EFFECTS OF INTERNAL INFORMATION CUES ON PERCEIVED SOURCE CREDIBILITY AND ATTITUDE: AN ANALYSIS OF CORPORATE REPUTATION, BRAND FAMILIARITY, AND CONSUMER EXPERTISE

By

WEN-HSIN CHENG

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To my family

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By

Wen-Hsin Cheng

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Chair: Janis Page
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Consumers today are bombarded daily with thousands of messages and faced with a proliferation of brand choices in the marketplace. Therefore, to disseminate marketing messages to relevant audiences effectively and accurately has become a challenge to marketers. Acknowledging that the pre-purchase information search plays an important role in consumers' decision making processes, scholars have devoted considerable efforts to examining consumers' information seeking behaviors. Information searches can involve seeking both internal and external information. An internal search refers to the retrieval of information that is available in memory while external information may be collected from sources outside of memory. However, little research has empirically examined the communication effectiveness of marketer-controlled and non-marketer-controlled sources depending on individual differences in internal cues.

The proposed model explored the way internal information cues influence external information evaluation and attitude formation. Corporate reputation and consumer knowledge were identified as influential internal cues that shape message persuasiveness and consumer attitudes. Whether level of involvement can moderate the effect of source credibility on attitude was addressed as well. Further, this study explored how consumers assign credibility to different

sources of product/brand information, including company-generated messages and non-company-controlled information.

A 2 (high vs. low corporate reputation) by 3 (company, editorial, and consumer sources) factorial experimental design was employed. A total of 212 university students participated in the study. The researcher found that perceived source credibility was directly influenced by level of involvement, but not influenced by corporate reputation and brand familiarity. In addition, the results indicated significant interactive effect of consumer expertise and involvement on perceived source credibility. In general, this study found a difference in source credibility between company-generated messages and non-company-generated content. A professional journalistic source was perceived as more credible by respondents than was a company source and an unknown peer consumer. The results suggested that consumer attitude toward a company was related strongly to corporate reputation and was influenced by consumers' credibility evaluations of external sources of information.

In conclusion, this study confirmed that respondents' level of involvement was related to the way consumers evaluate external information. The results of regression analyses supported the proposed conceptual model in which both internal and external cues are influential in attitude formation.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Searching for information is essential to a consumer's decision making process (Bettman, 1979; Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1986). Information searches can involve seeking both internal and external information. An internal search refers to the retrieval of information that is available in memory, such as prior brand experiences, beliefs, or previous exposure to advertising. External information may be collected from sources outside of memory, such as the Internet, word-of-mouth, consumer reports, or salespeople. As consumers are unique and their behaviors vary, scholars have made efforts to investigate the antecedents of external searches (Beatty & Smith, 1980; Moore & Lehmann, 1980). Empirical studies have suggested that "consumers exhibit very limited prepurchase information search activity" (Moorthy, Ratchford, & Talukdar, 1997, p. 263). Moreover, the body of literature has highlighted the influence of internal information cues on external information acquisition and information processing (e. g. Bettman, 1970; Duncan & Olshavsky, 1982; Sujan, Bettman, & Sujan, 1986).

Previous research has recognized the importance of both internal and external information cues as the basis for attitude formation and judgment (Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991; Wood, Kallgren, & Preisler, 1985). Feelings and prior experiences serve as accessible internal information used by message receivers to evaluate new information and determine attitude (Keller, 1987; Wood, 1982). In this thesis, corporate reputation and consumer knowledge were identified as influential internal cues that shape message persuasiveness and consumer attitude.

A good corporate reputation mirrors beliefs and perceptions stored in memory and becomes a heuristic that directs how people perceive and evaluate messages regarding the firm and their attitudes toward it (Coombs & Holladay, 2006; Lyon & Cameron, 2004). Consumer knowledge has been acknowledged as one of the major determinants of external search behaviors

(Grant, Clarke, & Kyriazis, 2007; Moore & Lehmann, 1980). In consumer knowledge structure, brand familiarity involves the quantitative aspect of a consumer's direct and indirect experience with a brand, such as advertising exposure and purchase and use of a brand (Kent & Allen, 1994). Consumer expertise determines the ability to perform product-related tasks (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). Both constructs serve as important internal sources of information (Lehto, Kim, & Morrison, 2006; Park & Stoel, 2005) that play key roles in individuals' information acquisition, information processing, and information evaluation (Bettman & Park, 1980; Brucks, 1985).

This thesis focused on the way internal information cues affect perceived source credibility among different external sources and consumers' attitude formation. In the process of pre-purchase information searches, consumers may rely on both company-generated and non-company-generated information. The former represents an official information source of brand or product-related information, and the latter is produced by individuals or organizations not affiliated with a company. Due to increasing consumer skepticism about business (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2009), information from non-company sources has been viewed as more credible by consumers and is therefore better able to drive behavioral intentions than corporate communications (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Chatterjee, 2001; Keaveney, 1995; Murray, 1991; Price & Feick, 1984).

The traditional persuasion theory has documented very capably the substantial impact of source credibility on communication effectiveness and attitude (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Perloff, 2003). Source credibility has two major dimensions: expertise and trustworthiness (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). Communication messages with a highly credible source yield

greater acceptance by receivers and positive attitudes than messages with a source that lacks credibility (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000a).

The present study proposed that consumers rely on both internal cues retrieved from memory and various external information sources to form attitudes toward a company. Specifically, this study focused on source credibility as an influential message cue that affects attitudes. Previous research in the advertising literature has revealed interactive effects of knowledge factors (e.g. brand familiarity, prior attitudes, and product expertise) and source factors on advertising effectiveness and brand attitudes (Braunsberger & Munch, 1998; Goldber & Hartwick, 1990; Gill, Grossbart, & Laczniak, 1988). However, discussions on the communication effectiveness of company-generated messages and non-company-controlled information are rather scarce. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining whether personal differences in internal information cues might affect the way people process and evaluate messages from different sources and consequently, how these variations influence their attitudes toward the company. An understanding of how consumers assign credibility to company and non-company sources relative to their preexisting beliefs and levels of knowledge can provide theoretical and managerial implications.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

External Source of Information

Given that consumers today are faced with a proliferation of brand choices in the marketplace and an overwhelming amount of marketing communication, marketers have been struggling to disseminate marketing messages to relevant audiences effectively and accurately (Geissler & Edison, 2005). Due to the growth of the Internet and an increasingly fragmented media environment, consumers have changed the way they search for information and obtain knowledge. Acknowledging that the pre-purchase information search plays an important role in consumers' decision making processes, scholars have devoted considerable efforts to examining information seeking behaviors in on-line and off-line environments (Beatty & Smith, 1987; Grant et al., 2007). The common sources of information used during external searches can be divided into marketer-controlled and non-marketer-controlled communications.

Marketer-controlled messages include various types of commercial communications produced and delivered by companies. Any form of online and offline advertising, public relations messages, marketing campaigns, personal selling, and product information on packages and brochures all represent possible venues through which companies communicate with consumers (Schmidt & Spreng, 1996). Such company-generated content serves as official sources of information for consumers.

Non-marketer-controlled information can be created by independent, third-party organizations (Schmidt & Spreng, 1996). For example, product reviews and ratings published by editorial sources, such as Consumers Union, J. D. Power, and Consumer Reports, and traditional mainstream media coverage (e.g. newspaper and magazines) are viewed as unbiased third-party sources. Traditional journalists act as gatekeepers who perform an important filtering function

and thus are viewed as important information sources by audiences rather than just a medium (Sunder & Nass, 2001). The value of publicity or publications produced by independent organizations or media outlets is that second-hand information is deemed much more legitimate and influential than their company-generated counterparts (Cameron, 1994).

Another type of non-commercial information source for brand or product-related information is that of interpersonal sources that are not affiliated with companies, such as knowledgeable relatives, friends, and acquaintances (Mourali, Laroche, & Pons, 2005; Price & Feick, 1984). Previous research has explored interpersonal search behavior and revealed the growing importance of consumer-created communications (Geissler & Edison, 2005; Gilly, Graham, Wolfinbarger, & Yale, 1998; Muñiz & Schau, 2007). Information provided by knowledgeable individuals was perceived as unbiased, immediate, and interpretable, and thus was more likely to be used than other information sources in the decision making process (Price & Feick, 1984). Marketing scholars have found that word-of-mouth communication from noncommercial, personal sources plays a particularly influential role in consumer awareness and attitude, product evaluations, choice and purchase decisions (Herr et al., 1991; Price & Feick, 1984), and selection of service providers (Keaveney, 1995).

The emergence of the Internet and the rise of social media platforms have created new ways for consumers to share and gather information and communicate with other consumers by engaging in electronic word-of-mouth (Chatterjee, 2001; Duan, Gu, & Whinston, 2008; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). Web-based, consumer-generated content has emerged as the most influential information source, which produces direct impacts on consumer behavior (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Park, Lee, & Han, 2007). The increased number of product-review Websites and virtual opinion platforms collect voluminous consumer-to-

consumer articulations about actual usage experiences, complaints, and advice (Bailey, 2004; Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2004). Other social media platforms, such as blogs, social networking sites, forums, and photo or video sharing sites also facilitate information exchange processes and expanded the traditional localized, face-to-face, word-of-mouth concept to incorporate any unknown online communicator beyond geographic boundary (Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Johnson & Kaye, 2004). Personal opinions, experiences, and recommendations communicated through online consumer publishing have been shared and embraced by hundreds of millions of people as additional sources of information to help evaluate product alternatives and gain reassurance of their choices and decision making processes (Bailey, 2005).

Previous studies have shown that non-company-generated information is viewed as more credible and exerts greater influence on brand choices than information from the firm (Keaveney, 1995; Murray, 1991). Bickart and Schindler (2001, p. 32) suggested that "Consumers voiced greater credibility to the opinion and accounts of personal product experiences because they regarded fellow consumers as trustworthy sources who have no vested interest in the product and no intentions to manipulate the reader." According to Geissler and Edison (2005), marketers should pay particular attention to the so-called "market mavens," who are expert shoppers or opinion leaders with knowledge and influence across a broad range of product categories. This is because they actively gather and disseminate the latest product and other marketing mix information, and eventually become influential word-of-mouth communicators. In line with this notion, Cheong and Morrison (2008) also reported consumers' reliance on consumer-generated content as trustworthy product information sources for purchasing decisions.

The 2009 Edelman Trust Barometer provided empirical support of greater public trust in non-business sources. According to the report, editorial content and word-of-mouth

communication were rated highly in evaluating the credibility of sources of information about a company: “stock or industry analyst reports” garnered 47% of participants’ trust, “articles in business magazines” attracted 44%, and “conversations with your friends and peers” attained 40%, which was the same as “conversation with company employees” (p. 12). On the other hand, all corporate channels of communication had lost their credibility in the minds of the public. Only 26% of respondents deemed press releases, reports, and e-mails from firms as credible sources; other company-controlled messages posted even lower scores, including corporate Websites (24%), business blogs (19%), and corporate or product advertising (13%). The results also suggested that “informed publics prefer multiple sources of information before they believe it” (p. 12).

This thesis incorporated various sources of product or brand-related information, including company-generated and non-company-controlled messages. Specifically, company-generated messages were operationalized as official announcements that directly produced by companies to communicate with customers. Non-company-controlled messages included communication messages from independent, third party media outlets and interpersonal sources. The former provided legitimate, second-hand information while the latter offered immediate personal experiences. It was suggested that non-company-controlled communication plays a particularly influential role in consumers’ decision making processes (Geissler & Edison, 2005; Mourali et al., 2005). The present study examined how consumers evaluate product-related communication messages from the company, editorial, and consumer sources in terms of source credibility.

Previous research into consumers’ information search behavior indicated that the types and numbers of external searches are determined by several environmental, situational, and individual factors, and that the amount of external search tends to be limited rather than

extensive (Beatty & Smith, 1987; Guo, 2001; Mourali et al., 2005; Schmidt & Spreng, 1996). This study focused specifically on how corporate reputation, brand familiarity, and product expertise affect the perceived credibility of three major external sources of brand/product information: company-generated messages, independent, third-party editorial content, and consumer-generated communication.

Source Credibility

In persuasion theory, source credibility has been one of the most important characteristics for effective communication. Academics and professionals have paid considerable attention to the influence of source credibility on persuasion in terms of changing people's attitudes and behaviors. Since the 1950s, researchers have claimed a positive effect by highly credible sources on persuasion. Hovland and Weiss (1951) found that highly credible sources elicited changes in opinion regarding the direction advocated by the communicator to a greater extent than did less credible sources. A message attributed to a low credibility source was perceived as less fair and justifiable than when it came from a high credibility source. In line with their statement, Maddux and Rogers (1980) found that expert sources tended to yield greater acceptance of arguments than did inexpert sources. Other studies have also supported the claim that a highly credible source resulted in more effective persuasion (Johnson, Torcivia, & Poprick, 1968; McGinnies & Ward, 1980; Warren, 1969).

An information source can consist of people, groups, or media. The present research focused on individual speakers who communicate directly with the audience and give opinions on an issue. In their book *Communication and Persuasion*, Hovland and colleagues (1953) characterized the credibility of individual sources as communicator credibility. Source credibility has two major components: expertise and trustworthiness. Expertise is defined as how well informed and intelligent a communicator is perceived to be while trustworthiness is the degree of

confidence in the communicator's intention to communicate (Hovland et al., 1953). Both factors contributed to effective persuasion and opinion change. Compared to a less credible source, a highly credible source tended to generate more a favorable evaluation of the presentation and elicit greater acceptance of recommendations made by the communicator. Since these findings were first reported, researchers have attempted to discover the constructs of source credibility (e.g. Applbaum & Anatol, 1972; Bowers & Phillips, 1967; Slater & Rouner, 1996; Whitehead, 1968). McGuire's (1985) source valence model included attractiveness as another component of source credibility. Based on factor analysis, McCroskey (1966) identified two factors: authoritativeness and character, as constructs of source credibility. Berlo, Lemert, and Mertz (1969) proposed the dimensions of safety, qualification, and dynamism. In addition to expertise and trustworthiness, researchers in advertising and marketing also incorporated other constructs to assess source credibility (Simpson & Kahler, 1980-81; Wynn, 1987). Message quality, believability, sociability, and potency have emerged as different dimensions of source credibility. Despite the various definitions and operationalizations of source credibility found in the literature, expertise and trustworthiness have been the most widely used and applicable dimensions recognized by scholars (Hovland et al., 1953; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; McCracken, 1989; Ohanian, 1990).

Source credibility is based on a receiver's perception (Perloff, 2003, p. 159). People are bombarded daily with thousands of messages. Consumers thus make judgments depending on their knowledge, memories, and available information inputs in different contexts. Contextual factors (i.e. the perceived amount of information) have been suggested to influence persuasive outcomes (Tormala & Petty, 2007). Living in such a multiple message environment, people's perception of a specific persuasive message may be affected by other messages they have

encountered previously. Tormala and Clarkson (2007) proposed that the perceived source credibility of a target message is susceptible to other sources that were encountered recently. The perceived credibility of sources that were encountered previously served as a standard of comparison for people when making judgments about a current target message. They found that when people form a higher evaluation of expertise for target messages, they generate relatively more positive attitudes and responses. Other experimental research that examines the persuasiveness of source credibility has revealed an interaction between source credibility and other variables related to the source, message, channel, receiver, and destination (Pornpitakpan, 2004; Sternthal, Phillips, & Dholkia, 1978).

Extensive research efforts have focused on the effect of source credibility on attitude and behavior in different contexts. Most studies supported that a high credibility source is more persuasive and has a positive effect on receivers' attitudes and behavioral intentions (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Warren (1969) observed that speakers using a highly credible source of testimony elicited greater attitude change and better evaluations of the speaker by subjects. In the advertising literature, source credibility has been identified as an important antecedent of attitude change and advertisement effectiveness. MacKenzie and Lutz's (1989) dual mediation hypothesis examined attitude formation relative to advertisements and brands. Their model provided a framework for understanding how credibility influences consumers' attitudes, and the findings they noted suggested that perceived advertiser credibility was related to ad credibility. More recently, corporate credibility has been introduced as another type of source credibility and a component of corporate reputation that shapes consumer attitudes and behavioral responses (Goldberg & Hartwick, 1990; Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000b). Goldsmith et al. (2000a) identified corporate credibility and endorser credibility as antecedents to attitude toward the

advertisement, attitude toward the brand, and consumer purchase intentions. The dual-credibility model suggested that while endorser credibility had a strong impact on consumers' evaluations of advertisements, corporate credibility directly influenced consumers' reactions to advertisements, perceptions of brands, and purchase intentions, independent of the effect of endorser credibility (Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Newell, 2002).

