjects recall that the information given about a service was negative? The control group did not rate the types of information given about the various services. A cross tabulation between the treatment group's likelihood to use Gold Star, and their ability to correctly recall the type of information (negative or positive) given about Gold Star resumes showed a significant correlation ($X^2 = 7.053$). Therefore, a significant relationship can be declared.

Table 3. Likelihood to use Gold Star Resumes

Control Group (N=105)

	1 Not Likely	2	3	4	5 Very Likely
Control Group	19	12	41	17	16

Treatment Group (N=153)

	1 Not Likely	2	3	4	5 Very Likely
Treatment Group	58	34	50	11	0

Table 4 shows almost 57 percent of the subjects in the treatment group correctly recalled that the stimulus information was negative. Of those who formed a memory-based judgment about the service in question, subjects were more than twice as likely not to chose it as a service. Conversely, the difference in choice of Gold Star resumes among those who could not correctly recall the type of information given is negligible (20.4% compared to 23%).

The group of 152 subjects used in the cross tabulation was slightly smaller than the 158 subjects that responded to the question asking students to rate the type of information given about Gold Star resumes. This is because only 152 of the 158 answered both questions.

Of the respondents who received stimulus information, a majority, almost 57 percent of the respondents, correctly recalled the type of information given about Gold Star. Significance of the cross tabulations were confirmed, using a X^2.

Table 4. Cross tabulation of Likelihood to use Gold Star Resumes With Recall of Information Type.

	negative (correct recall)	positive, neutral, or don't know (incorrect recall)
1-2 Not likely to choose Gold Star	60 (39.5%)	31 (20.4%)
3-5 neutral - very likely to choose Gold Star	26 (17.1%)	35 (23%)

Research Question Number Three

Is there a correlation between the level of involvement and the likelihood of choosing a service about which negative information was received? Involvement was defined in the literature review as personal relevance of a particular message for an individual (Garramone, 1984). In this study, involvement was measured by asking subjects how likely they would be to use a resume service. It was surmised that a greater likelihood of using a service would indicate involvement with research topic. Only the treatment group answered this research question. A significant correlation was found between greater level of involvement and likelihood of choosing Gold Star, the service about which negative information had been previously been given ($r=.2318$, $p<.05$) See Table 5.

The correlation between the involvement measure and Gold Star (despite its significance) is roughly half of the correlation between the involvement measure and the other fictitious services. Other correlation coefficients contrasting the involvement measure with the likelihood of using other services are listed in the Table 6.

Table 5. Correlation Coefficients Between the Involvement Measure and the Independent Variable (Treatment Group Only).

	Likelihood of using a resume service	Likelihood of using Gold Star Resumes
Likelihood of using a resume service	1.0000 (161) P< .	.2318 (153) P= .004*
Likelihood of using Gold Star Resumes	.2318 (153) P= .004*	1.0000 (161) P< .

* significance at p<.05

Table 6. Correlation Coefficients Between the Involvement Measure and the Other Services (Treatment Group Only).

	Likelihood of using a resume service
Likelihood of using Quality Writing resumes	.3602 (154) P< .000*
Likelihood of using Customized resumes	.5112 (152) P<.000*
Likelihood of using Crown resumes	.4557 (154) P<.000*

* Significant at p<.001

Post Hoc Analysis

Although the following observations do not specifically relate to any one of the three research questions, the information does help provide a more complete understanding of the subjects and their feelings about the research topic.

In the sample, 41.4 percent of respondents indicated having a resume (58.6% did not); of those respondents, a mean of 3.43 was given to the question: "How satisfied are you with your resume?" This, compared with the mean of 3.17 in response to the question: "How likely would you be to use a resume service?" shows a significant negative correlation ($p<.001$, with the significance level set at $p< .05$) between those who are satisfied with their resume and those who would be likely to use a resume service (correlation $r=-.3084$). This seems to indicate that those who are unhappy with their existing resume would be significantly more inclined to use a resume service than those who are happy with their existing resume.

Respondents indicated a mean of 3.64 in response to the question asking how difficult they think it is to get an entry-level job. High mean responses to the questions: How important do you think a resume is in landing interview (4.65); and, How

important do you think it is to have a resume (4.84) also show a strong correlation, as could be expected.

