Diagnosticity and Materiality. Whether consumers dedicate a considerable degree of care to the processing of advertising information will also depend on the extent to which consumers consider the information to be useful. That is, if they perceive it as diagnostic, or instrumental in achieving their objectives (Feldman and Lynch, 1988; Lynch, Marmorstein and Weigold 1988). The FTC presumes that claims about a product's central characteristics (i.e., purpose, safety, healthfulness, efficacy, cost, durability, performance, warranties, or quality) are material. They are important to consumers and will likely influence their purchase decisions (Deception Policy Statement 1983). The courts assume that challenged claims are material, otherwise sellers would not waste resources to disseminate information that consumers do not care about, especially if it does not translate to increased preference for their product (Ford and Calfee 1986; Preston 1990; Richards 1990a; Stewart 1995).

The legal concept of materiality and the diagnosticity construct both address the importance of advertising claims to consumers. However, there may be significant differences in the perceived importance of a claim from time one, when consumers are exposed to an ad, to time two, when they must make a purchase decision. Thus, the model in Figure 2 suggests that materiality be considered when consumers recruit information from memory, not simply at time of exposure.

Comprehension: Inference Making and Elaboration

Comprehension involves a series of processes with opposite functions. It requires that we extract the general meaning of an advertisement, simplifying the details into the gist of the message. At the same time, comprehension involves elaboration upon the presented information in order to arrive at a meaningful interpretation of an ad (Hunt and