Source credibility is a multi-dimensional concept that is relevant to judgments by audiences, and it involves the knowledge or ability ascribed to the communicator (Perloff, 2003). McCroskey (1997) defined credibility as "the attitude toward a source of communication held at a given time by a receiver." Perloff (2003) identified authority, credibility, and social attractiveness as three fundamental characteristics of communicators. Authority figures influence others by compliance since people always favor rewards and avoid punishment. Credibility includes three attributes—expertise, trustworthiness, and goodwill. Attractive communicators persuade successfully because they are more likable, they are similar to audiences, or they are physically appealing. In spite of the various dimensions of source credibility defined by different scholars, most of the studies supported the generalization that expert and trustworthy sources impart a greater degree of approval and attitude change.

Effect of Source Credibility on Persuasion: Level of Involvement

Aside from the established literature that examines the main impact of source credibility on persuasion, other studies have explored the relationship in view of the different conditions that moderate the effect of source credibility. Scholars have found that individuals' ability and motivation to process a message may moderate the effect of source credibility on persuasion.

The dual-process models of persuasion suggested two different mechanisms by which communication affects attitudes. Both the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) proposed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) and the related heuristic-systematic model (HSM) presented by Chaiken,

Libermn, and Eagly (1989) suggested two distinct ways in which people process information. According to the ELM, people may utilize either a central or peripheral route to process messages. The central route involves a high level of elaboration while the peripheral route is characterized by less cognitive effort being devoted to information processing. Recipients' understanding and cognitive elaboration mediate attitude formation. The different routes of inducing attitude change may work best depending on whether the elaboration likelihood is high or low in certain communication situations. The model suggested that different levels of motivation and ability determine individual processing strategies (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

The central route implies that people focus actively on the communication and evaluate the arguments presented in the message by using considerable cognitive elaboration. The central route processing tends to occur when individuals are motivated, highly involved in the issue, perceive a need for cognition, and are knowledgeable about a given topic. In contrast, the peripheral route processing requires less cognitive effort and fewer cognitive resources. When lacking sufficient motivation and ability to process messages, people examine them quickly and rely on simple cues or heuristics to make an evaluation. An expert source, the number of arguments, physical attractions, and a long list of endorsements are all common peripheral cues that may invoke attitude change and behavioral responses (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Based on the dual-processing model, it has been discovered that source credibility affects persuasion depending on the message recipients' level of elaboration (Tormala, Briñol, & Petty, 2007). Previous research suggested that peripheral cues (e.g. communicator credibility, argument quality) become more persuasive when recipients have a limited ability to process the information as well as when their motivation for extensive elaboration is low rather than high (Axsom, Yates, & Chaiken, 1987; Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann,

1983). The credibility of the information source serves as a peripheral cue to persuasion under conditions of low elaboration (Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981). When people are less involved in a given issue, a highly credible source tends to generate more attitude change than a low credibility source (Johnson & Schileppi, 1969). Ratneshwar and Chaiken (1991) found that subjects with low levels of comprehension expressed more positive attitudes to expert inventors and that their responses were associated strongly with source-related thoughts (e.g. source expertise).

On the other hand, researchers also found that source credibility can affect persuasion when elaboration is high (e.g. Heesacker, Petty, & Cacioppo, 1983; Homer & Kahle, 1990). Chaiken and Maheswaran (1994) maintained that people were biased positively by an expert source and consequently perceived arguments as stronger. The information processing that occurred with the biased thoughts resulted in more favorable attitudes. Other researchers suggested a different mechanism for the source credibility effect under conditions of high elaboration. In an early study by Heesacker, Petty, and Cacioppo (1983), the relationship between source credibility and attitude change in a high involvement communication was associated with the personal characteristics of field dependence/independence. They found that a highly credible source appeared persuasive for subjects who were unmotivated to articulate and differentiate external stimuli (field dependence) for high involvement issues because source credibility increased the scrutiny applied to the message. More recently, Homer and Kahle (1990) studied the interaction between source expertise, the timing of source identification, and involvement. They concluded that under high involvement, source factors aided persuasion when it was presented early in the message. When allocating considerable elaboration to information processing, people formed less favorable evaluations when they identified a less expert source

early in the message. According to the self-validation hypothesis of Petty, Briñol, and Tormala (2002), under high elaboration conditions, an individual's confidence in his or her thoughts can affect persuasion depending on the cognitive responses elicited by the message. Tormala, Briñol, and Petty (2006) contended that the positive thoughts about a message followed by the identification of a credible source resulted in a greater participant confidence, which led ultimately to more favorable attitudes. In a subsequent study, they suggested further that source credibility influences attitudes by affecting the thought favorability or thought confidence of the message receivers. The differential effects were determined by the timing of the identification of source credibility; namely, whether the source credibility cue preceded or followed a message (Tormala, Briñol, & Petty, 2007).

However, a number of studies have reported null findings regarding the source credibility effect on attitudes under conditions of high elaboration. When people were motivated or were able to process the message, deep elaboration on the message itself may have reduced their need to rely on source cues such as source credibility (Homer & Kahle, 1990).

In summary, the dual-processing models of attitude change contended that the concept of involvement is an important moderator of the amount and type of information processing elicited by a persuasive communication. The implication of the ELM on the persuasiveness of source credibility is that level of involvement moderates the source credibility effect on persuasion. The literature review revealed mixed results for the impact of source credibility on attitudes under high and low involvement conditions based on different mechanisms. The present study included this moderating variable to understand further how source cues influence attitude toward a company.

Corporate Reputation

It is believed by academics and practitioners alike that corporate reputation is becoming increasingly important. Every year, many organizations publish reputational rankings, such as America's Most Admired Companies in *Fortune* magazine, the 100 Best-Managed Companies developed by *Industry Week*, Harris Interactive's Reputation Quotient, and the U.S. RepTrak of Reputation Institute, all of which attempt to quantify the abstract perceptions of corporate reputation. Reputation is highly prized by firms and contributes to brand equity (Chaudhuri, 2002; McCorkindale, 2008). The bottom-line implications of a strong reputation have prompted managers to create and maintain a favorable corporate reputation (Roberts & Dowling, 2002). Reputation is an asset to be leveraged for strategic opportunity, and it is vital to the economic success of a company. Reputation-building requires long-term efforts and is never an easy task. A favorable corporate reputation is desirable since it becomes a competitive strategy, which ensures the long-term survival of a company (Dowling, 1986).

A growing body of literature has revealed an abundance of definitions of corporate reputation. Balmer (1998) analyzed the development of the corporate reputation theory and found that the concept has evolved from corporate image (1950s) to corporate identity and corporate communication (1970s and 1980s), and more recently to corporate brand management and reputation management (1990s). Scholars from a variety of academic disciplines (e.g. economics, marketing, accounting, management, sociology) have focused research efforts into reputation studies (Frombrun & Van Riel, 1997; Rhee & Valdez, 2009). Reputation involves the historical aspect of what an organization has done and how it behaves over time (Balmer, 1998). It is based on subjective assessments of a firm's past performance, which describes its ability to satisfy the interest of multiple stakeholders (Fombrun & Van Riel, 1997). Bromley (2002) maintained that reputation is a socially shared impression that reflects collectively-held beliefs

about a company. Grounded in attitude-behavior theories, Caruana, Cohen, and Krentler (2005) associated reputation with the beliefs of and attitudes toward companies.

Some empirical research has focused on the factors that influence corporate reputation. Fombrun and Shanley (1990) found that people constructed reputations based on several informational signals: market and accounting signals that indicate financial performance, institutional signals representing social responsiveness, and strategy signals that reveal the choice of business strategies. Rindova, Williamson, Petkova, and Sever (2005) suggested that perceived quality of services/products and organizational prominence (derived from third-party endorsements) are two components of organizational reputation.

The reason corporate reputation has been valued traditionally can be explained by its contribution to a firm's sustainable development. The more favorable a company's reputation, the more likely its stakeholders are to engage in supportive behaviors (McCorkindale, 2008). Previous research suggests that corporate reputation is related to everything from market share to employee morale (Chaudhuri, 2002; Dowling, 1986; Rhee & Valdez, 2009). Public relations practitioners strive to enhance and maintain strong corporate reputation because it affects every possible stakeholder group of a company, from consumers to employees, investors, shareholders, and government organizations.

Reputation affects people's behavioral intentions profoundly (Gaines-Ross, 1997; Lyon & Cameron, 2004). Consumers reported higher purchasing intentions and were more willing to provide recommendations for products and services from companies that are highly regarded (Bontis, Booker, & Serenko, 2007; Graham & Bansal, 2007; Jeng, 2008; Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Rogerson, 1983). Reputation also served as a strong driver of customer loyalty (Andreassen, 1994; Bontis et al., 2007; Ryan, Rayner, & Morrison, 1999). It played an important

role in the enhancement of brand relationships such that customers were more willing to communicate with the firm and perceived a greater emotional exchange with the brand (Cleopatra & Moutinho, 2009). In addition, research has suggested that corporate reputation is related to the attraction and retention of quality employees (Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993; Highhouse et al., 1999; Turban & Greening, 1996) and investors (Chajet, 1997; Gaines-Ross, 1997; Helm, 2007). A company with a good reputation is rewarded by other benefits, including easier product introduction, better perceived product quality, the ability to influence regulatory processes, increased advertising effectiveness and credibility, and better perceptions of corporate giving (Bae & Cameron, 2006; Goldberg & Hartwick, 1990; Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Weigelt & Camerer, 1988).

Reputation can serve as a heuristic people can use to help them form perceptions about a firm. Research has confirmed a positive effect of reputation on attitudes (Lyon & Cameron, 2004). Companies with positive reputation were reported to be more prosocial and likable than companies with negative reputation, and their management styles and ethical standards also garnered more support from stakeholders (Lyon & Cameron, 2004). Especially in crisis situations, corporate reputation served as a key predictor of people's attitude (Lyon & Cameron, 2004). Previous studies have indicated that the pre-crisis reputation of a company has substantial impacts on its post-crisis reputation and crisis outcomes (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Klein & Dawar, 2004). Coombs and Holladay (2006) maintained that prior corporate reputation provides a halo effect; that is, it acts as a shield that leads stakeholders to ignore negative information created by the crisis and deflects reputational harm away from the organization. In other words, strong corporate reputation may act as a type of insurance policy that protects the reputational assets of a firm during a crisis (Dowling, 2002).

Reputation management has gained distinct prominence in the literature of public relations (e.g. Hutton, Goodman, Alexander, & Genest, 2001; Kim, 2001; Skolnik, 1994; Yang, 2007). Among the various roles of corporate communication, reputation management has been ranked as the leading philosophy of corporate communication departments (Hutton et al., 2001). On behalf of the organization they represent, public relations practitioners are entrusted with the responsibility of creating and maintaining a corporate reputation in the most positive manner among different stakeholder groups. The excellence theory of public relations maintained that public relations efforts aided organizations in achieving their goals. The principle of two-way symmetrical communication has guided the profession to help companies build beneficial relationships with their key stakeholder groups and enhance mutual understanding between the two parties (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). In Hon's study (1997), CEOs and managers believed that effective public relations contribute to creating the right corporate image and communicating positive and accurate messages. Previous research suggested a positive relationship between public relations expenditures and corporate reputation, and a favorable reputation was related to a company's financial success (Kim, 2001).

The literature review revealed how actions and communication conducted through public relations affect corporate reputations. A firm's media exposure appears to be highly related to its corporate reputation (Wartick, 1992). According to the agenda-setting theory, the selection and display of news influences the prominence of the chosen topics and their images among the public (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Empirical studies also found that companies are able to acquire better reputations if their successful attributes appear more frequently in media coverage (Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis, 2006). Carroll and McCombs (2003) argued that organized corporate communication can influence news content significantly. It was

suggested that public relations messages have an impact on shaping an organization's media coverage and that they ultimately influence public perceptions and opinions (Berger & Park, 2003; Carroll & MCombs, 2003; Kiousis, Popescu, & Mitrook, 2007). Kiousis et al. (2007) studied the relationships among public relations messages, media coverage, perceived corporate reputation, and financial performance and suggested a corporate communication strategy to differentiate public relations materials that target specific media outlets for the management of corporate reputation. Corporate vision and leadership and corporate social responsibility were two message attributes in news content that are more likely to result in a better corporate image.

In summary, the review of literature indicated that corporate reputation can be regarded as an evaluation cue that influences and shapes people's judgment of a company. Moreover, preexisting corporate reputations that remain in consumers' minds are likely to affect their processing and evaluations on any given information regarding the firm.

Consumer Knowledge

Consumer research literature has shown a long-standing interest in consumer knowledge and has revealed its impacts on individual behavior. Early studies into this subject focused on consumers' prior knowledge and experiences. For example, Park and Lessig (1981) evaluated subjects' perceived knowledge based on behavioral considerations, such as information search experience, usage experience, and ownership status. Johnson and Russo (1984) viewed the knowledge of a product class to be the same as product familiarity. In many cases, researchers have connected familiarity with knowledge and experience. Consumer knowledge and experience are shown to be important factors in consumer information processing (Bettman & Park, 1980). Operationally, consumer knowledge has been measured in terms of the amount of purchasing or usage experience (Monroe, 1976; Moore & Lehmann, 1980) and information stored in memory (Brucks, 1985).

In their review study, Alba and Hutchinson (1987) divided consumer knowledge into two dimensions: familiarity and expertise. Familiarity is defined as "the number of product-related experiences that have been accumulated by the consumer." These related experiences broadly include advertising exposure, information search, interactions with salespeople, word-of-mouth communications, trials, and purchasing (Alba & Hutchison, 1987). Alternatively, they defined expertise as "the ability to perform product-related tasks successfully." To clarify further the difference between the two constructs, de Bont and Shoormns (1996) argued that familiarity refers to the quantity rather than the quality or type of experience, while expertise involves qualitative aspects of consumer knowledge.

Jacoby, Troutman, Kuss, and Mazursky (1986) offered a more profound explication of experience and expertise. They stated that an individual can have many "personally encountered" experiences with a particular subject matter without becoming an expert; on the other hand, individuals that have the same level of expertise may possess different amounts of experience. Therefore, many experience-based indices cannot truly reflect knowledge. This confusion may stem from the fact that both experience and expertise involve acquiring knowledge; however, having experience does not always equate to expertise. The essential distinction between experience and expertise is that expertise presents a qualitatively higher level of knowledge when compared to some external standard (Jacoby et al., 1986). In line with Jacoby et al. (1986), Braunsberger and Munch (1998) concluded that experience and expertise are two distinct constructs. While the former reflects a degree of familiarity obtained through some type of personal exposure to a certain subject area, the latter involves a high degree of skill in or knowledge of a specific subject obtained through some type of formal training. Figure 2-1 illustrates the differences between familiarity and expertise. Generally, accumulated experience

and exposure to information result in greater familiarity (Ha & Perks, 2005), and increasing familiarity is associated with the development of expertise (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Brucks, 1985).

Previous research indicated how different knowledge factors contribute to individual differences in experience and expertise. Philippe and Ngobo (1999) identified four dimensions of consumer knowledge structure—familiarity, product class information, objective expertise, and subjective expertise. Different components of consumer knowledge were found to have diverse effects on cognitive tasks (Philippe & Ngobo, 1999). In their factor analysis, Mitchell and Dacin (1996) identified three knowledge factors—subjective/objective knowledge, magazine reading/number of motorcycles owned, and friends owning motorcycles—which exert different effects on consumer knowledge. Subjective/objective knowledge factors were found to support and explain the differences in the content and organization of knowledge and the reasons for consumer choice. The number of correct choices in choice tasks was affected by subjective/objective knowledge and friends owning motorcycles. They also found that magazine reading/number of motorcycles owned and friends-owning-motorcycles are more related to the amount of experience with a product class. These experiences may not necessarily translate into knowledge but would increase consumers' familiarity with the product. Their findings supported the claim that experience and expertise are two different yet related constructs acquired through different processes. Given that familiarity and expertise each contribute to individuals' cognitive and behavioral differences, this research incorporates brand familiarity and consumer expertise to better capture consumer knowledge.

The idea that consumer knowledge could be utilized as a differentiating strategy and market segmentation technique was widely supported in previous research. For example, Su,

Comer and Lee (2008) revealed that consumer expertise can influence the perceived effectiveness of interactive recommendation agents by e-tailers in online purchasing environments. They suggested that online marketers might consider designing different Web pages or usage interfaces for expert and novice customers to accommodate their preferences and enhance satisfaction. Moreover, research into consumer responses to advertising showed that technical advertising elicited more cognitive responses for higher familiarity consumers (Edell & Mitchell, 1978). For marketers, it is important to note that communication should match the technical complexity of its intended audience (Johnson & Russo, 1984).