A repeated measures ANOVA of the control group yielded many more significant differences. For the control group—who heard no stimulus information at all—a significant difference was found between Gold Star and Crown resumes; Gold Star and Quality Writing resumes; Crown resumes and Quality writing resumes; Crown resumes and Customized resumes; and, Quality Writing resumes and Customized resumes. Because the subjects had no information about these services to rely on, this may indicate the presence of name bias. For significance values, see Table 7.

Table 7. Difference Levels of the Four Service Companies in the Control Group.

	Gold Star resumes	Crown resumes	Quality Writing resumes	Customized resumes
Gold Star resumes		p=.008*	p=.015*	p=.489
Crown resumes	p= .008*		p<.000*	p< .000*
Quality Writing resumes	p=.015*	p< .000*		p= .031*
Customized resumes	p= .489	p<. 000*	p= .031*	

* Significance at p<.05 level.

Mean responses to all four service companies (control group only).

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Gold Star resumes	2.99	1.62
Crown resumes	2.74	1.17
Quality Writing resumes	3.23	1.49
Customized resumes	3.06	1.21

Chapter V
Discussion

Discussion of Findings

Influence of negative information. Can negative information have a positive effect in consumer brand-based decisions? This assumption arose from the thinking that consumers might prefer a familiar choice over an unfamiliar one—even if what they knew about the familiar product or service was negative. This assumption was not supported. The treatment group clearly did not prefer Gold Star resumes over other unfamiliar services after they heard negative information about Gold Star.

This implies that the ethnocentric phenomenon of preferring what we know (what is familiar) does not prevail if negative information is clearly available in the consumers mind. For the purpose of this study, the availability of information for subsequent recall is defined as saliency. When a brand-based decision is made, consumers may prefer the familiar over the unfamiliar, unless the familiar name is associated with negative information.

As mentioned in the introduction, conventional wisdom sometimes dictates that any press is good press. This may not be true. When consumers are given negative information—whether it is through counter-advertising using brand names, crisis control situations, or publicized rumors about a product—they may avoid that brand, even if it is the only familiar choice available.

Past research (Bettman, 1979) shows that individuals tend to prefer a familiar choice over an unfamiliar one. However, this was not the case in this study. By asking the subjects if they could recall the type of information given about the resume services, it became clear that the negative information was salient in the minds of the consumers. Perhaps the saliency of the negative information was so strong that the subjects did not prefer a familiar choice over an unfamiliar one.

Strong recall of negative information. When a memory-based judgment is made about a product, can consumers recognize a product but not recall accompanying information? While empirical evidence dictates this phenomenon is possible (Edell and Burke, 1987), it did not occur in this experiment when negative information was used. About two-thirds of the treatment subjects correctly recalled that the information about

Gold Star was negative. Answers to this question provide important implications in understanding results of the first research question.

In the absence of negative information, consumers will frequently prefer a familiar choice (Bettman, 1979). As we have seen, this was not the case when consumers' familiarity was due to negative information. However, the findings show that the saliency of the negative information was strong. Meaning, if the negativity of the information can be readily recalled, the subject will shy away from those products.

Evidence also exists that when negative information is easily recalled, consumers will **not** prefer the familiar over the unfamiliar. This presents an interesting dilemma. The obvious question then, is: at what point does the existence of negative information prevail over the tendency to prefer familiar products? This is an important area of concern for anyone dealing with the emergence or existence of negative information in a consumer-type situation.

How involvement affects the decision. Is there a correlation between level of involvement and likelihood of choosing a service about which negative information was received? The answer to

this question is yes. Involvement was operationally defined in this study as personal relevance of a particular message for an individual (Garramone, 1984). In this study, involvement was measured by asking subjects how likely they would be to use a resume service.

Treatment group subjects with a higher level of involvement did show a correlation with their likelihood of choosing Gold Star resumes. This seems to indicate that when a topic at hand has a high degree of personal relevance to an individual, that individual is likely to gravitate toward a familiar source.

Implications

The evidence found in this study implies that "name-calling" is an important factor in the consumer decision-making process. Product descriptors play a role in the consumer's ultimate choice. Perhaps the way a product is described is inextricably linked to the individual's the awareness of the product itself—at least in the short term. As research shows with the "sleeper effect," this is not necessarily true over time. Over time, the source or direction of the information may become

disassociated with the product or service (Severin and Tankard, 1992).

