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**WHAT DOES 'FOLK WISDOM' ABOUT DECEPTIVENESS
IN ADVERTISING SAY ABOUT CONSUMERS'
WILLINGNESS-TO-BUY? THE CASE OF DRTV**

By

Karan J. Wyre

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

WHAT DOES 'FOLK WISDOM' ABOUT DECEPTIVENESS IN ADVERTISING SAY ABOUT CONSUMERS' WILLINGNESS-TO-BUY? THE CASE OF DRTV

By

Karan J. Wyre

Direct response television advertising, or DRTV advertising, is a commercial format which involves the marketing of products and services directly to the consumer (e.g., via a toll-free telephone number). Because DRTV advertising combines two advertising methods that consumers perceive as deceptive and misleading (that is, television and direct marketing), this study examined consumers' beliefs about the tactics used in traditional DRTV short-form advertising, the nature of the products typically featured in such advertising, and the motives of advertisers who rely upon the format to sell their goods. The main goal of the study was to determine whether consumers hold a set of culturally-shared beliefs (or, folk wisdom) about the deceptiveness of the DRTV short advertising format. A secondary goal was to assess whether two relatively new and unfamiliar features that have recently come into use in hybrid DRTV commercials (i.e., commercials that are a blend of direct response and brand image advertising) increase the persuasiveness of traditional DRTV short form advertising among certain groups of consumers. The new features examined were the use of website addresses, and major advertisers utilizing the format to advertise a well-known brand.

Consumers' beliefs about DRTV advertising were measured using a newly-developed scale (the DRTV Deceptiveness Beliefs measure). Factor analysis of the scale identified seven dimensions of beliefs about DRTV deceptiveness.

The study found that adult consumers do appear to hold a set of culturally-shared, slightly deceptive beliefs about the nature of DRTV short form advertising. Additionally, these beliefs have a slight influence on individuals' willingness-to-buy from DRTV short form advertising (the persuasiveness measure) when website addresses are included in these ads, though no such influence was found when major brands are featured. The study also found that neither having past purchase experience with DRTV advertising, nor demographic variables (such as gender, income and education) appear to influence consumers' DRTV deceptiveness beliefs, or their willingness-to-buy from DRTV advertising when unfamiliar features are included in these ads.

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2001

Dedicated to

My Beautiful, Loving Husband,

Leon

Our Wonderful Children,

Louis Kyle and Leon, Jr.

My Loving Mother,

Jacqueline Kailimai

and

To the Memory of My Beloved Father,

Bailey E. Kailimai

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the advent of television in the 1940's, the effectiveness of the direct response television (hereafter DRTV) short commercial format has made it a mainstay of many direct marketing advertising programs. Yet, despite its positive qualities (as seen by advertisers), DRTV has also long been a target of criticism and consumer suspicion. In the early days of television, for example, station managers looked upon direct marketing as a necessary evil. Although products using the format sold successfully (and benefitted TV stations), they were often viewed as unreliable; and the commercials advertising them were considered unsophisticated (e.g., Eicoff, 1988; Auchmutey, 1985; and Cleaver, 1984). In 1960, the myriad offers for records, salad makers, slicers, dicers, knives and vitamins, replete with exaggerated claims, also drew the attention of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).¹

It has also been suggested that the decades of consumer exposure to a variety of executional elements typically used in DRTV advertisements (e.g., product demonstrations, celebrity endorsements, testimonials, etc.) has led many consumers to become suspicious of this particular format (Witek, 1981). This 'lack of trust' notion was

¹Eicoff (1988) notes that FCC Chairman Newton Minnow issued a directive asserting that stations carrying commercials more than 120 seconds long would find it difficult to obtain a license renewal. In addition, Eicoff states that, "Minnow pointed out that because of the high percentage of fly-by-night entrepreneurs using television for direct marketing, the FCC would frown upon broadcasters that allowed direct marketers to use their facilities," (p. 161).

generally corroborated in a recent study by Korgoankar et al., (1997). In their study of consumers' overall direct marketing attitudes, these researchers found that individuals who were the most critical of direct marketing singled-out DRTV advertising as the least influential method of advertising (as compared to other media and word of mouth). This finding led these researchers to conclude that other direct marketing advertising methods may be a better choice than DRTV.

Recently, however, a new type of short-form direct response commercial has come increasingly into use. Hybrids, as they are called, have been hailed by DRTV practitioners as the television advertising format of the future (Bliwas, 2000). In contrast to traditional DRTV short form commercials, hybrids have improved production quality, and use creative executions which are more similar to television brand image advertisements. As a result of improvements like these, and other benefits over-and-above the accountability generally offered by direct response advertising methods, practitioners contend that there exists a high degree of diversity among the types of companies currently using short-form DRTV advertising.²

Yet, admittedly there is still some reluctance on the part of many major advertisers to use either type of DRTV short-form advertising (Bliwas, 2000; Douglas, 1997). One indicator of this skepticism is the fact that television analysts foresee network spending, a mainstay for television brand image advertising, continuing to dominate over the next several years (Consoli, 1999). Although there may be many reasons for advertisers to be skeptical, one possibility is a general lack of knowledge regarding how consumers

²Use of infomercials, a longer form DRTV advertisements has also increased.

perceive DRTV short-form advertising. This issue is based on the fact that there has been very little published empirical research on how consumers respond to this format (Nowak, 1992).