Brand Familiarity

Brand familiarity reflects the extent of a consumer's direct and indirect experience with a brand (Kent & Allen, 1994) and captures the consumer's brand knowledge structures; that is, the brand associations in the consumer's memory (Campbell & Keller, 2003). Alba and Hutchison (1987) defined familiarity as the number of product-related experiences that have been accumulated by the consumer. Based on this definition, Tam (2008) defined brand familiarity as the accumulated related experiences customers have had with a brand.

Research in consumer behavior has shown that consumers' familiarity with brands/products influences their information acquisition (Johnson & Russo, 1981; 1984) and information processing (Bettman & Park, 1980). These differences are apparent in various consumer behaviors, such as the decision-making process (Bettman & Park, 1980; Park & Lessig, 1981), behavioral intentions (Söderlund, 2002; Tam, 2008), satisfaction formation (Söderlund, 2002; Tam, 2008), and preference construction (Coupey, Irwin, & Payne, 1998).

Johnson and Russo (1984) have conducted several studies on the relationship between product familiarity and information acquisition and learning. Given high familiarity, consumers spend less time searching for product information, have a better ability to encode new

information, and are capable of distinguishing relevant from irrelevant information (Johnson & Russo, 1984). Therefore, consumers familiar with a brand would be less vulnerable to exaggerated and deceptive information in advertisements (Biswas, 1992).

Individuals' abilities and motivation determine the amount of processing involved in given messages. In the context of reference prices, Vaidyanathan (2000) showed that subjects with greater brand familiarity have a better developed price schema and thus rely less on external cues when constructing price estimates. The results supported that customers with different levels of prior knowledge and experience exert different degrees of processing available information (Bettman & Park, 1980).

Previous research suggested that well-known brands are better liked than less familiar brands and enjoy positive customer evaluations (Colombo & Morrison, 1989; Sen & Johnson, 1997). Familiar things gave people a feeling of intimacy and a "glow of warmth" experience (Titchener, 1910). By repeated stimulus exposure, which Zajonc and Markus (1982) called the "exposure effect," an enhancement of positive affect toward an object occurs and makes individuals' attitudes toward the object more positive. People tend to attribute more positive features to companies that are better known (Brooks, Highhouse, Russell, & Mohr, 2003; Luce, Barber, & Hillman, 2001). Similarly, McCorkindale (2008) found that familiarity plays a major role in corporate reputation, which holds true for companies in six different industries. When encountering an unfamiliar brand, consumers learn about and form impressions of the brand during consumption (Campbell & Keller, 2003). Customers less familiar with the brand perform satisfaction evaluations depending on whether the perceived performance exceeds their expectations (Tam, 2008). In contrast, given that highly familiar customers already possess established brand associations and complicated knowledge structures, they exert less cognitive

effort on expectations (Tam, 2008) and are less motivated to learn from consumption experience (Hoch & Deighton, 1989). It was suggested that when brand familiarity increases through experience, performance perception will dominate the satisfaction formation process and determine consumers' purchase intentions (Tam, 2008). Söderlund (2002) showed that a high level of familiarity was associated with more extreme post-purchase responses in satisfaction and behavioral intentions (e.g. repurchase and word-of-mouth intentions). This was true especially when customers perceived performance in extreme conditions; that is, either high or low performance.

There is evidence which shows that brand familiarity is associated with consumer behavior. In consumers' decision-making processes, decision biases and heuristics are functions of consumers' familiarity. Park and Lessig (1981) showed that people with various levels of familiarity are different in terms of perceptual category breadth, use of functional/nonfunctional product dimensions, decision time, and confidence in choice. A high level of brand familiarity is desirable since it facilitates the decision process and boosts confidence in the chosen brand; consequently, it increases purchase intentions (Bennett & Harrell, 1975; Laroche, Kim, & Zhou, 1996). As brand name awareness increases, consumers perceive less uncertainty and risk regarding the purchasing decisions they make (Erdem & Swait, 1998). The positive effect of brand familiarity on purchase intentions has been verified in both traditional store settings and online shopping environments (Laroche et al., 1996; Park & Stoel, 2005). Monroe (1976) studied the interaction of price differences and brand familiarity and the interactive effect on brand preferences. The researcher revealed a dominant impact of brand familiarity, such that "whenever a buyer has had previous purchase-use experience with a brand, that information is likely to be a dominant factor in choice behavior." Similarly, Mano and Davis (1990) found that

brand familiarity and brand preferences are highly correlated for low involvement, experience-related, and nontechnical products (i.e. breakfast cereals and fast food restaurants).

In the marketing literature, brand familiarity has been an important variable that has substantial impact on people's responses to the firm/brand. Campbell and Keller (2003) maintained that the difference between familiar and unfamiliar brands lies in the amount and type of brand associations stored in a consumer's memory. Consumers possess a variety of different types of associations with familiar brands based on their experience with the brand. In their experimental studies, brand familiarity can affect consumers' processing of advertising and the effectiveness of advertising. A high familiarity brand enjoyed an advertising advantage: consumers are more likely to recall the brand and advertisement information, and their memories are less affected by exposure to competitors' ads (Brennan & Babin, 2004; Kent & Allen, 1994).

The advertising literature has revealed a significant effect of brand familiarity on the relationship between attitudes toward advertising and attitudes toward brands (Edell & Burke, 1986; Gill et al., 1988; Machleit & Wilson, 1988; Messmer, 1979; Park, Hitchon, & Yun, 2004; Stammerjohan, Wood, Chang, & Thorson, 2005). For familiar brands, attitudes toward advertising significantly affect attitudes toward those brands (Phelps & Thorson, 1991). Regardless of program context, brand familiarity was reported to generate more favorable brand attitudes and customer responses (Shen, 2001). Simon (1970) found that advertisements for leading brands score higher in consumer purchase attitude than the ad content may warrant, whereas advertisements for less familiar brands may not score as well even though they may be superior with respect to the product attributes revealed in the advertising.

Consumer Expertise

A review of the literature shows that expertise has been defined in several ways. In the persuasion literature, Hovland et al. (1953, p. 21) defined a communicator's "expertness" as the

extent to which a communicator is perceived to be capable of making valid assertions. For McGuire (1969), expertise is an individual's ability to know the correct stance on an issue. The founding theory of consumer expertise provided by Alba and Hutchinson (1987) defined consumer expertise as "the ability to perform product-related tasks successfully." Consumer expertise is developed through increased familiarity, which is based on accumulated experiences with a brand/product (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987).

Expert and novice consumers have demonstrated differences in their information acquisition (Coupey et al., 1998), information processing (Chase & Simon, 1973; Johar, Jedidi, & Jacoby, 1997; Larkin et al., 1980; Maheswaran & Sternthal, 1990; Moore & Lehmann, 1980; Su et al., 2008), information evaluation (de Bont & Schoormans, 1995; Maheswaran, Sternthan & Gürhan, 1996; Sujan, 1985), and judgment (Bettman & Sujan, 1987; Chiou, 2003; Frankenberger & Liu, 1994).

According to Alba and Hutchinson (1987), compared to novice consumers, expert consumers need less cognitive effort during the decision-making process, have a more complicated cognitive structure (which helps to categorize and differentiate different brands/products), and demonstrate a stronger ability to analyze, elaborate, and recall information. Therefore, expert consumers employ a reasoning strategy while novice consumers utilize heuristics and surface value when establishing preferences and making assertions. Moreover, differences have been found between experts and novices in their preferences regarding information type. Expert consumers are found to be more satisfied and likelier to use attribute-based information than novice consumers, who are more comfort with benefit-based information (Su et al., 2008). Given a richer knowledge base and available cognitive capacity, expert consumers tend to focus more on product-related information (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987).

Previous research showed that expert consumers evaluate a product and make judgments based on attribute messages and that benefit-based information alone cannot motivate them to engage in message elaboration (Maheswaran & Sternthal, 1990). In contrast, lacking sufficient knowledge, novice consumers rely more on observable features and literal benefits when assessing a product (Su et al., 2008).

De Bont and Schoormans (1995) analyzed three factors that explain the information processing of expert consumers: cognitive structure, the degree of information analysis, and the ability to elaborate on information. In their analysis, expert consumers have more structured and detailed product information. Given their increasingly diversified expertise regarding a particular product, expert consumers possess a more detailed cognitive structure and a superior ability to distinguish between information units. The degree of analysis involves the extent to which consumers process information that is relevant to a particular task. It was suggested that increased expertise improves consumers' ability to process information analytically. Moreover, expert consumers have a better ability to elaborate on information based on functional determinants.

In their assessment of different measures of consumer expertise, Mitchell and Dacin (1996) discussed how experts and novices differ in the content and organization of knowledge and reasons for a decision in the choice tasks. It has been found that experts are more aware and knowledgeable of the alternative models of a product than are novice consumers. Furthermore, expert consumers tend to organize their knowledge around product types and store the product information at the physical-attribute level, which enables them to make evaluations for different usage situations. In contrast, novice consumers recall fewer brands and models available in the market and are more likely to focus on the general performance of particular models.

Previous research indicated that product expertise is important to understanding how consumers make evaluations and judgments (Bettman & Sujan, 1987). Consumers with different levels of expertise prefer various types of messages, which affect their evaluations of products (Maheswaran et al., 1996). Relative to product development, consumers with higher levels of product-related expertise have demonstrated extensive information processing, which enables them to provide evaluations and suggestions that are better articulated and more internally consistent and stable over time (de Bont & Schoormans, 1995). This suggested that expert consumers demonstrate different ways of thinking when making evaluations, and the evaluations they present have stabler and more tractable characteristics.

Conceptual Model

Based on the previous discussions, a conceptual model was proposed, which is illustrated in Figure 2-2. This study investigated the differences in perceived source credibility depending on prior corporate reputation, brand familiarity, and consumer expertise. The study also evaluated the effect of source cues on persuasion. In other words, source credibility was associated with consumers' attitudes toward the company.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

"Understanding consumers' information search behavior is critical to firms' strategic decision making. Therefore, it is not surprising that empirical research on consumers' information search behavior has a long tradition in marketing" (Moorthy et al., 1997, p. 263). This study explored the relationship between internal information in memory and external information evaluation, paying particular attention to the role of consumers' prior beliefs, experience, and knowledge in shaping message persuasiveness. Perceived source credibility served as a key determinant of persuasion and attitude change.

The prior beliefs and perceptions of a company in the minds of consumers direct their responses to external information. For example, Sujan et al. (1986) found that consumer expectations can affect how they process information in purchasing situations. Previous impressions of the company, operationalized as corporate reputations in this research, should be incorporated as one of the factors that influence the perceived source credibility of a message. Corporate reputation reflects the public's collective judgment of a company based on its financial, social, and environmental performance over time (Barnett, Jermier, & Lafferty, 2006). Companies with favorable reputations seem to be in a better position to gain consumer trust through corporate messages and garner positive responses by consumers. Previous research has found that the advertising messages from a reputable company tend to be regarded as more credible and generated greater degrees of attitude change and message acceptance (Goldberg & Hartwick, 1990). In crisis communication, scholars also suggested that corporate reputation plays a key role in communication effectiveness and attitude (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Klein & Dawar, 2004; Lyon & Cameron, 2004). Slater and Rouner (1996) maintained that "prior beliefs and affective responses are likely to be powerful in shaping message impact." Therefore, it was expected that corporate reputation is positively related to perceived source credibility and consumer attitude toward the company.

H1. Corporate reputation is positively related to perceived source credibility.

H2. Corporate reputation is positively related to consumer attitude toward the company.

Consumer behavior literature has confirmed the notion that individual differences in knowledge and experience play a major role in external information search and evaluation (Schmidt & Spreng, 1996). Two components of consumer knowledge—familiarity and expertise—have substantial impacts on individual information processing and judgment (Alba &

Hutchison, 1987). Previous research has confirmed the influence of extant attitude-relevant information on persuasion. Wood (1982) explored the relationship between subjects' retrieval of beliefs and prior experiences and their changes in opinion. The researcher observed that respondents with access to internal knowledge cues apparently used these data to make judgments on a given issue; thus, a new external information cue may have little impact on respondents' opinions.

Previous research has indicated that a well-known brand name serves as one of the most important extrinsic cues (attributes that are not part of the physical product), which has the ability to dominate consumer evaluations (Richardson & Dick, 1994). A familiar brand appeals to customers because it reduces search cost and cognitive effort when making judgments, and it decreases the perceived risk and uncertainty about products (Dawar & Parker, 1994; Erdem & Swait, 1998). When people encounter information about a company, brand familiarity also functions as a simple heuristic that affects their evaluations of the messages. Therefore, a better evaluation of perceived source credibility is anticipated for high familiarity brands.

H3. Consumers' brand familiarity is positively related to perceived source credibility.

Consistent with the predictions of dual-processing theories such as ELM, it has been determined that a higher level of knowledge and experience can enhance an individual's ability to make evaluations, and it is positively related to a person's involvement with the topic (Wood et al., 1985). Ratneshwar and Chaiken (1991) maintained that people's prior knowledge structures afford them greater message comprehensibility and consequently reduce the persuasive impact of source expertise. They defined comprehension as the act of using prior knowledge to extract meaning from a message based on its components and their inter-relations. In general, source credibility was viewed as a peripheral cue in persuasion and attitude formation

(Petty et al., 1981). Other studies also showed that source credibility may affect attitude under high elaboration by enhancing argument quality as well as the confidence and favorable thoughts of message recipients (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994; Tormala et al., 2007). Based on previous discussion, it was proposed that consumer expertise can influence the perceived credibility of different information sources depending on the level of involvement.

RQ1. How does consumer expertise affect perceived source credibility?

H4. The respondent's level of involvement will moderate the effect of source credibility on attitude.

In persuasion theory, source credibility has been recognized as one of the important source factors that has substantial influence on communication effectiveness (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; McCroskey, 1966; Perloff, 2003). It has been observed that the characteristics of a message source serve as antecedents to attitudes. As noted by Burgoon et al. (2000, p. 554), "Understanding a message and assigning credibility to it or its information source are a prerequisite to message or information acceptance." A number of studies have confirmed a positive effect of source credibility on message effectiveness and attitude (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Lafferty et al., 2002; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989).

H5. Perceived source credibility is positively related to consumer attitude toward the company.

The attribution of sources is important in evaluating information and message effects on attitudes (Sunder & Nass, 2001). The way audiences assess source credibility has been of interest to communication scholars as well (Slater & Rouner, 1996). Research has suggested that sources controlled by non-marketers are perceived as unbiased and thus more credible than commercial sources. For example, editorial content was given more credence by readers compared to paid

advertising (Cameron, 1994). In Flanagin and Metzger's (2007) study, which explored credibility perceptions in an online setting, information from media organizations was rated as relatively more credible than was information from other commercial or personal sources. Similarly, a number of studies also found that interpersonal sources and word-of-mouth communication play key roles in consumer searching behaviors (Mourali et al., 2005; Price & Feick, 1984) and decision making processes (Chatterjee, 2001; Murray, 1991). Both reports and research have acknowledged consumer-generated content as being a reliable and trusted source of information (Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Edelman Trust Barometer, 2009). However, there is little research that compares simultaneously consumer perceived credibility among company, journalist, and consumer sources. The final research question explored how consumers assign credibility to these three sources of product information.

RQ2. What are the differences in perceived credibility among different information sources (e.g. company-generated messages, third-party independent editorial contents, and consumer-generated communication)?