These findings provide some important insight for the field of public relations. **How** one describes a product or situation, might be just as important as the very existence of the information in the public eye. If the descriptors are a force in consumer perception of an item or service, information **distribution** is perhaps a rather delicate matter. The existence of a single word may determine whether a consumer will purchase the product or service or not.

The findings concerning the subjects' levels of involvement also have implications for the field of advertising. This research shows a correlation between those individuals identified as highly involved with the service and the likelihood of choosing a familiar service about which negative information was given. This is useful information considering consumers highly involved with purchase decisions.

Further Study

Negative information and highly involved individuals. There is a correlation between level of involvement and likelihood of choosing a service about which negative information was given.

However, highly involved subjects were even more likely to chose a service about which no information had been given. Then in a brand-based decision, highly involved individuals would likely choose an unknown brand over a brand about which negative information was given. However, if the consumer is likely to buy the service, and the negative/familiar brand is the only choice available, perhaps they would choose it anyway.

This is a powerful statement on the effect of negative information on the consumer. Perhaps then, the dissemination of negative information about a service to consumers, may not be as damaging as previously thought. Further study is needed to explain this further.

Possibility of name bias. Because the control group received no stimulus information, all service names listed on the questionnaire were unfamiliar to them. Significantly different means in the control group's likelihood of choosing the services suggest some inherent name biases may have been the reason for the significance. This warrants further study to determine how strong name biases are and exactly which other variables they affect.

In both groups, Crown was the lowest ranking choice (excluding Gold Star for the treatment group). Quality Writing and Customized resumes were consistently the highest. Perhaps the reason for the popularity of the name "Customized resumes," is the fact that students so often hear that they should "customize" their resumes in order to stand out as an impressive candidate. This phenomenon presents evidence for the importance in name selection, and is cause for further study.

Discrepant means among unfamiliar names. The control group, who did not receive information about any service companies, was faced with all unfamiliar choices. Yet, the mean responses to the question asking likelihood of use, show significant differences from one another. The treatment group had all unfamiliar names to chose from except one (Gold Star). However in this group, mean responses to the other three choices were much more constant.

Perhaps when subjects are faced with all unfamiliar choices, they have a need to discriminate. If being faced with all unknown choices causes a sort of cognitive dissonance to occur, then perhaps subjects use name bias, primacy effect, whatever they can, in order to differentiate among the choices. Whatever

the reason for the varying mean responses of the control group, the fact that it did not occur in the treatment group with the unfamiliar names is cause for further investigation.

Gradual reduction of negative information. As the findings indicate, the majority of subjects clearly recalled the negative information given about Gold Star resumes. Further study should gradually reduce the amount of stimulus information to determine whether there is a point when the saliency of the negative information may be recognized—and preferred—but not recalled.

This could be done a number of ways: the distracter task could be longer; the questionnaire could have more items (including more fictitious services); visual aids could be removed, using only verbal stimulus information; less time (fewer positive, negative, or neutral adjectives) could be devoted to each service company; or perhaps a longer period of time—a week of so—could be allowed to elapse before the subjects were tested. Perhaps, as in voting, the format testing the independent variable should have asked subjects to "chose one" that they would be most likely to use.

If Garramone's theory about the "boomerang effect" holds true for consumers and media, negative information may produce

a backlash effect in the consumer marketplace as well. Further study is needed to examine consumers' perceptions of the credibility of sources of today's information.

Also, it should be determined whether the subjects recalled the stimulus information but chose it anyway, OR if subjects could recognize the name but not recall the information.

Comparing the influence of negative information between people and services. As discussed in the literature review, Lingle and Ostrom's (1979) findings imply that negative information tops the list of kinds of information people seek out when making a judgment about a person. Although the study reviewed did not address how this phenomenon would relate to service-based judgments, this would be an interesting and important area to explore. Might consumers undergo a similar processing situation with a familiar service that they are considering? First their initial experience, or impression of the product would come to mind; then, could there be a search for negative stimulus information to disqualify it as a possibility? Or perhaps this cognitive processing is unique to our evaluations of other people (Lingle and Ostrom, 1979).

Further study could also explore the use of neutral information mixed with other neutral and/or positive information. Would it still hold true that the subjects could recognize the brands about which neutral information had been given, but not place the ads with the brands? If so, the use of this information may be recognized along with others, and not distinguished. Research shows this tendency is particular to unfamiliar products, in which no prior opinion has been formed (Bettman, 1979).