However, if consumers' cognitive responses toward other, related forms of advertising are any indication of how they respond to DRTV short-form commercials, then advertisers may have good reason to be skeptical of this format. This is because research examining consumer perceptions and attitudes toward advertising, in general; on television; and toward direct marketing, in general, has identified a variety of negative issues facing these areas. These findings, which have persisted since the seminal study conducted by Bauer and Greyser (1968), generally conclude that consumers have unfavorable views of advertising.

More recent studies have found that consumers are critical of specific claims made in advertising (e.g., Newell, Goldsmith and Banzhaf, 1998; Ford, Smith and Swasy, 1990), of the increased level of competition among firms in the direct marketing industry, and that they perceive direct marketing efforts largely as an invasion of privacy (e.g., Akaah, Korgoankar and Lund, 1995). Consumers have also been found to hold specific negative beliefs and perceptions about television advertising. These include the belief that it is offensive, and that there is too much of it (Alwitt and Prabhaker, 1992), and that it is silly, fussing over trivial differences and insulting of an average consumer's intelligence; it is also perceived as deceptive, boring, annoying, and/or in bad taste (Mittal, 1994).

Some suggest that these kinds of issues may culminate in a consumer back-lash effect toward advertising, in general (O'Leary, 2000; Voight, 2000; Shevitz, 1999). More specifically, because the DRTV short-format continues to proliferate, this format may be a

prime candidate for such a reaction. If this occurs, the reason may be due to the possibility that, over time, consumers have acquired 'folk wisdom' about the deceptiveness of various aspects of the DRTV short commercial format. While no empirical evidence of the existence of folk wisdom about DRTV advertising has been found, anecdotal evidence is offered in the numerous parodies and satirical skits performed in comedy acts on television. These skits typically make fun of the ever-present, fast-talking announcer boasting inflated claims about useless products which are shoddily-manufactured and intended to separate unwitting consumers from their money in return for little or nothing of value. A prime example of this is the classic I Love Lucy episode when Lucy is hired to hawk a vitamin product in a DRTV commercial.

The persuasion knowledge model, or PKM, is a cognitive processing model which contends that, over time, consumers develop 'folk wisdom', or a set of culturally-shared beliefs about how persuasion works (Friestad and Wright, 1994). They rely upon these beliefs (commonly called 'schemas') in an effort to evaluate advertisements they are exposed to, and to cope with them. A key point of this model is that it also holds that such beliefs are triggered by the use of familiar executional elements, or tactics, in advertisements. When these beliefs are triggered, they may evoke related sets of beliefs in consumers' minds which, in turn, lead to broader evaluations (or attitudes) of a specific object.

Given DRTV advertisers' long-term reliance upon (and commonplace use of) various executional elements with which consumers are likely to be very familiar (e.g., a toll-free telephone number, free offers, testimonials, etc.), many of these elements may have come to be construed as tactics associated (perhaps exclusively) with this format.

Furthermore, given the long history of criticism toward the DRTV short advertising format, it is conceivable that people have developed folk beliefs about the format which may reflect some aspects of these criticisms.

Learning the nature of consumers' beliefs about DRTV short-form advertising, and whether they reflect folk wisdom, seems an especially important issue for major advertisers who are trying to weigh the potential benefits associated with using the format against the possibility that consumers may not respond positively to 'their' use of the format. A second important reason for determining whether cultural folk beliefs exist for DRTV deceptiveness is that, if they are found to exist, this could be seen as support for the 'caveat emptor' position currently held by federal regulators on the issue of advertising deception. If consumers do tend to hold deceptiveness beliefs about certain aspects of DRTV advertising, this might indicate that the format should be considered in the same legal light as tactics like advertising puffery.³

Therefore, the goal of the present study will be to investigate consumers' beliefs about certain aspects of short-form DRTV advertising. Specifically, the study will attempt to: 1) determine whether a DRTV deceptiveness beliefs schema exists for adult consumers; and if found, 2) investigate its potential influence on consumers' expressed willingness to purchase from DRTV advertisements (i.e., the dependent variable).

The dependent variable in this study is also intended to assess the capability of

³Preston (1975) notes that, by legal definition, puffery is any advertising or sales presentation which praises the item to be sold with objective opinions, superlatives, or exaggerations vaguely and generally, while stating no specific facts. He also notes that the Federal Trade Commission's primary action toward puffery has been to protect its use, on the basis that "certain falsities known as puffery are [viewed as] non-deceptive in the face of strong reasons for believing they are actually deceptive," (pg. 15).

two recent features of hybrid-type DRTV commercials (namely, web site addresses and major advertisers' brands⁴) to significantly increase individuals' willingness-to-buy when they perceive the DRTV format itself as deceptive. If this does occur, it may indicate that the mere addition of executional elements that consumers are unfamiliar with may, in effect, prevent a DRTV 'deceptiveness schema' from being triggered in a consumer's mind. On the other hand, if willingness-to-buy when hybrid features are included (along with traditional tactics) does not increase significantly when the format itself is perceived as deceptive, this may indicate that the use of unfamiliar features in short-form DRTV commercials are not capable of bypassing a DRTV deceptiveness schema. In this case, according to the PKM, individuals' coping responses would be likely to be evoked for hybrid-type as well as traditional DRTV advertisements. Either occurrence, however, would be valuable information for advertisers considering the use of DRTV short-form advertising.