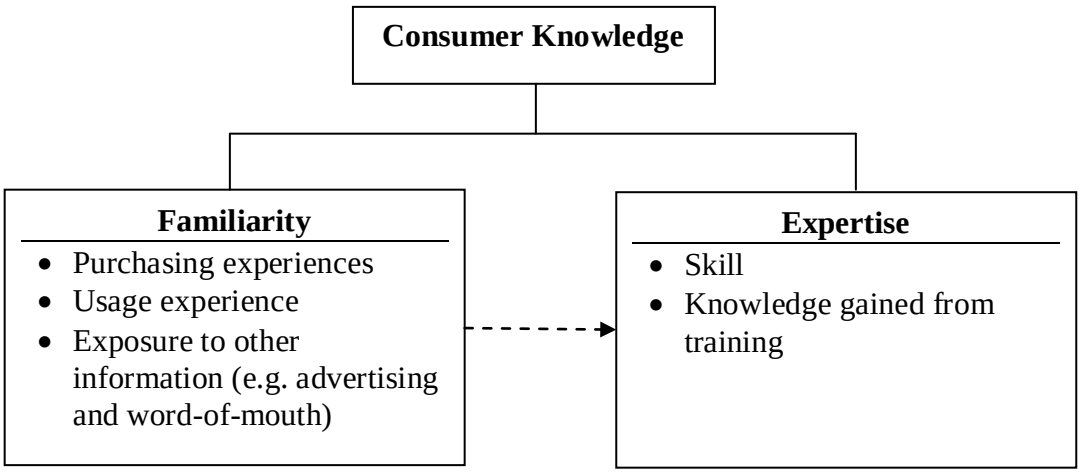

Figure 2-1. The components of familiarity and expertise.

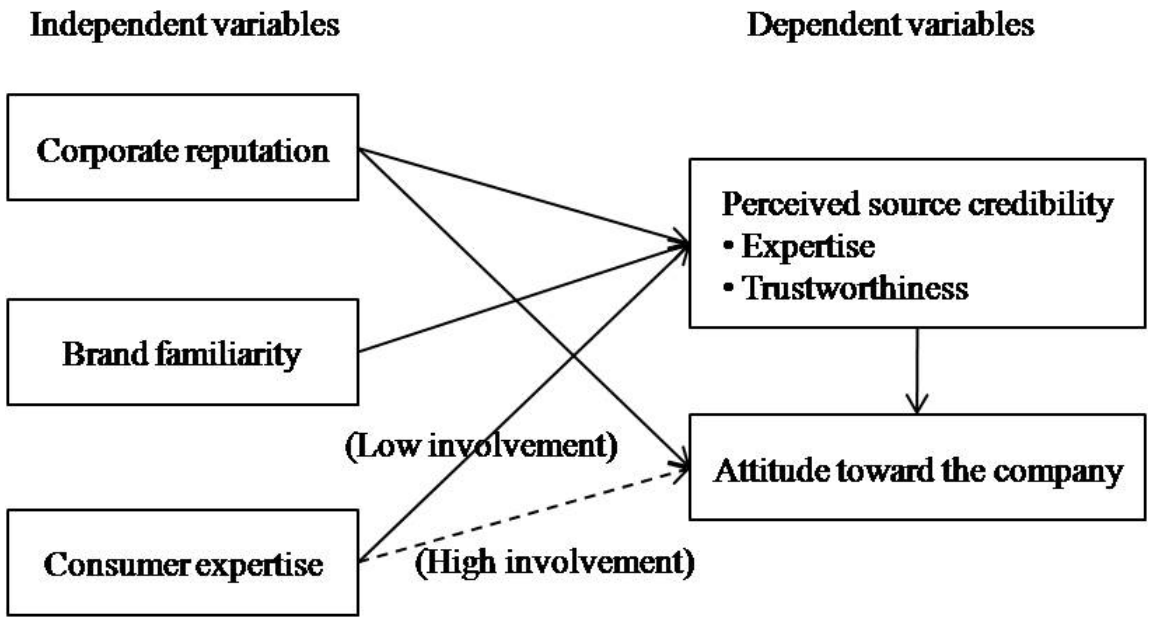

Figure 2-2. Theoretical model of source credibility in persuasion depending on corporate reputation, brand familiarity, and consumer expertise.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Experimental Design

This study examined the effects of corporate reputation, brand familiarity, and consumer expertise on the perceived credibility of different information sources, and how these constructs affect consumer attitudes toward a company. Based on the literature review and proposed conceptual model, the level of involvement among participants served as a moderating variable that influences the persuasiveness of source credibility. A 2 (high corporate reputation vs. low corporate reputation) by 3 (different sources: company-generated messages, third-party, independent editorial content, and consumer-generated communication) factorial experimental design was employed to test hypotheses and explore research questions. Prior to the main study, a pretest was conducted to determine a product category and two companies with high and low corporate reputations. Based on the results of the pretest, stimulus materials were created for the main study.

Pretest

The purpose of the pretest was to search for a product category and two brands appropriate for this study that represented high and low reputations. Several factors were considered when choosing a product category for the experiment. First, the selected product category should contain two brands with high or low reputations. The differences in perceived corporate reputation between the two brands should be identifiable. In addition, participants' familiarity with the product category should be considered when selecting product stimulus (Su et al., 2008). For this study, the product category should be familiar to a student sample, which was utilized in the main study. Moreover, participants' varying degrees of knowledge and expertise about the selected product should be identifiable. Consumer electronic products appeared to be a

widely-used product category in the expertise literature (Chiou, 2003; Su et al., 2008). On the basis of these considerations, the pretest incorporated two product categories—laptop computers and mobile phones—and a list of brands that might be appropriate for this study.

The list of brands in two product categories was derived from consumer ratings published by independent organizations or media. Five brands of mobile phones were selected based on the U.S. wireless mobile phone evaluation study carried out by J.D. Power and Associates (2008). The study measured overall satisfaction with mobile phones based on responses from consumers, who rated the features, durability, physical design, battery life, and operation of their mobile phones. The five mobile phone brands included LG, Motorola, Nokia, Samsung, and Sony Ericsson, which scored differently in the consumer satisfaction scale ranging from 0 to 5 points. Seven brands of laptop computers were chosen based on *Consumer Reports*' product ratings of 13.3-inch and 14.1-inch laptop computers (2008). These included Acer, Apple, Dell, Gateway, HP, Sony, and Toshiba. The report showed the overall score for each brand evaluated based on performance and features. The scores ranged from 0 to 100 points.

Pretest Sample and Instruments

The pretest engaged 26 students enrolled in an introductory Public Relations course at the University of Florida. In a survey questionnaire (Appendix A), the respondents were asked to indicate their familiarity with two product categories (laptop computers and mobile phones), and then evaluated corporate reputations for the different brands in each product category.

The participants were asked to rate their familiarity with each product category on a seven-point scale ranging from "not familiar at all" to "very familiar." A higher score represented a greater degree of familiarity with the product category. Corporate reputation was measured using three items developed by Cleopatra and Moutinho (2008). Using a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," the respondents reported on the items, "this

brand is trustworthy," "this brand is reputable," and "this brand makes honest claims." The reputation score of each company was the mean score among the three items. Demographic information was collected at the end of the questionnaire.

Pretest Results

The 26 respondents were comprised of 8 males (31%) and 18 females (69%), with a mean age of 20.77 years old. Among the group of students, 17 were juniors (65%), 7 were seniors (27%), and 2 were sophomores (8%).

The mean score for product category familiarity was significantly higher ($t=2.82$, $p<.05$) for mobile phones ($M=6.31$, $SD=.97$) than for laptop computers ($M=5.81$, $SD=1.06$). Among laptop computer brands, Apple yielded the highest mean reputation score ($M=4.19$, $SD=.71$) and Acer had the lowest score ($M=2.88$, $SD=.16$). The mean difference in corporate reputation between Apple and Acer was significant ($t=-6.13$, $p<.05$). Regarding mobile phones, LG was rated highest in reputation ($M=4.11$, $SD=.71$) while Sony Ericsson was the lowest ($M=3.35$, $SD=.87$). The mean difference between the two brands was also significant ($t=3.86$, $p<.05$). Based on results of the pretest, the laptop computer and two brands, Apple and Acer, were chosen to be employed in the main study as stimuli since the two brands had the most polarized corporate reputation scores.

Stimulus Materials

Six articles of product-related information served as the stimulus materials in the experiment. Three were created for the low reputation brand, Acer, to describe a new model of its laptop computer, the Acer Aspire 3935, which was launched in April 2009 (Appendixes B, C, and D). Three articles focused on the new generation of Apple's MacBook Pro, launched in early June 2009, which represented the high reputation brand (Appendixes E, F, and G). Three sources

were attributed to the articles: company's official announcements, editor reviews from *PC Magazine*, and consumers' reviews.

The rationale for product selection was that both models were new and were launched close to each other in 2009. Therefore, consumers would have little experience with either product. Moreover, the two models selected were categorized as thin-and-light laptops, had similar features and specifications, and were often mentioned and compared in editors' reviews, such as in *PC Magazine*.

All six articles were adapted from genuine information written by the companies, editors, and consumers. Company-generated messages were obtained from Acer and Apple's official announcements, advertising, or product information. Editorial content for each product was obtained from *PC Magazine's* product reviews, which were written originally by Cisco Cheng, a lead analyst for laptops and tablet PCs for the magazine since 2003. Stimulus articles from the editor included a short paragraph that described Cisco Cheng's background and profession. The consumer-generated reviews were attributed to Peter Anderson, who shared his usage experiences in a blog. The sentence "This review was quoted directly from his personal blog on June 14, 2009" appeared below his name in the stimulus articles that included consumer sources. The content of each paragraph of the six articles was identical but with different tones that resembled company-generated messages, editorial content, and consumer-generated communication. The length of each article was similar in that appeared on a single page using 12-point font size.

Pilot Study

In order to ensure that the manipulation of corporate reputation and source cues worked successfully, a pilot study was conducted prior to the main study. In it, 30 participants were recruited from the University of Florida and were assigned randomly to six conditions.

Corporate reputation was manipulated by exposure either to a high or low reputation brand. Based on the pretest, Acer represented the low reputation brand while Apple served as the high reputation brand. The pilot test revealed a successful manipulation of corporate reputation for the stimuli. The mean difference in corporate reputation between Acer and Apple was significant ($t=-2.10$, $p<.05$). The results also showed that manipulation of three different source cues worked successfully, with 93% (28 respondents) having correctly identified the sources of the article.

Main Study

The main study used a 2 (high corporate reputation vs. low corporate reputation) by 3 (different sources: company-generated messages, third-party, independent editorial content, and consumer-generated communication) factorial experimental design. Corporate reputation was manipulated in the stimulus materials by including either a high reputation (Apple) or low reputation (Acer) brand. The source cue was manipulated using three different sources of product-related information: company, journalist, and personal sources. The experiment employed a student sample, and participants were randomly assigned to one of six treatment conditions (Table 3-1).

Sample and Procedure

The participants were recruited from several classes within the College of Journalism and Communications and from sending invitation e-mails through listserv at the University of Florida. The participants were randomly assigned to one of six treatment conditions: product information from Acer's official announcement; *PC Magazine* editor's review of Acer's laptop; consumer product review of Acer's laptop; product information from Apple's official announcement; *PC Magazine* editor's review of Apple's laptop; consumer product review of Apple's laptop.

The instrument employed for the study included two versions of the questionnaire designed for Apple and Acer, respectively. The participants assigned to high reputation brand conditions received the questionnaire for Apple (Appendix H) with a stimulus article from one of three information sources. Similarly, those who were assigned to low reputation brand conditions received the questionnaire for Acer (Appendix I) with a stimulus article from one of three source cues. Two questionnaires were identical except for the name of company. The experiment was conducted both online and offline. Students in classes completed a paper-and-pencil version of the questionnaire while others received e-mail that included a link to a Web-based questionnaire at an online survey service (surveymonkey.com).

The questionnaire began with an introduction that explained the purpose of the research, the time needed to complete the questionnaire, and a discussion of how the respondents' confidentiality would be protected. Students who volunteered to participate in the study were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. The first part of questionnaire measured brand familiarity, corporate reputation, and consumer expertise. In the following section, participants were asked to read through the stimulus articles before completing the rest of the questionnaire. After reading the article, they completed questions or measures related to information source identification, level of involvement, perceived source credibility, and attitude toward the company. At the end of the questionnaire, demographic information was collected.

For the purpose of statistical analyses, participants were classified as high/low reputation groups, high/low familiarity groups, expert/novice groups, and high/low involvement groups. Corporate reputation was manipulated in the experiment. Respondents who received the questionnaire for Apple were classified as the high reputation group while those who received

the questionnaire for Acer were classified as the low reputation group. Respondents' brand familiarity, consumer expertise, and level of involvement were measured in the questionnaire. They were assigned to either high or low groups based on the mean scores they achieved on the respective measurements.

Independent Variables

Corporate reputation was manipulated by exposure either to a high or low reputation brand. Based on the pretest, Acer represented the low reputation brand while Apple served as the high reputation brand. Corporate reputation was measured in the main questionnaire to accommodate manipulation checks. Following Graham and Bansal (2007), corporate reputation was measured by four items using a 7-point rating scale anchored by "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree." The respondents were asked "whether the company has a good reputation," "whether the company performs well compared to others," "whether the company is legitimate," and "whether the company operates in an acceptable manner" (Table 3-2).

Consumer expertise was measured by subjective product expertise scales. The subjective measure reflected an individual's perception of how much he or she knows about a given product (Jognson & Russo, 1981). The participants were then classified as expert or novice consumers based on their scores from the subjective measurement. The self-assessment knowledge was measured using a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," with five items developed by Flynn and Goldsmith (1999) (Table 3-2).

According to Baker, Hutchinson, Moor, and Nedungadi (1986), brand familiarity is a unidimensional construct that is related directly to the amount of time spent processing information about the brand, regardless of the type of content or processing involved. Consumers' familiarity with the brand was a self-reported measure: "how familiar are you with

this company with respect to products and services" (Tam, 2008). The 7-point scale was anchored by "not familiar at all" and "very familiar."

Dependent Variables

Ten 7-point semantic differential scales assessed perceived source credibility (Table 3-2). These scales were borrowed from Ohanian (1990) in order to measure celebrity endorsers' perceived attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. Because this study neither included physical appeals in the research model nor presented any physical cues in stimulus materials, only items for measuring trustworthiness and expertise were used in the study. For this purpose, 10 items used 7-point semantic differential scales. Five items—dependable/undependable, honest/dishonest, reliable/unreliable, sincere/insincere, and trustworthy/untrustworthy—measured trustworthiness. Expertise was assessed by five items anchored by expert/not an expert, experienced/inexperienced, knowledgeable/unknowledgeable, qualified/unqualified, and skilled/unskilled.

To measure attitude toward the company, the participants were asked to use four items in 7-point semantic differential scales to rate their overall impressions of the company (Table 3-2). Borrowed from the previous study by Holbrook and Batra (1987), the items anchored with unfavorable/favorable, bad/good, dislike/like, and negative/positive.

Moderating Variable

The respondents' level of involvement was treated as a moderating variable in the study. Researchers in advertising have proposed different conceptualizations and classifications of involvement (e. g. Andrews, Durvasula, & Akhter, 1990; Antil, 1984; Houston & Rothschild, 1978; Muncy & Hunt, 1984). For this study, however, involvement was conceptualized as message involvement. Message involvement was defined as the motivational state of an individual induced by a particular stimulus or situation (Laczniak, Muehling, & Grossbart,

1989). Andrews et al. (1990) labeled this view of involvement as attention/processing strategies. The rationale for this involvement categorization was that attentional effort and processing intensity are critical stages in information acquisition (Mitchell, 1981). Therefore, people who are highly involved were characterized as experiencing greater cognitive elaboration, which in turn led to greater persistence of message effects (Batra & Ray, 1985). The present research explored the moderating effect of level of involvement on the persuasiveness of source credibility. Based on the ELM, high involvement respondents were expected to focus on the content (message cues) while the low involvement group was more likely to utilize peripheral heuristics, such as source credibility (source cues). Hence, a measurement of involvement depending on attention to and processing of information was appropriate for this study.

Borrowed from Ellen and Bone (1998), a four-item, 9-point scale measured the level of involvement of respondents (Table 3-2). The scale, which was called "motivation to process" by Ellen and Bone (1998), measured the cognitive effort an individual reports having expended relative to processing a stimulus. This measurement captured the situational state of a person at a particular time as opposed to an enduring predisposition (Batra & Ray, 1985).

Table 3-1. Conditions of the 2x3 experimental design.