Use of "borderline" information. In relation to the findings of Gardner et. al (1985), if the negative information distributed about a product or service was considered "borderline" negative, then consumers may recognize the brand with a more positive feeling than was generated by the information given. Although this idea was presented by Gardner et. al (1985), more research is needed to further support or refute this theory.

Limitations of the Study

Experimental Method. Because a convenience sample of undergraduate college students was used, the generalizability of these results is limited. It is important to remember however, that this research required only that the two groups be

comparable, not representative of the population of the population (Singletary, 1994, p.57). Also, Wimmer and Dominick note that proponents of the available (or convenience) sample claim that if a phenomenon, characteristic, or trait does in fact exist, it should exist in *any* sample (Wimmer and Dominick, 1983).

Although the results of this experiment will only hold true for "those specific conditions which the experimental and control groups have in common, i.e., intelligence, socioeconomic status, geographical region," (Campbell and Stanley, 1963, p.17) Singletary (1994, p.166) noted that:

> Research with college freshmen and sophomores contributes to prediction of behavior despite the apparent absence of external validity. (some argue that college students, especially those at large public universities, are a fair cross-sectional sample, given the broad range of income and ethnic groups they represent.)

Although logically, we may not be able to generalize beyond these limits, Campbell and Stanley (1963) suggest that "we do attempt generalization by guessing at laws and checking out some of these generalizations in other equally specific but different conditions" (p.17).

In the experimental design, a Solomon Four group design may have lended more validity. But, as previously noted, four

separate groups are required. Due to time and financial constraints, this was a luxury that this researcher could not afford.

Although the possibility of demand characteristics confounding the data does exist, the treatment group was asked if they knew what was being tested after the questionnaires were collected. None of the students guessed the independent variable, or the true nature of the study.

Limited measure of involvement. Only one measure of involvement was used. By expanding "involvement" to a more comprehensive method of measurement, the "highly involved" group of subjects could be better defined. Future study could also examine this relationship by adding to the measure of involvement how satisfied subjects are with their existing resume. But because of time constraints, the involvement measure was kept relatively simple in this experiment.

Influence of distracter task on results. As mentioned, there was a correlation (and high mean responses) between the involvement measure and the likelihood of choosing various service companies. Subjects demonstrated a high response mean to the involvement measure, indicating the importance placed on

resume services. This could be partly because of the video subjects viewed as a distracter task.

The speaker in the video repeatedly emphasized the importance of a good, comprehensive resume. Also, in the introduction to the experiment, the researcher mentions how a resume service can often provide an advantage over standardized formats. This information may have influenced responses to the question measuring involvement.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Circle an answer (please answer all questions)

	not important				very important
How important do you think it is to have a resume?	1	2	3	4	5

Suppose you were going to use a resume service, how likely would you be to use the following services?

	not likely				very likely
Crown Resumes	1	2	3	4	5
Customized Resumes	1	2	3	4	5
Gold Star Resumes	1	2	3	4	5
Quality Writing Resumes	1	2	3	4	5

	not likely				very likely
How likely would you be to use a resume service?	1	2	3	4	5

Do you already have a resume? yes no

	not satisfied				very satisfied
If yes, how satisfied are you with it?	1	2	3	4	5

	not important				very important
How important do you think resumes are in landing an interview?	1	2	3	4	5

	not difficult				very difficult
How difficult do you think it is to get an entry-level job?	1	2	3	4	5

Age: _____ Gender: Male Female

Year in School: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Other

Before the video, you were given brief information about some resume services. Please rate the information that was given for each service.

	negative	neutral	positive	don't know
Crown Resumes				
Customized Resumes				
Gold Star Resumes				
Job Right Resumes				
Kinko's Resumes				
Quality Writing Resumes				

Appendix 2. A Script of the Video

Hello, my name is David Anderson, I recruit for entry-level positions in a major southeastern corporation. I will talk to you about the importance of a good resume when seeking employment.

The primary purpose of a resume is simple: to obtain an interview. Your resume is your official representative, a verbal portrait calculated to arouse a perspective employer's interest in meeting you. It is an advertisement of your skills and knowledge, presented in the most favorable light.

Your resume precedes you in your job search like an emissary of goodwill. Until you meet the interviewer, your resume is all the employer may know about you. Approximately one interview is granted for every 245 resumes I receive. This illustrates the importance of a good, well-written resume.