		Source cue		
		Company source	Editorial source	Consumer source
Corporate reputation	High	Group (1)	Group (2)	Group (3)
	Low	Group (4)	Group (5)	Group (6)

Table 3-2. Construct measurement summary

Variables	Scale items
Corporate reputation	1. Whether the company has a good reputation. 2. Whether the company performs well compared to others. 3. Whether the company is legitimate. 4. Whether the company operates in an acceptable manner.
Brand familiarity	1. How familiar are you with this company with respect to products and services?
Consumer expertise	1. Among my circle of friends, I'm one of the "experts" on laptop computers. 2. I know pretty much about laptop computers. 3. I do not feel very knowledgeable about laptop computers. 4. Compared to most other people, I know less about laptop computers. 5. When it comes to laptop computers, I really don't know a lot.
Source credibility	1. Dependable/undependable 2. Honest/dishonest 3. Reliable/unreliable 4. Sincere/insincere 5. Trustworthy/untrustworthy 6. Expert/not an expert 7. Experienced/inexperienced 8. Knowledgeable/unknowledgeable 9. Qualified/unqualified 10. Skilled/unskilled
Attitude toward the company	1. Unfavorable/favorable 2. Bad/good 3. Dislike/like 4. Negative/positive
Involvement	1. To what extent did you try to evaluate the information in the article? 2. How much effort did you put into evaluating the information in the article? 3. I paid close attention to the article. 4. I carefully read the article.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Analysis Summary

This section provided an overview of the statistical methods and parameters employed to test the proposed hypotheses and explored the research questions. SPSS was used throughout the statistical analysis.

In this study, the proposed model examined the effects of corporate reputation, brand familiarity, consumer expertise, and level of involvement on perceived source credibility and attitude. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the effect of three independent variables and one moderating variable on perceived source credibility. Participants were classified as high or low reputation groups according to their exposure to different stimulus articles about the high or low reputation company. They were also identified as being within high/low familiarity groups, expert/novice groups, and high/low involvement groups based on the mean scores of the construct measurements. The overall sample means and medians of each variable were considered together to dichotomize the two groups. An ANOVA was employed to test H1 (corporate reputation-source credibility), H3 (brand familiarity-source credibility), and H4 (level of involvement-source credibility), and to clarify the correlation between consumer expertise and perceived source credibility (RQ1). Another ANOVA was used to explore whether independent variables have any impact on attitude toward the company. The analysis was used to test H2, which anticipated a positive effect of corporate reputation on attitudes. H5 tested the relationship between source credibility and attitude toward the company. Since the two variables were measured by interval scales, a simple regression was used to assess the relationship between two constructs. RQ2 explored whether a difference in perceived source credibility exists among the three different information sources. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was

conducted to identify the variance of source credibility means among three groups. Then, separate t-tests were used to compare the mean differences between groups in pair. Finally, correlation and regression analyses were used to evaluate further the proposed chain of influence among the variables in the model. A summary of the statistical analyses and results is presented in Table 4-1.

Sample Profile

The study sample included 212 university students comprised of 115 (54%) males and 97 (46%) females. The respondents ranged in age from 18 to 43 with a mean age of 23.78 years old. All respondents were students from the University of Florida, including graduate and undergraduate students. Only 1 was a freshman while 19 were sophomores, 42 were juniors, 51 were seniors, and 99 were graduate students.

The 212 participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions (Table 4-2). There were 35 respondents in the Apple and company source group, 35 in the Apple and editorial source group, 35 in the Apple and consumer source group; further, there were 36 in the Acer and company source group, 35 in the Acer and editorial source group, and 36 in the Acer and consumer source group.

Manipulation Checks

Manipulation checks for source cues and corporate reputation were performed. The results showed that the manipulation of source cues worked successfully. Among the 212 respondents, about 94% correctly identified the source of information. The data from 13 participants who misidentified the source of stimulus articles were eliminated from the subsequent analysis; thus, the total valid sample was 199.

The manipulation check of corporate reputation worked successfully as well. Participants were asked to evaluate the corporate reputations of Apple and Acer based on four scale items. In

view of the pretest, Apple was set as the high reputation company while Acer served as the low reputation company, which was confirmed in the pilot study as well. Consistent with the pilot study, the reputation mean difference between Apple and Acer was statistically significant ($t=10.12$, $p<.05$) (Table 4-3).

Reliability Check

A reliability analysis was conducted to ensure the internal reliability of each construct used in the main study. The Cronbach alphas for the major constructs are presented in Table 4-4. The results showed that the reliabilities of every variable were satisfactory, and the scales were internally consistent. Regarding the independent variables, corporate reputation (Cronbach alpha=.92) and consumer expertise (Cronbach alpha=.93) had Cronbach's alphas in excess of $\alpha=.90$. Dependent variables, including source credibility (Cronbach alpha=.93) and attitude toward the company (Cronbach alpha=.92), were also confirmed as reliable constructs. Finally, the moderating variable, level of involvement (Cronbach alpha=.89), showed high internal consistency as well.

Sample Analysis

The sample population for this study consisted of 212 university students. Of these, there were 199 valid samples, including varied numbers of respondents in each condition (Table 4-5). Participants were classified as high/low reputation groups, high/low familiarity groups, expert/novice groups, and high/low involvement groups based on the mean scores they achieved on the respective measurements. Those who were assigned to conditions with stimulus articles on Apple's product were labeled as the high reputation group while those who were exposed to Acer's product information were characterized as the low reputation group. Previous manipulation checks had confirmed a statistically significant difference among the corporate reputation scores of the two companies.

Brand familiarity was measured by a single item. The mean score for brand familiarity for all respondents was 3.57 (SD=1.87) and the median was 3. Therefore, the respondents were divided into high and low familiarity groups based on their overall mean scores. Those who achieved scores of 4 or higher were considered part of the high familiarity group while those who scored from 1 to 3 were placed within the low familiarity group.

Respondents were classified as expert or novice consumers based on their self-reported assessments of their product expertise with laptop computers. The mean score for overall expertise measure was 4.48 (SD=1.49) with a median of 4.6. The mean score was utilized to dichotomize the two groups. As a result, those who scored higher than 4.48 were labeled as expert while others with scores lower than 4.48 were categorized as novice.

The overall mean score of the respondents' level of involvement was 5.43 (SD=1.61), with a median of 5.75. There were 12 respondents who had involvement scores of 5.75. The score of 5 represented the middle of the scale. Therefore, the data was divided into high and low involvement groups according to mean.

Research Questions and Hypotheses Testing

Effects of Corporate Reputation, Brand Familiarity, Consumer Expertise, and Involvement on Source Credibility

Based on the conceptual model proposed in this study, perceived source credibility was hypothesized to be influenced by corporate reputation, brand familiarity, consumer expertise, and level of involvement. Hypothesis 1 predicted that corporate reputation is positively related to perceived source credibility. Hypothesis 3 expected that respondents with a higher level of brand familiarity would perceive the source of information as more credible. Research Question 1 explored the effect of consumers' product expertise on perceived source credibility. Hypothesis 4 predicted that level of involvement would moderate the effect of source credibility on attitude.

An ANOVA was employed to explore how these constructs affect consumer's perceived source credibility.

Table 4-6 summarized the results and between-subject effects. The results showed that corporate reputation had no significant effect on perceived source credibility. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was not supported. It was also found that participants' brand familiarity has no significant impact on perceived source credibility. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Research Question 1 explored how consumer expertise influences perceived source credibility. Table 4-6 revealed that there was no significant direct effect of expertise on source credibility. However, a significant interactive effect of consumer expertise and involvement on perceived source credibility was revealed. In addition, the results indicated that involvement itself has a significant impact on perceived source credibility. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was supported. For both the expert and novice groups, source credibility was rated higher under high involvement than low involvement conditions (Figure 4-1). For the high involvement groups, expert consumers perceived higher source credibility (M=5.24, SD=.84) than did novice consumers (M=5.04, SD=0.69). In contrast, under low involvement conditions, the novice group reported higher source credibility scores (M=4.68, SD=1.03) than did the expert group (M=4.33, SD=.87).

Effect of Corporate Reputation on Attitude

A second ANOVA was employed to examine how consumer attitude toward the company was influenced by corporate reputation, brand familiarity, consumer expertise, and involvement. The results in Table 4-7 revealed a significant effect by corporate reputation on consumer attitude toward the company. A t-test was performed to compare the attitude mean difference between the high and low reputation groups. The result indicated that respondents' attitude mean

score was significantly higher (t=4.92, p<.05) for the high reputation group (Apple) than for the low reputation group (Acer) (Table 4-8). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Effect of Source Credibility on Attitude

In Hypothesis 5, perceived source credibility was expected to be positively related to consumer attitude toward the company. A simple regression was performed to determine the correlation between the two constructs (Table 4-9). The regression coefficient showed a positive correlation between source credibility and attitudes, and the relationship was statistically significant, R^2=.25, F(1, 197)=66.68, p<.05. Thus, Hypothesis 5 was supported.

Effect of Source Cue on Perceived Source Credibility

Research Question 2 explored the differences in perceived credibility among three product-related information sources: company-generated messages, editorial content, and consumer-generated communication. Table 4-10 summarized the mean scores of perceived source credibility for three source cues, and the editorial source was rated highest among the three (M=5.19, SD=.77). An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether any mean difference existed among the three groups. As shown in Table 4-11, the test yielded significant results, F(2, 196)=6.41, p<.05.

Three t-tests were performed to confirm how the three groups differed in credibility mean scores. The product information from editorial sources (i.e. *PC Magazine*) was perceived as more credible than the other two sources. The credibility mean score of the editorial source was significantly higher than that of company source (t=-2.77, p<.05) (Table 4-12), and consumer source (t=3.59, p<.05) (Table 4-14). However, the credibility mean difference between the company and the consumer source groups was not statistically significant (t=.63, p>.05) (Table 4-13). The results suggested that opinions and product-related information from professional

editorial sources were perceived as more credible than company-generated messages and consumer-generated content.

Overall Model Testing

To confirm further the suggested causal relationships between the independent and dependent variables in the proposed model, multiple regression analyses were employed to examine how corporate reputation, brand familiarity, consumer expertise, and involvement predicted perceived source credibility and attitude toward the company. Except for the manipulated variables, including corporate reputation and source cues, each construct was tested through regression analyses by original numeric data rather than dichotomized group assignment. Corporate reputation and source cues were dummy-coded.

First, a multiple regression examined the correlation between the independent variables (i.e. corporate reputation, brand familiarity, consumer expertise, involvement, and source cues) and the dependent variable, perceived source credibility. Table 4-15 summarized how perceived source credibility was predicted by the five constructs. Only involvement was significantly correlated to perceived source credibility. A second regression was used to determine how the five constructs were related to consumer attitude toward the company (Table 4-16). The results revealed that corporate reputation, brand familiarity, and level of involvement have significant impacts on consumer attitude toward the company. In sum, the results were consistent with previous ANOVA tests. Figure 4-2 showed how each construct in the model was related.

Finally, the data was examined in a hierarchical regression analysis (Table 4-17). Here, attitude toward the company served as the dependent variable. The first block of variables included corporate reputation, brand familiarity, consumer expertise, involvement, and source cues (Model 1). Source credibility was added in the second block (Model 2).

The overall relationship of model 1 was significant [$F(5,193)=12.88$, $p<.001$]. In model 1, significant impacts by corporate reputation ($\beta=.50$, $p<.001$), brand familiarity ($\beta=.08$, $p<.05$), and level of involvement ($\beta=.15$, $p<.001$) on consumer attitude toward the company were observed. After adding an extra variable of source credibility in model 2, the overall relationship was significant as well [$F(6, 192)=22.96$, $p<.001$], and the additional 16.8% variance was explained by the second model. Consistent with the first model, corporate reputation ($\beta=.50$, $p<.001$) was found to be significantly correlated to consumer attitude toward the company. In addition, the results indicated significant and positive effects of consumer expertise ($\beta=.08$, $p<.05$), source cue ($\beta=.17$, $p<.01$), and perceived source credibility ($\beta=.46$, $p<.001$) on consumer attitudes. However, the significant impact of level of involvement and brand familiarity on attitudes disappeared in the second model. This was understandable since familiarity and expertise were two dimensions of consumer knowledge (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). Moreover, the previous ANOVA results (Table 4-6) revealed significant interactive effects of brand familiarity, consumer expertise, and level of involvement on consumer attitude toward the company.

Comparing the two models in the hierarchical regression analysis, the second model indeed showed a better predictive ability than did the first model. Including perceived source credibility, these variables accounted for 42% of the variance, which was higher than the first model ($R^2=.25$). In summary, corporate reputation, consumer knowledge, level of involvement, and perceived source credibility were important influencers of consumer attitude toward the company. The results also supported the interactive effect of consumer knowledge and involvement on perceived source credibility, which in turn influenced consumer attitude toward the company.

Table 4-1. Summary of statistical analyses and results for research questions and hypotheses.

	Dependent variables	Independent variables	Statistical technique	Hypothesized effect	Result
H1	Source credibility	Corporate reputation	ANOVA	Positive effect	Not supported
H2	Attitude toward the company	Corporate reputation	ANOVA	Positive effect	Supported
H3	Source credibility	Brand familiarity	ANOVA	Positive effect	Not supported
RQ1	Source credibility	Consumer expertise	ANOVA		No direct effect
H4	Source credibility	Involvement	ANOVA	Interaction effect	Supported
H5	Attitude toward the company	Source credibility	Simple regression	Positive regression coefficient	Supported
RQ2	Source credibility	Source cues	ANOVA		Editor > Consumer Editor > Company

Table 4-2. Random assignment of participants in each condition.

		Source cues			
		Company	Editorial	Consumer	Total
Corporate reputation	Apple (High)	N=35	N=35	N=35	N=105
	Acer (Low)	N=36	N=35	N=36	N=107
	Total	N=71	N=70	N=71	N=212

Table 4-3. Corporate reputation by company.

	M	SD	N
Apple (High)	5.61	.92	N=97
Acer (Low)	4.14	1.10	N=102

Table 4-4. Reliability check.

	Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Independent variable	Corporate reputation	.92
	Consumer expertise	.93
Dependent variable	Source credibility	.93
	Attitude toward the company	.92
Moderating variable	Level of involvement	.89

Table 4-5. Valid sample in six conditions.

		Source cues			
		Company	Editorial	Consumer	Total
Corporate reputation	Apple (High)	N=34	N=32	N=31	N=97
	Acer (Low)	N=35	N=34	N=33	N=102
	Total	N=69	N=66	N=64	N=199

Table 4-6. Between-subject effects, dependent variable: source credibility.

Source	df	MS	F
Reputation	1	.079	.107
Source	2	2.239	3.048*
Familiarity	1	2.134	2.905
Expertise	1	1.287	1.751
Involvement	1	5.766	7.849**
Reputation * Source	2	.015	.020
Reputation * Familiarity	1	.672	.915
Source * Familiarity	2	.281	.382
Reputation * Source * Familiarity	2	.394	.536
Reputation * Expertise	1	.053	.073
Source * Expertise	2	1.376	1.873
Reputation * Source * Expertise	2	.037	.050
Familiarity * Expertise	1	.039	.053
Reputation * Familiarity * Expertise	1	.031	.042
Source * Familiarity * Expertise	2	.091	.124
Reputation * Source * Familiarity * Expertise	1	.001	.001
Reputation * Involvement	1	.008	.011
Source * Involvement	2	.178	.243
Reputation * Source * Involvement	2	.130	.176
Familiarity * Involvement	1	.066	.090
Reputation * Familiarity * Involvement	1	.003	.003
Source * Familiarity * Involvement	2	.750	1.020
Reputation * Source * Familiarity * Involvement	1	.628	.854
Expertise * Involvement	1	4.030	5.486**
Reputation * Expertise * Involvement	1	.129	.176
Source * Expertise * Involvement	2	.012	.016
Reputation * Source * Expertise * Involvement	1	.192	.261
Familiarity * Expertise * Involvement	1	.818	1.114
Reputation * Familiarity * Expertise * Involvement	1	.012	.016
Source * Familiarity * Expertise * Involvement	1	.023	.032

Note. N=199, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 4-7. Between-subject effects, dependent variable: consumer attitude toward the company.

Source	df	MS	F
reputation	1	6.896	10.344**
source	2	1.003	1.504
familiarity	1	5.906	8.858**
expertise	1	.035	.053
involvement	1	3.705	5.557**
reputation * source	2	1.310	1.965
reputation * familiarity	1	1.309	1.963
source * familiarity	2	.333	.499
reputation * source * familiarity	2	2.301	3.451*
reputation * expertise	1	.004	.005
source * expertise	2	.555	.833
reputation * source * expertise	2	.112	.168
familiarity * expertise	1	.054	.082
reputation * familiarity * expertise	1	.211	.317
source * familiarity * expertise	2	.216	.324
reputation * source * familiarity * expertise	1	.623	.935
reputation * involvement	1	.786	1.180
source * involvement	2	.573	.860
reputation * source * involvement	2	1.075	1.612
familiarity * involvement	1	1.500	2.250
reputation * familiarity * involvement	1	.093	.140
source * familiarity * involvement	2	.271	.407
reputation * source * familiarity * involvement	1	1.703	2.555
expertise * involvement	1	2.330	3.495
reputation * expertise * involvement	1	.460	.690
source * expertise * involvement	2	.639	.959
reputation * source * expertise * involvement	1	.545	.817
familiarity * expertise * involvement	1	3.710	5.564**
reputation * familiarity * expertise * involvement	1	.528	.792
source * familiarity * expertise * involvement	1	.157	.235

Note. N=199, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 4-8. Result of t-test: corporate reputation-attitude.

		M	SD	N	t	Sig. (two-tailed)
Corporate reputation	Apple (High)	5.50	.87	97	4.92	.000***
	Acer (Low)	4.88	.90	102		

Note. 1. Dependent variable: attitude toward the company
2. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 4-9. Result of bivariate linear regression, dependent variable: attitude toward the company.

	B	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.695		8.696	.000
Source credibility	.510	.503	8.166	.000***

Note. N=199, R=.50, R^2=.25, F(1, 197)=66.68***, ***p<.001

Table 4-10. Perceived source credibility by source cue.

	M	SD	N
Company source	4.77	.99	N=69
Editorial source	5.19	.77	N=66
Consumer source	4.66	.91	N=64

Table 4-11. F-test of source credibility by source cue.

	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F
Between groups	10.41	2	5.21	6.41**
Within groups	159.12	196	.81	

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 4-12. Result of t-test: source cue-source credibility.

		M	SD	N	t	Sig. (two-tailed)
Source cue	Company source	4.77	.99	69	-2.77	.006**
	Editorial source	5.19	.77	66		

Note. 1. Dependent variable: source credibility
2. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 4-13. Result of t-test: source cue-source credibility.

		M	SD	N	t	Sig. (two-tailed)
Source cue	Company source	4.77	.99	69	.63	.53
	Consumer source	4.66	.91	64		

Note. 1. Dependent variable: source credibility
2. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 4-14. Result of t-test: source cue-source credibility.

		M	SD	N	t	Sig. (two-tailed)
Source cue	Editorial source	5.19	.77	66	3.59	.000***
	Consumer source	4.66	.91	64		

Note. 1. Dependent variable: source credibility
2. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 4-15. Regression analysis, dependent variable: source credibility.

	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
Corporate reputation	.410	.168	.146	7.788	.000***	.004	.056	.955
Brand familiarity						.101	1.354	.177
Consumer expertise						-.073	-1.090	.277
Level of involvement						.384	5.662	.000***
Source cue						-.072	-1.094	.275

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 4-16. Regression analysis, dependent variable: consumer attitude toward the company.

	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
Corporate reputation	.500	.250	.231	12.883	.000***	.269	3.905	.000***
Brand familiarity						.155	2.191	.030*
Consumer expertise						.086	1.352	.178
Level of involvement						.261	4.053	.000***
Source cue						.117	1.871	.063

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 4-17. Hierarchical regression analysis of proposed model, dependent variable: consumer attitude toward the company.

	Model 1		Model 2	
	β	Standard error	β	Standard error
Block 1				
Corporate reputation	.504***	.129	.501***	.114
Brand familiarity	.078*	.036	.055	.032
Consumer expertise	.054	.040	.075*	.036
Level of involvement	.152***	.038	.052	.036
Source cue	.134	.072	.171**	.063
Block 2				
Source credibility			.455***	.061
R^2	.250		.418	
Adjusted R^2	.231		.400	
F	12.883***		22.958***	

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

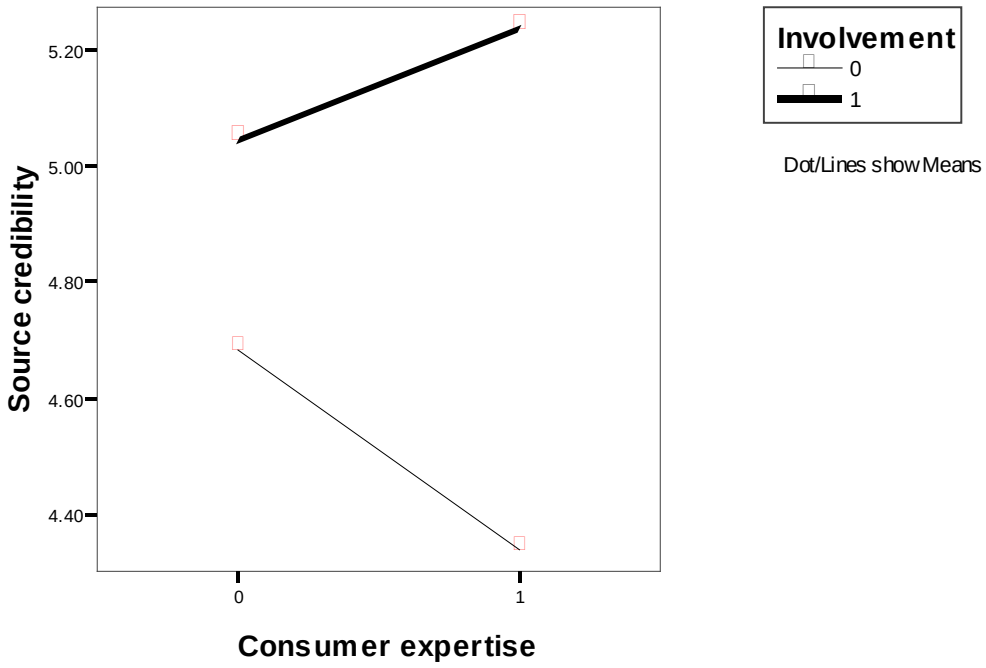

Figure 4-1. Interactive effect of consumer expertise and level of involvement on source credibility.

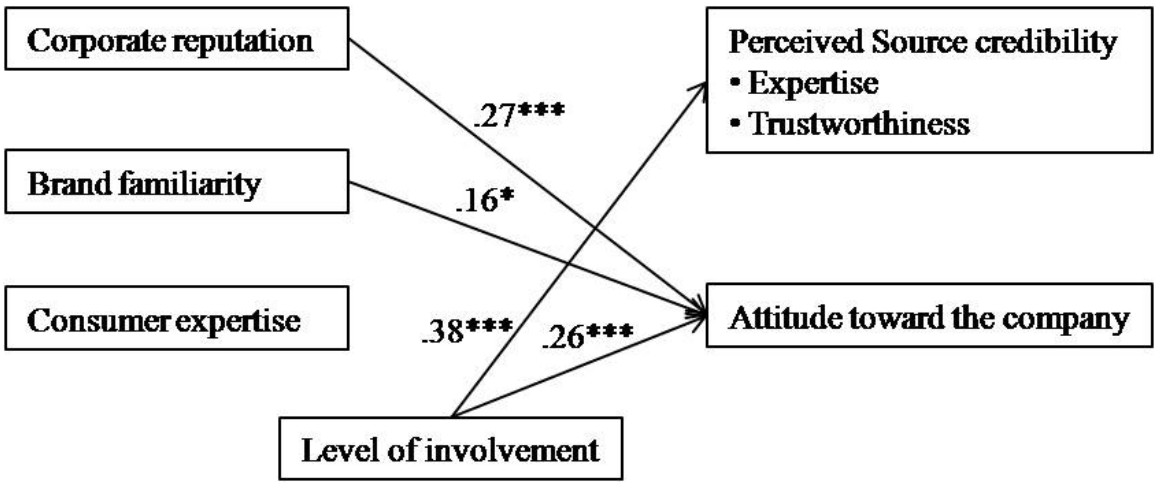

Figure 4-2. Significant results of regression models. Path coefficients (beta weights) appear above each line (*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001).

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study was based on two main research areas: consumer behaviors and persuasion theory. Specifically, this study focused on how consumer information search behaviors affect their information processing and attitude formation. One objective of this study was to understand how internal information cues stored in memory affect the way consumers perceive product-related information from different sources. The proposed model incorporated several important cognitive or attitude-related factors, which are believed to influence the persuasiveness of external information. Corporate reputation captures consumers' general perceptions of a company based on its past actions and performance and thus served as an influential cue that resides in customers' minds. In addition, each consumer has a varied knowledge structure about products and brands. Consumers' brand familiarity is acquired by product- or brand-related experiences. People might also have different levels of product expertise, which is established through increased familiarity or gained from learning. Therefore, consumers' perception of corporate reputation, their familiarity with a brand, and expertise were expected to influence their perceived source credibility of external information.

Another aim of this research was to investigate how consumers respond to three different sources of information and form attitudes toward the firm. Three distinct sources of information were examined in this study, including company-generated communication, journalist/editorial content, and consumer-generated communication. According to the ELM, people's engagement in information processing affects attitude change through two routes (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The central route involves considerable thinking about an object. In contrast, the peripheral route is taken when people employ a low level of elaboration and rely on simple cues. Source credibility was regarded as one of the influential cues that affect attitude. Message involvement

refers to the extent of cognitive effort an individual utilizes to process a stimulus (Ellen & Bone, 1998). Therefore, varied levels of involvement were expected to influence whether a source cue can affect persuasion. Specifically, consumers who are high in expertise were expected to focus more on message content and thus were less influenced by a source cues.

The present study employed an experimental design to test the proposed model. Participants were exposed to product-related information attributed to a source of a company, an editor from *PC Magazine*, or a peer consumer. The selected products were from either a company with high corporate reputation or one with low reputation. The content and length of each article were kept identical across different conditions to ensure that respondents' perceptual variances were due to a source factor. This study sought to clarify how consumers' perceived source credibility and attitudes toward a firm were influenced by their assessments of corporate reputation, brand familiarity, and product expertise.

The results found that perceived source credibility was influenced by respondents' level of involvement. Further, a significant interactive effect of consumer expertise and involvement on perceived source credibility was observed. However, the research findings indicated that corporate reputation, brand familiarity, and consumer expertise have no significant and direct effect on perceived source credibility. Therefore, this study suggested that the amount of information processing elicited by a persuasive communication was related to the way consumers evaluate external information. Based on regression analyses, the results indicated that both internal information cues and external information affect consumers' formation of attitude. In addition, the influence of perceived credibility of external information sources on attitude was moderated by the message receivers' level of involvement.

In general, this study found a difference in source credibility between company-generated messages and non-company-generated content. In terms of laptop computers, a professional journalistic source was perceived as more credible by respondents than was a company's product information and an unknown peer consumer. The results suggested that consumers' attitude toward a company was related strongly to corporate reputation. In addition, attitude was influenced by consumers' credibility evaluations of external sources of information. Hence, the research results supported the proposed conceptual model in which both internal and external cues are influential in attitude formation.

General Discussion

The research findings shed light on the relationship among corporate reputation, consumer knowledge structure, and perceived source credibility, and how these factors jointly affect attitude toward the company. This research combined the concept of internal and external information cues to better understand consumers' information processing and attitude formation. Furthermore, it provides a consumer-focused approach to persuasion and proposes a link between internal information differences and external information evaluations.

Hypothesis 1 was not supported. The data showed that corporate reputation was not significantly related to perceived source credibility regarding product-related information. This finding contrasted with those of previous studies, which have observed a positive impact of corporate reputation on perceived credibility (Goldberg & Hartwick, 1990). However, it should be noted that most of the positive relationship between corporate reputation and perceived credibility came from the literature related to crisis communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). This could be explained by the fact that corporate reputation plays a key role in message effectiveness, especially in negative situations. According to Herr et al. (1991), when a well-defined prior impression was available from memory or when extremely negative information

was encountered, the effect of external information cues would be reduced. Therefore, a positive relationship between corporate reputation and perceived source credibility might be more easily observed when respondents encounter negative information. Since the stimulus articles in this study presented positive features of newly launched laptop computers, the effect of corporate reputation might not be substantial in shaping message receivers' evaluations of perceived source credibility.

Hypothesis 2 stated that corporate reputation is positively related to consumer attitude about the company. Consistent with the body of extant literature, companies with high corporate reputation indeed yielded positive consumer attitudes compared to those with low reputation (Bae & Cameron, 2006; Weigelt & Camerer, 1988). This study provided empirical support that companies should continue to establish and manage their corporate reputation to garner favorable attitudes from consumers.

Hypothesis 3 and Research Question 1 focused on two dimensions of consumer knowledge, familiarity and expertise. Hypothesis 3 anticipated that brand familiarity predicts perceived source credibility; however, this was not supported. Brand familiarity was not significantly related to perceived source credibility. This result might be related to the relative high percentage of responses of low familiarity with the two brands. The frequency distribution of brand familiarity scores showed that 52% (103 responses) belonged to relatively low familiarity scores (scores of 1 to 3); only 35% (70 responses) reported relatively high familiarity scores (scores of 5 to 7). In addition, the modes of the data were scores of 1 and 3. Since the sample distribution of brand familiarity was skewed to the right, the sample might not be representative enough to generate a significant impact.

Similarly, consumer expertise was not found to influence perceived source credibility directly. However, when level of involvement among respondents was controlled, consumer expertise indeed affected their credibility perceptions of information sources. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was supported. In line with previous research, source credibility affects persuasion depending on message recipients' level of elaboration (Tormala et al., 2007). Our results showed that both expert and novice consumers reported higher source credibility scores under conditions of high involvement than under low involvement conditions. For the high involvement group, expert consumers perceived higher source credibility (M=5.24, SD=.84) than did novice consumers (M=5.04, SD=0.69). In contrast, under low involvement conditions, the novice group reported higher source credibility scores (M=4.68, SD=1.03) than did the expert group (M=4.33, SD=.87). These findings confirmed that source credibility not only operated as a peripheral cue to persuasion but also aided persuasiveness when people devote extensive elaboration to information processing.

Regarding Hypothesis 5, it was found that source credibility is positively related to attitudes toward the company. Based on extensive regression analyses, the results demonstrated a strong and highly predictable relationship between perceived source credibility and consumer attitude toward the company. According to traditional persuasion theory, a highly credible source is more persuasive and has a positive effect on receivers' attitudes (Hovland et al., 1953; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989).

Research Question 2 explored how consumers assign credibility to three different sources of information, including company source, journalist/editorial source, and consumer source. Different source cues were manipulated in this study. In our findings, product reviews written by an editor from an authoritative computer magazine (PC Magazine) yielded the highest credibility

scores. It has been posited widely in previous research that non-marketer-controlled sources are perceived as unbiased and therefore more credible than commercial sources (Cameron, 1994; Sunder & Nass, 2001). Traditional independent journalistic and editorial sources performed an important gatekeeping function for message receivers (Sunder & Nass, 2001); information provided by these sources was viewed as much legitimate and credible than company-generated messages (Cameron, 1994). However, there was no significant difference in perceived source credibility between the other two sources of information, namely, a company and a consumer source. Previous studies have shown the growing importance of information from personal sources or consumer-generated communication such as word-of-mouth in purchase decision making processes (Duan et al., 2008; Mourali et al., 2005; Price & Feick, 1984). Unlike corporate announcements or commercial advertising produced by companies, recommendations and opinions from peer consumers were perceived as unbiased, immediate, and interpretable (Price & Feick, 1984). Therefore, personal sources were deemed as trustworthy sources of information (Park et al., 2007). The powerful influence of interpersonal sources was not demonstrated in the present study. This might be explained by two reasons. First, the null findings on consumer-generated contents as credible information sources might be due to the product category employed in the study. Since laptop computers belong to a product category of high-end technology, a peer consumer's opinion might not generate a significant impact on source credibility evaluations. Another possible explanation is that the content included in stimulus materials may have included too much detailed information about the functions, performances, and benefits of the two brands of laptop computers. Since the specifications of each branded laptop were provided and can serve as standardized benchmarks for consumers to assess the message, a source factor might not be in effect. Therefore, a company-generated

message, including the extensive functional advantages of the products being promoted can possibly be rated highly as a credible source of product-related information.

Conclusion and Implications

Consumer behaviors regarding information searching and processing have long been of interest to scholars and marketers. Grounded on a proposed model that considers both internal and external information cues applied by consumers to evaluating information and forming attitudes, this study provided empirical results about the ways consumers perceive various sources of information in terms of credibility depending on the existing information they retrieve from memory.

One of the important findings in this study is that consumers' evaluation of external information was influenced by message involvement. Previous research has suggested that consumers usually use a limited number of sources in their decision making because it reduced their search cost (Mourali et al., 2005). External search behaviors are driven by their ability and motivation to search (Schmidt & Spreng, 1996). The present study investigated the potential antecedents to consumer information evaluation. It was found that people differ in their judgments regarding source credibility, and that the judgment is influenced by the extent to which they elaborate on the information or messages encountered.