Many times, the manner in which you state your accomplishments is no less important than the details themselves. Active phrases tend to attract the reader's attention more than dull, passive phrases. In fact, the very first word you use to describe an accomplishment can make the difference between an impressive resume and one that's just ho-hum.

For the job applicant a resume has become an indispensable tool. A good resume can be the most important fact in determining whether a prospective employer decides to call you in for an interview. In short, a well-prepared resume can literally get your foot in the door.

An accurate, detailed resume serves another function as well. It is a point of reference during the interview as well as an advantageous focal point for conversation between you and your prospective employer. A good rule of thumb is to save some information about yourself to discuss with the interviewer, but get enough information into the resume to make the interviewer want to know more about you — to call you in and talk with you personally. Strive to sound like a good investment.

When composing a resume, what is good and what is bad, depends on what "works" and what does not. In the final analysis results are what count.

Certainly, the element of chance may enter into landing a desirable position, as is true in every aspect of our lives, but a well-organized approach can minimize distracters, and reduce the arbitrary flow of circumstances. Some things perhaps are relative, but truly effective resumes are based on a carefully conceived resume strategy. In sum, an effective resume will increase your

control over the factor governing a single aspect of your career: getting the interview you want. Good luck

Apppendix 3 Human Subjects Form

FORM A

(This form may be reproduced on a personal computer and printed on a high quality printer.)

Certification for Exemption from Review by Full Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects

IRB # 4927-A

Date received in OR DEC 12 1995

A. **PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(s) and/or CO-PI(s):** (For student projects, list both the student and the advisor.)

Lisa Lyon and Dr. Candace White

B. **DEPARTMENT:**
Communication

C. **COMPLETE MAILING ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBER OF PI(s) and CO-PI(s):**
907 Luttrell St. #6 School of Journalism, 330 Communications Bldg.
Knoxville, TN 37917 (423)637-9312Knoxville, TN 37996-0330 (423)974-5155

D. **TITLE OF PROJECT:**
The Influence of Negative Information of the Consumer Decision-Making Process

E. **EXTERNAL FUNDING AGENCY AND ID NUMBER** (if applicable):
None

F. **GRANT SUBMISSION DEADLINE** (if applicable):
None

G. **STARTING DATE:** Upon certification by Coordinator of Compliances. **(NO RESEARCH MAY BE INITIATED UNTIL CERTIFICATION IS GRANTED.)**
January 29, 1996

H. **ESTIMATED COMPLETION DATE** (Include all aspects of research and final write-up.):
April 12, 1996

I. **Objective(s) of Project** (Use additional page, if needed.):
See attached sheet

II. **Subjects** (Use additional page, if needed.):
See attached sheet

III. **Methods or Procedures** (Use additional page, if needed.):
See attached sheet

IV. **CATEGORY(s) FOR EXEMPT RESEARCH PER 45 CFR 46** (see reverse side for categories): 2

CERTIFICATION: The research described herein is in compliance with 45 CFR 46.101(b) and presents subjects with no more than minimal risk as defined by applicable regulations.

Principal Investigator: Lisa Lyon (Name)	Lisa Lyon (Signature)	12/2/95 (Date)
Advisor: Dr. Candace White (Name)	Candace White (Signature)	12/2/95 (Date)
Dept. Review Comm. Chair: Dr. Michael Singletary (Name)	M W Singletary (Signature)	12-11-95 (Date)
Dept. Head: Dr. Herbert Howard (Name)	Herbert H Howard (Signature)	12/5/95 (Date)
APPROVED: Steven B. Pulik, Coordinator of Compliances, Office of Research Administration	S Pulik (Signature)	01-22-96 (Date)

Rev. 04/95

Vita

Lisa Lyon was born in Heidelberg, Germany on October 1, 1972. She moved to Virginia Beach, VA shortly thereafter, where she attended Thalia Elementary from Kindergarten until sixth grade. In seventh grade she entered the Norfolk Academy, where she graduated from high school in 1990.

In the fall of 1990 she enrolled in the College of William and Mary. In the spring of 1994 she graduated from William and Mary with a Bachelor of Arts degree in both English and German. The following fall she entered the Master's program in Communications at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, officially receiving the Master of Science degree in May of 1996.

She has plans to enter the University of Georgia doctoral program in communications in the fall of 1996.