Second, this research contributed to an understanding of the attitude change process based on both internal and external information cues. The model used in this study demonstrated that consumer attitude is highly related to corporate reputation. Nevertheless, attitude could be changed positively by providing external information from highly credible sources. In terms of product-related information, communication messages from independent, professional editorial sources were rated as more credible than company and consumer sources in this study.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study provides an additional explication of how personal differences in cognitive and knowledge factors influence information processing and attitude formation. Furthermore, the proposed model highlighted and tested several relationships among important internal and external information cues and their connections to persuasion.

In terms of practical implications, this study provides marketers or public relations practitioners with insights into some variables that have substantial impacts on consumers' perceptions of messages from different sources. Positive publicity and validated product information from professional or authoritative media outlets were found to serve recurrently as credible sources to consumers. Additionally, company-generated communication can still garner positive evaluations and favorable attitudes among consumers if presented with truthful claims. Companies should also pay attention to establishing and maintaining a positive corporate reputation. Reputation management becomes a focal point if organizations seek to elicit favorable attitudes from or build long-term relationships with customers and other stakeholders. Finally, the research findings recognized that a firm's strategic decision making should consider consumers' information search behaviors and their knowledge structures. This study also held that consumer knowledge can be a viable way to facilitate consumer segmentation when designing corporate communication with customers regarding product-related information (Guo, 2001).

Limitations and Future Research

There were several limitations to the present study. First, this study collected responses via both online and offline settings. While some of the sample population provided its opinions in a classroom environment using paper-based questionnaires, others completed the questionnaire via online survey services (surveymonkey.com). Although all respondents were randomly assigned to each condition in the experiment, the researcher did not know whether any difference existed

between the results gathered in the online and offline settings. Since respondents may prefer reading a Web-based article over having a sheet of paper in hand, the measures of their recognition of sources, attitude, perceived source credibility, and involvement might be affected by this factor. Future research can determine whether any difference in information evaluation and attitudes exists when respondents use different media.

Second, the employment of real-world brands in the experiment provides external validity. However, the stimulus articles used in this study did not truly resemble those actually encountered by respondents in natural situations. In order to ensure a successful manipulation of source cues in this experiment, controls for the content, length, and layout of stimulus articles were necessary. However, this resulted in the problem of artificiality as well. Therefore, one might argue that the perceived credibility and subsequent attitude change based on these materials cannot be applied to real-world messages. Additionally, other message variables, such as message attributes and message claims, were not included in the present study. Therefore, the effect of message content on perceived source credibility was unclear in this study. Consequently, the lack of differences in perceived source credibility between consumer sources and company sources could result from the message design used for the stimulus materials. Future research should exercise caution in the design of stimulus messages.

Moreover, the present study examined consumers' information evaluation and attitude formation based on single product category, laptop computers. It is possible that consumers' information search behaviors would vary across different products and services.

Further, the research findings confirmed the interactive effect of level of involvement and consumer knowledge on perceived source credibility. However, the result was somewhat surprising with respect to the better evaluation of source credibility reported by high involvement

than low involvement groups. Specifically, for the expert consumer group, perceived source credibility was rated much higher by highly involved respondents than for the low involvement group. This was different from the general notion that source credibility serves as a peripheral cue to persuasion under conditions of low elaboration (Petty et al., 1981). Although previous studies found that source credibility can affect persuasion when elaboration is high (e.g. Heesacker et al., 1983; Homer & Kahle, 1990), the researcher did not know the reason for the results in this study. It is possible that some confounding variables were overlooked.

It must be noted that the results of this study can only be generalized to a population similar to that employed in the study. The use of a student sample revealed only a narrow scope of consumer perceptions and behaviors. As opposed to other subject groups, student subjects may rely more on the Internet, online social networking sites, and blogs as their sources of information. Their perceptions about a credible source are also different from those of people from other generations. Therefore, this characteristic becomes a limitation in this research.

In future studies, it would be valuable to replicate the present study with more representative samples. Since this study was limited to only one product category, greater insights into other product categories, services, or issues may be achieved if addressed in future research. Instead of an experimental method and quantitative approach, future studies could utilize qualitative designs (e.g. interview) to understand the way consumers search for product-related information and to clarify the difference in perceived source credibility among three common sources of information.

This study contributes to research on the antecedents to external information search and evaluation in the context of persuasion and attitude formation. Clearly, there are other variables that may influence the effect of source cues on persuasion. Moore, Hausknecht, and Thamodaran

(1986) observed a significant interaction between source credibility and argument strength. In addition, the advertising literature has revealed the effects of message factors (e.g. message claims and message attributes) on advertising effectiveness and brand attitudes (Goldber & Hartwick, 1990; Gill et al., 1988). Apparently, the effect of message attribute was ignored in the present study. However, previous research indicated that the number of important and unimportant product attributes in messages has an impact on perceived source credibility and attitude judgments (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994). Other studies also found that consumers with varied levels of knowledge prefer different types of messages (Su et al., 2008). Hence, the use of attributed-based or benefit-based information in communication messages can influence the way people evaluate messages. Moreover, the differential influences of objective and subjective message claims were found to have an impact on shaping communication effectiveness (Gill et al., 1988). Other message variables, which may affect perceived source credibility and attitude, have been addressed and tested in the persuasion literature (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Therefore, future research, which includes examinations of the effects of message factors, is suggested to clarify further the effect of source cues on persuasion.

Finally, the present study included three different sources of information: company-generated messages, journalist/editorial content, and consumer-generated communication. A company-generated message was operationalized by a corporate announcement. An editor review from *PC Magazine* represented journalist/editorial content. An unknown blogger was set as a personal source of consumer-generated communication. However, there are various types of communication tools and channels in the above three sources of information. For example, the credibility of someone who is known personally might be perceived differently than that of an

unknown, interpersonal source. It would be interesting to explore perceived source credibility based on the various ways of presenting messages for each source category.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PRETEST

Thank you for taking time to answer questions in this survey. Please read the following questions carefully, and check one choice from the scale that best describes your thoughts or feelings. Your answers will be used only for statistical purposes and will remain strictly confidential.

Section 1. Please rate your overall familiarity with the following product categories.

Product category	Not familiar at all						Very familiar
a. Laptop computer	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. Mobile phone	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Section 2. Please evaluate reputation of the following brands in each product categories.

a. Laptop computer

Acer	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
This brand is trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5
This brand is reputable	1	2	3	4	5
This brand makes honest claims	1	2	3	4	5
Apple	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
This brand is trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5
This brand is reputable	1	2	3	4	5
This brand makes honest claims	1	2	3	4	5
Dell	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
This brand is trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5
This brand is reputable	1	2	3	4	5
This brand makes honest claims	1	2	3	4	5
Gateway	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
This brand is trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5
This brand is reputable	1	2	3	4	5
This brand makes honest claims	1	2	3	4	5
HP	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
This brand is trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5
This brand is reputable	1	2	3	4	5
This brand makes honest claims	1	2	3	4	5
Sony	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
This brand is trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5
This brand is reputable	1	2	3	4	5
This brand makes honest claims	1	2	3	4	5

Toshiba	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
This brand is trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5
This brand is reputable	1	2	3	4	5
This brand makes honest claims	1	2	3	4	5

b. Mobile phone

LG	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
This brand is trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5
This brand is reputable	1	2	3	4	5
This brand makes honest claims	1	2	3	4	5
Motorola	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
This brand is trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5
This brand is reputable	1	2	3	4	5
This brand makes honest claims	1	2	3	4	5
Nokia	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
This brand is trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5
This brand is reputable	1	2	3	4	5
This brand makes honest claims	1	2	3	4	5
Samsung	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
This brand is trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5
This brand is reputable	1	2	3	4	5
This brand makes honest claims	1	2	3	4	5
Sonic Ericsson	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
This brand is trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5
This brand is reputable	1	2	3	4	5
This brand makes honest claims	1	2	3	4	5

Section 3. Demographics

1. Gender: ( ) Male ( ) Female
2. Age: _____
3. Current level of education:
   ( ) Freshman ( ) Sophomore ( ) Junior
   ( ) Senior or post-baccalaureate ( ) Graduate Student

Thank you very much for your participation!

APPENDIX B
COMPANY-GENERATED MESSAGE FROM ACER

Acer Announcement
Enter the World of Glamour with the Acer Aspire 3935
Minimalist Design Meets Advanced Technology

2009-04-08 - New York. Slim, light, glamorous, ultra-portable, great performer: a notebook with no compromises. It's not a dream; it is the new Acer Aspire 3935, an ultra-pornotebook series less than one inch thick and with a 13.3-inch format that combines inimistyle with cutting-edge technologies.

The new Aspire 3935 is not simply another ultra-porlaptop. With a full metal structure with a brushed-metal finish, the 3935 is characterized by a distinctive style and personality that evokes both glamour and efficiency. Weighing just over 4 lb., this notebook begs you to take it wherever you go.

At the same time classy and high-tech, the Aspire 3935 does away with all excess providing an exceptionally comforuser experience. The Aspire 3935 features a 13.3" HD 1366x768 pixel resolution, high-brightness Acer LCD with a super slim frameless design and a 16:9 aspect ratio for best viewing of high definition content. Keys with a pearl gloss floating on the shiny base create an easy and effortless typing experience. Acer FineTip keyboard, with larger key caps and key gaps, makes typing even more natural. Touch sensitive hotkeys give you easy access to frequently used functions, while the multi-gesture touchpad offers scrolling, zooming and flipping functionalities.

Even in a compact size, the new notebook delivers impressive performance. The standard Acer 3935-6504 features genuine Windows Vista® Home Premium; Intel® Core™2 Duo Processor P7350 (3MB L2 cache, 2.0GHz, 1066MHz FSB); 3GB (2/1) DDR3 1066 SDRAM; 250GB hard drive; integrated Super-Multi drive; 5-in-1 card reader; Acer® CineCrystal 13.3" WXGA (1366 x 768) TFT display; Intel® Graphics Media Accelerator 4500MHD; 802.11a/b/g/Draft-N WLAN, Bluetooth®, gigabit LAN, webcam; one-year parts-and-labor warranty.

For hassle-free usage on the go, the Aspire 3935 integrates several energy saving features. The panel uses LED backlight technology that besides increasing readability in low-light conditions is mercury-free and reduces power consumption. For greater energy savings, the panel can be switched off. The Aspire 3935 features Acer SmartPower button, a power saving switch that takes a series of actions to reduce power consumption, giving you control over battery life. If equipped with an 8-cell battery, the Aspire 3935 will give you 8 hours of freedom from plugs and cables, for uninterrupted work or fun on the road.

The 3935 has acquired certifications from three accredited institutions: Energy Star, EPEAT (Silver), and RoHS. Energy Star is a U.S. government–backed program that helps businesses realize the energy-efficiency potential of their products, while EPEAT and RoHS evaluate products based on a broader range of environmental attributes, including energy efficiency and recyclability.

The Aspire® 3935 is an ultra-slim and elegant yet full-powered notebook for those who want the best in on-the-go computing. It's truly your digital edge in today's wireless world.

APPENDIX C
EDITORIAL CONTENTS FOR ACER

***PC Magazine* Editor Review**
Cisco Cheng is *PC Magazine's* lead analyst for laptops and tablet PCs. He is responsible for benchmarking, reviewing, and evaluating all laptops and tablet PCs. Cisco started with *PC Magazine* in 1999 as a support technician, testing printers, PC components, networking equipment, and software. He became the lead analyst for the laptop team in 2003 and since has written numerous reviews, buyer guides, and feature stories for both PCMag.com and the print magazine.

Acer Aspire 3935

Review Date: 04.22.09

Acer has been delivering affordable systems for as long as it has existed, but the majority of them have come with design trade-offs. Often they were too thick or too heavy, or just plain ugly. The Acer Aspire 3935 ushers in what hopefully will be a new era for the company. Forget the fact that it's a $900 laptop, because Acer is widely known for being a price aggressor. The sleek metallic cover, the 1-inch-thick chassis, and the sheer portability of this system are qualities that customers have been yearning for but hadn't been able to get in such a sweet deal. Pairing aesthetics with good performing parts further cements the Aspire 3935 as the new Editors' Choice for our budget category.

Brushed aluminum on the lid—a first on an Acer laptop—looks absolutely gorgeous. The moldable characteristics of the metals enabled Acer to produce a 1-inch-thick design (dimensions are 12.7 by 9.4 by 1 inches), so the 3935 is almost as thin as the Apple 13-inch (Aluminum). And it's light, in fact, at only 4.1 pounds.

The 3935's 13.3-inch widescreen is work- and media-friendly, providing plenty of screen real estate for multiple spreadsheet columns or a 720p HD video. It has 16:9 aspect ratio. The scalloped, non-interconnecting keys of the full-size keyboard are another departure from other Acer laptops. They are visibly spaced apart, resembling those of the MacBook and Sony. A lot has been made of the touchpad and buttons on the 3935. The touchpad provides multitouch features: You can pinch, scroll, and enlarge files and text by gesturing with two fingers.

Even in a compact size, the new notebook delivers impressive performance. The standard Acer 3935-6504 features genuine Windows Vista® Home Premium; Intel® Core™2 Duo Processor P7350 (3MB L2 cache, 2.0GHz, 1066MHz FSB); 3GB (2/1) DDR3 1066 SDRAM; 250GB hard drive; integrated Super-Multi drive; 5-in-1 card reader; Acer® CineCrystal 13.3" WXGA (1366 x 768) TFT display; Intel® Graphics Media Accelerator 4500MHD; 802.11a/b/g/Draft-N WLAN, Bluetooth®, gigabit LAN, webcam; one-year parts-and-labor warranty.

For hassle-free usage on the go, the Aspire 3935 integrates several energy saving features. The panel uses LED backlight technology that besides increasing readability in low-light conditions is mercury-free and reduces power consumption. For greater energy savings, the panel can be switched off. The Aspire 3935 features Acer SmartPower button, a power saving switch that

takes a series of actions to reduce power consumption, giving you control over battery life. The 3935's most impressive performance feat was in its battery life. If equipped with an 8-cell battery, the Aspire 3935 will give you 8 hours of freedom from plugs and cables, for uninterrupted work or fun on the road.

The 3935 earns our GreenTech Approved award, having acquired certifications from three accredited institutions: Energy Star, EPEAT (Silver), and RoHS. Energy Star is a U.S. government–backed program that helps businesses realize the energy-efficiency potential of their products, while EPEAT and RoHS evaluate products based on a broader range of environmental attributes, including energy efficiency and recyclability.
The list of achievements goes on and on for the Acer Aspire 3935. The 1-inch-thick metallic design and surprisingly good battery score alone are merits worthy of an Editors' Choice. On top of these fabulous attributes, the 3935 is equipped with good performing parts and ample features, and thus earns our GreenTech seal of approval. Not too shabby, eh?

APPENDIX D
CONSUMER-GENERATED COMMUNICATION FOR ACER

Consumer Product Review
By Peter Anderson
(This review was directly quoted from his personal blog on June 14, 2009.)

I received my new Acer Aspire 3935 today, and unpacked it at work. Working in IT, I could play with my new computer without arousing attention, other than the admiring looks and comments from co-workers. The sleek metallic cover, the 1-inch-thick chassis, and the sheer portability of this system are qualities that customers have been yearning for but hadn't been able to get in such a sweet deal.

Brushed aluminum on the lid—a first on an Acer laptop—looks absolutely gorgeous. The moldable characteristics of the metals enabled Acer to produce a 1-inch-thick design (dimensions are 12.7 by 9.4 by 1 inches), so the 3935 is almost as thin as the Apple 13-inch (Aluminum). And it's light, in fact, at only 4.1 pounds.

The 3935's 13.3-inch widescreen is work- and media-friendly, providing plenty of screen real estate for multiple spreadsheet columns or a 720p HD video. It has 16:9 aspect ratio. The scalloped, non-interconnecting keys of the full-size keyboard are another departure from other Acer laptops. They are visibly spaced apart, resembling those of the MacBook and Sony. A lot has been made of the touchpad and buttons on the 3935. Touch sensitive hotkeys give you easy access to frequently used functions. The touchpad provides multitouch features: You can pinch, scroll, and enlarge files and text by gesturing with two fingers.

Even in a compact size, the new notebook delivers impressive performance. The standard Acer 3935-6504 features genuine Windows Vista® Home Premium; Intel® Core™2 Duo Processor P7350 (3MB L2 cache, 2.0GHz, 1066MHz FSB); 3GB (2/1) DDR3 1066 SDRAM; 250GB hard drive; integrated Super-Multi drive; 5-in-1 card reader; Acer® CineCrystal 13.3" WXGA (1366 x 768) TFT display; Intel® Graphics Media Accelerator 4500MHD; 802.11a/b/g/Draft-N WLAN, Bluetooth®, gigabit LAN, webcam; one-year parts-and-labor warranty.

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The 3935 has acquired certifications from three accredited institutions: Energy Star, EPEAT (Silver), and RoHS. Energy Star is a U.S. government–backed program that helps businesses realize the energy-efficiency potential of their products, while EPEAT and RoHS evaluate products based on a broader range of environmental attributes, including energy efficiency and recyclability.

So, my final thoughts? I love my new toy. The list of achievements goes on and on for the Acer Aspire 3935. The 1-inch-thick metallic design and surprisingly good battery score alone are merits worthy of consumers' choice. On top of these fabulous attributes, the 3935 is equipped with good performing parts and ample features.

APPENDIX E
COMPANY-GENERATED MESSAGE FOR APPLE

Apple Announcement
MacBook Pro Updated with New Models and Innovative Built-in Battery

June 8, 2009. The Macbook Pro is designed to provide the best computer experience you can have. From the smallest detail to the biggest engineering breakthrough, the new MacBook Pro truly is the next generation of notebooks.

When you pick up a new MacBook Pro, you immediately notice the difference. Carved from a single block of aluminum, its unibody enclosure is the product of precise machining. The entire enclosure is thin and light. It looks polished and refined. And it feels strong and durable—perfect for life inside (and outside) your briefcase or backpack.

The moment you open your new MacBook Pro you're greeted by glorious, full screen brightness. But that's only one gleaming quality of the glossy LED-backlit widescreen display. It offers a 60 percent greater color gamut than previous generations for richer, more vibrant colors. The seamless glass enclosure makes this display strong and durable. And the display is power efficient and mercury-and-arsenic-free, so it's greener than ever. The rigid aluminum keyboard webbing has been cut precisely to hold the keys. And the keys are curved to perfectly fit fingers. The result? Pure typing bliss. The new MacBook Pro trackpad has no button because it is the button. That means there's more room to track, more room to click—left, right, center, and everywhere in between—and one less part. You'll find two USB 2.0 ports and a FireWire 800 port for connecting faster peripherals. Transfer your photos and videos to and from your MacBook Pro just as fast as you're able to take them. Built into the 13-inch MacBook Pro is a new SD card slot, so you can edit and share your photos and digital video on the spot.

In terms of internal components, the MacBook Pro 13-inch has the 2.26-GHz Intel Core 2 Duo P7550 CPU. The MacBook Pro reaches a new level of high-speed, high-end game-playing power. Not to mention pure performance for graphics-intensive applications like Aperture and Motion. The power-saving NVIDIA GeForce 9400M integrated graphics processor inside every MacBook Pro is great for everyday performance. Built right into each of the new MacBook Pro notebooks is a breakthrough battery that lasts dramatically longer and does so without increasing the size or weight of MacBook Pro. On a single charge, the battery in the new MacBook Pro lasts up to 7 hours.

Just how green is the new MacBook Pro? Every MacBook Pro model is ENERGY STAR 5.0 compliant, which means it meets the government standard for energy efficiency. All models have also earned EPEAT Gold status, the highest standard for environmental performance in the electronics industry. And every MacBook Pro is shipped in packaging that's 34 to 41 percent smaller than the original generation. That translates to fewer trees used for boxes and less fuel used to transport more systems on fewer planes. And at the end of its long, productive life, you can recycle almost all of your MacBook Pro.

Only Apple could make a notebook like this. Hardware and software. Design and engineering. Production and manufacturing. The light and sturdy unibody protects the components inside. The

LED-backlit display—along with the graphics processor that helps power it—gives you faster games and a brilliant canvas for your photos, movies, and more. The glass Multi-Touch trackpad feels as good as it functions. They're all part of a single process at Apple. When you start using your new MacBook Pro, you'll discover what that means.

APPENDIX F
EDITORIAL CONTENTS FOR APPLE

***PC Magazine* editor review**
Cisco Cheng is *PC Magazine's* lead analyst for laptops and tablet PCs. He is responsible for benchmarking, reviewing, and evaluating all laptops and tablet PCs. Cisco started with *PC Magazine* in 1999 as a support technician, testing printers, PC components, networking equipment, and software. He became the lead analyst for the laptop team in 2003 and since has written numerous reviews, buyer guides, and feature stories for both PCMag.com and the print magazine.

Apple MacBook Pro 13-inch

Review Date: 06.10.09

After all the whining, the bickering, and the constant remarks about how Windows-based laptops have this and that and cost so much less, Apple, a company known to make its own rules, is finally letting down its guard. The lovable MacBook Pro 13-inch enhances its feature sets and throws in a bigger battery while lowering prices—which in the past would have been difficult for the company to pull off. All the improvements are signs that Apple is finally paying attention to its suggestion boxes. Indeed, it's a great time to be shopping for a new Apple laptop—especially this one, which earns our Editors' Choice.

The MacBook Pro 13-inch measures only an inch thick, despite having a built-in optical drive, and uses the same Unibody enclosure carved out from a thick slab of aluminum. These are the fundamentals—a metallic chassis and a thin design—that have contributed to Apple's success. Reshuffling the ports and the adding a bigger battery didn't affect the new model's weight. Like the previous versions, the MacBook Pro 13-inch weighs 4.5 pounds (5 pounds with the adapter).

Speaking of the aesthetic touches of a glass screen, the 13.3-inch widescreen, according to Apple, now has a 60 percent greater color gamut than that of its predecessor, and when placed alongside those of the previous MacBook, it's clearly the superior screen. Regarding tiled keyboard, touch and non-touch typists alike will find it easy to adapt to this keyboard, as it is full-size and tactile. Having your keyboard light up in the dark is another invaluable asset in this price range. Other models, specifically Windows-based laptops, have tried incorporating touch gestures into the touchpad, but none have touchpads as fluid and responsive as Apple's. Aside from having the largest touchpad, the MacBook Pro 13-inch is also an all-in-one, complete with the single-click mouse button and the two- to four-fingered touch gestures. The SD slot is the most compelling addition because no other Apple product before the MacBook Pro 13-inch has seen anything similar. The return of the FireWire port isn't a feature one usually brings back. But give credit to Apple for listening to its customers (and reviewers) and for upgrading the port from FireWire 400 to 800.

In terms of internal components, the MacBook Pro 13-inch has the 2.26-GHz Intel Core 2 Duo P7550 CPU. It also has the advantage in graphics horsepower with an Nvidia GeForce 9400M integrated chipset, giving the 3D benefits. Increasing the capacity of the battery (without doing the same to its dimensions) is the toughest part, and Apple has pulled off this feat. The battery is

now essentially nonremovable, which scored an admirable 4 hours 44 minutes on our battery tests. More than 5 hours of battery life (Apple claims 7 hours) can easily be achieved with the optimized operating system.

Apple goes out of its way to emphasize the MacBook Pro 13-inch's green credentials. The laptop is certified for Energy Star (in this case 5.0), EPEAT Gold, and RoHS. Incorporating an LED display eliminates the use of hazardous materials (mercury and arsenic) and promotes energy efficiency. In addition, Apple has an excellent recycling program in place, and the change to a nonremovable battery across all MacBook and MacBook Pro lines curbs the amount of waste heading into a landfill.

Historically, a depleted feature set and bloated prices have been the arguments against Apple's 13-inch laptops, and Apple's superior operating system and unparalleled design have been used in their defense. Now you can stand proud and say that the MacBook Pro 13-inch is a contender in terms of features (not to mention battery life) on top of all the other usual Apple triumphs.

APPENDIX G
CONSUMER-GENERATED COMMUNICATION FOR APPLE

Consumer Product Review
By Peter Anderson
(This review was directly quoted from his personal blog on June 14, 2009.)

Yihay! I got an Apple Macbook today and unpacked it at work. Working in IT, I could play with my new computer without arousing attention, other than the admiring looks and comments from co-workers. The lovable MacBook Pro 13-inch enhances its feature sets and throws in a bigger battery while lowering prices—which in the past would have been difficult for the company to pull off. All the improvements are signs that Apple is finally paying attention to its suggestion boxes. Indeed, it's a great time to be shopping for a new Apple laptop.

The MacBook Pro 13-inch measures only an inch thick, despite having a built-in optical drive, and uses the same Unibody enclosure carved out from a thick slab of aluminum. A metallic chassis and a thin design look absolutely gorgeous. Reshuffling the ports and the adding a bigger battery didn't affect the new model's weight. Like the previous versions, the MacBook Pro 13-inch weighs 4.5 pounds (5 pounds with the adapter).

Speaking of the aesthetic touches of a glass screen, the 13.3-inch widescreen, according to Apple, now has a 60 percent greater color gamut than that of its predecessor, and when placed alongside those of the previous MacBook, it's clearly the superior screen. Regarding tiled keyboard, touch and non-touch typists alike will find it easy to adapt to this keyboard, as it is full-size and tactile. Having your keyboard light up in the dark is another invaluable asset in this price range. Other models, specifically Windows-based laptops, have tried incorporating touch gestures into the touchpad, but none have touchpads as fluid and responsive as Apple's. Aside from having the largest touchpad, the MacBook Pro 13-inch is also an all-in-one, complete with the single-click mouse button and the two- to four-fingered touch gestures. The SD slot is the most compelling addition because no other Apple product before the MacBook Pro 13-inch has seen anything similar. The return of the FireWire port deserves extra credit to Apple for listening to its customers and for upgrading the port from FireWire 400 to 800.

In terms of internal components, the MacBook Pro 13-inch has the 2.26-GHz Intel Core 2 Duo P7550 CPU. It also has the advantage in graphics horsepower with an Nvidia GeForce 9400M integrated chipset, giving the 3D benefits and so ideal for video games. Increasing the capacity of the battery (without doing the same to its dimensions) is the toughest part, and Apple has pulled off this feat. The battery is now essentially nonremovable, which scored an admirable 4 hours 44 minutes. More than 5 hours of battery life (Apple claims 7 hours) can easily be achieved with the optimized operating system.

The MacBook Pro has acquired certifications from three accredited institutions. The laptop is certified for Energy Star (in this case 5.0), EPEAT Gold, and RoHS. Incorporating an LED display eliminates the use of hazardous materials (mercury and arsenic) and promotes energy efficiency. In addition, Apple has an excellent recycling program in place, and the change to a nonremovable battery across all MacBook and MacBook Pro lines curbs the amount of waste heading into a landfill.

So, my final thoughts? I love my new toy. Historically, a depleted feature set and bloated prices have been the arguments against Apple's 13-inch laptops, and Apple's superior operating system and unparalleled design have been used in their defense. Now you can stand proud and say that the MacBook Pro 13-inch is a contender in terms of features (not to mention battery life) on top of all the other usual Apple triumphs.

APPENDIX H
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR APPLE

Introduction

Thank you for taking time to participate in this study. The purpose of this research is to learn about how consumers evaluate product-related information of laptop computers. Please read the following questions carefully, and check one choice from the scale that best describes your thoughts or feelings. Your answers will be used only for statistical purposes and will remain strictly confidential. Thank you!

Section 1. Please answer the following question.

1. How familiar are you with the company Apple with respect to its products and services?
   Not familiar at all (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Very familiar

Section 2. How do agree/disagree with the following statements about the company Apple?

1. The company has a good reputation.
   Strongly disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Strongly agree
2. The company performs well compared to others.
   Strongly disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Strongly agree
3. The company is legitimate.
   Strongly disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Strongly agree
4. The company operates in an accepmanner.
   Strongly disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Strongly agree

Section 3. How do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

1. Among my circle of friends, I am one of the “experts” on laptop computers.
   Strongly disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Strongly agree
2. I know pretty much about laptop computers.
   Strongly disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Strongly agree
3. I do not feel very knowledgeable about laptop computers.
   Strongly disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Strongly agree
4. Compared to most other people, I know less about laptop computers.
   Strongly disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Strongly agree
5. When it comes to laptop computers, I really don’t know a lot.
   Strongly disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Strongly agree

Section 4. Please read the attached article regarding Apple’s MacBook Pro 13”, a new model launched in early June, and then continue to complete the rest of the questionnaire.

Section 5. Please identify the source of the article you read.

( ) Official Apple announcement
( ) Editor review
( ) Consumer review

Section 6. How would you rate the source of the article?

Undependable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Dependable
Dishonest	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Honest
Unreliable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Reliable
Insincere	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Sincere
Untrustworthy	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Trustworthy
Not an expert	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Expert
Inexperienced	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Experienced
Unknowledgeable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Knowledgeable
Unqualified	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Qualified
Unskilled	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Skilled

Section 7. Please answer the following questions.

1. To what extent did you try to evaluate the information in the article?
   Not at all (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) Very much
2. How much effort did you put into evaluating the information in the article?
   No effort at all (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) A great deal of effort
3. I paid close attention to the article.
   Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) Agree
4. I carefully read the article.
   Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) Agree

Section 8. After reading the article, please rate your overall impression of the company Apple.

Unfavorable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Favorable
Bad	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Good
Dislike	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Like
Negative	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Positive

Section 9. Demographics

1. Gender:

   ( ) Male ( ) Female

2. Age: _____

3. Current level of education:

   ( ) Freshman
   ( ) Sophomore
   ( ) Junior
   ( ) Senior or post-baccalaureate
   ( ) Graduate Student

Thank you very much for your participation!

APPENDIX I
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ACER

Introduction

Thank you for taking time to participate in this study. The purpose of this research is to learn about how consumers evaluate product-related information of laptop computers. Please read the following questions carefully, and check one choice from the scale that best describes your thoughts or feelings. Your answers will be used only for statistical purposes and will remain strictly confidential. Thank you!

Section 1. Please answer the following question.

2. How familiar are you with the company Acer with respect to its products and services?
   Not familiar at all (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Very familiar

Section 2. How do agree/disagree with the following statements about the company Acer?

6. The company has a good reputation.
   Strongly disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Strongly agree
7. The company performs well compared to others.
   Strongly disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Strongly agree
8. The company is legitimate.
   Strongly disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Strongly agree
9. The company operates in an accepmanner.
   Strongly disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Strongly agree

Section 3. How do you agree/disagree with the following statements?

5. Among my circle of friends, I am one of the "experts" on laptop computers.
   Strongly disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Strongly agree
6. I know pretty much about laptop computers.
   Strongly disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Strongly agree
7. I do not feel very knowledgeable about laptop computers.
   Strongly disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Strongly agree
8. Compared to most other people, I know less about laptop computers.
   Strongly disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Strongly agree
10. When it comes to laptop computers, I really don't know a lot.
    Strongly disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) Strongly agree

Section 4. Please read the attached article regarding Acer's Aspire 3935, a new model launched in early April, and then continue to complete the rest of the questionnaire.

Section 5. Please identify the source of the article you read.

( ) Official Acer announcement
( ) Editor review
( ) Consumer review

Section 6. How would you rate the source of the article?

Undependable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Dependable
Dishonest	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Honest
Unreliable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Reliable
Insincere	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Sincere
Untrustworthy	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Trustworthy
Not an expert	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Expert
Inexperienced	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Experienced
Unknowledgeable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Knowledgeable
Unqualified	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Qualified
Unskilled	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Skilled

Section 7. Please answer the following questions.

5. To what extent did you try to evaluate the information in the article?
   Not at all (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) Very much
6. How much effort did you put into evaluating the information in the article?
   No effort at all (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) A great deal of effort
7. I paid close attention to the article.
   Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) Agree
8. I carefully read the article.
   Disagree (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) (7) (8) (9) Agree

Section 8. After reading the article, please rate your overall impression of the company Acer.

Unfavorable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Favorable
Bad	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Good
Dislike	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Like
Negative	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Positive

Section 9. Demographics

1. Gender:

   ( ) Male ( ) Female

2. Age: _____

3. Current level of education:

   ( ) Freshman
   ( ) Sophomore
   ( ) Junior
   ( ) Senior or post-baccalaureate
   ( ) Graduate Student

Thank you very much for your participation!

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Wen-Hsin Cheng was born in Taipei, Taiwan. She earned a B.A. in Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics from National Taipei University (2006) in Taiwan. She joined the graduate program of the College of Journalism and Communication at the University of Florida in fall 2007. In summer 2009, she received a M.A. in Mass Communication with specialization in public relations. During her graduate studies, she was interested in applied communication research, including corporate social responsibility, brand management, and relationship management in public relations.