Chapter II will begin by presenting a brief history of the short-form DRTV commercial's use, as well as the criticisms which have surrounded it and related aspects of advertising. This chapter will also review the available consumer behavior and marketing literature regarding consumer beliefs research with respect to advertising in general, in direct marketing and on television. Finally, it will present the framework which this study will use in order to investigate consumers' beliefs about DRTV short-form advertising.

⁴These are considered new features because both have only recently begun to be used in DRTV commercials, and therefore beliefs about them are not likely to have been formed as yet. This is likely to be the case because: 1) web site addresses only began to be included in such ads within the past several years; and 2) with only a few industries having begun using the format, major brands are also still a relatively new (and unfamiliar) feature in DRTV commercials.

Chapter III will present the methodology for this study. The results will be presented in Chapter IV, followed by a discussion of the findings and conclusions in Chapter V.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Brief History of DRTV Advertising and An Overview of Related Consumer Advertising Research

Direct response television advertising, or DRTV advertising, is a commercial format which involves the marketing of products directly to the consumer (e.g., via a toll-free telephone number). Having come into existence with the advent of television, short-form DRTV commercials have changed little since 1946, when Daniel Rubin, one of the first marketers to use this type of commercial, filmed pitchmen from Atlantic City's boardwalk in action and used them successfully to sell his Florida fashion line via television. This loud and pushy style, together with its call for immediate action on the part of viewers, caused DRTV advertising to become considered as synonymous with the 'hard-sell' advertising approach widely used in the early days of television⁵ (Wright, Winter and Ziegler, 1982).

Due in part, however, to growing public criticism regarding the intrusive, high-pressure and often deceptive tactics of TV advertising (in general, and especially in DRTV commercials), the 1960's began what Fox (1984) termed a 'creative revolution' in television advertising. More and more, commercials began to emphasize persuasion through creativity, achieving this through focusing on the entertainment capacity of television. This newer style, judged more preferable by consumers than hard sell

⁵The hard-sell approach was also the original copy style of early print advertising.

advertising, was termed the 'soft sell' approach⁶ (Wright , Winter and Ziegler, 1982).

Because it often emphasized the image (or personality) of the advertised brand, television commercials using this latter style came to be known generally as 'brand' or 'image' advertising.⁷ Thus, today the distinction between traditional DRTV short form commercials and brand image commercials is generally made upon the basis of the particular approach used (i.e., 'hard' or 'soft' sell), as well as the call for immediate viewer action, which is always featured in the former type of commercial format.⁸

An equally profound reaction to the problems associated with DRTV during this period came by way of federal-level restrictions, which were tied to the renewal of licenses for television stations airing these commercials. In compliance with FCC regulations issued in 1960, which limited commercials to no more than 120 seconds in length, the policies of many television stations regarding DRTV advertising started to change between 1961 and 1963. The end result was that stations, though still desirous of the income generated by direct marketers, began to closely monitor the reliability of direct

⁶This approach also originated in earlier print advertising, shortly after the turn of the century. Early figures in advertising (e.g., Walter Dill Scott, author of *The Psychology of Advertising*) referred to such print advertisements as 'impressionistic' or suggestive in style (Fox, 1984).

⁷While David Ogilvy came to be know as the 'father of the image school' of advertising, other creative approaches were also prominent at the time. William Bernbach, for example, instituted the idea of bringing together the artist and copy writer to create advertising with powerful visual imagery, while communicating in a truthful, intimate and sympathetic fashion (Wright, Winter and Ziegler, 1982).

⁸Although not a focus of this paper, infomercials are another form of DRTV advertising. While very similar to the short format, this format is characterized by product demonstrations which are typically performed in front of a studio audience. They also usually last between fifteen and thirty minutes (thus, they are referred to as 'long form' DRTV).

marketer sponsors and the lengths of their DRTV commercials (Eicoff, 1988).

Despite these problems, however, use of the DRTV short format still proliferated. In fact, one event that led to a major increase in the use of direct response advertising was the banning of cigarette advertising on television in the 1970's. When networks and local stations found themselves with loads of unsold air-time, direct marketers took advantage of cheap broadcast rates (Witek, 1981). Ultimately, the television advertising copy style in this period came to resemble that of the 1950's, as the 'hard sell' approach was more appropriate for the tighter economic climate facing advertisers then (Fox, 1984).

Throughout its existence, smaller direct marketers have continued to rely upon short-form DRTV advertisements. This reliance is due to the high audience reach and frequency offered by television, and the low production and air-time costs associated with it. These factors, along with the ability of direct response methods to generate results, are why DRTV remains a prime advertising method for these individuals. Eicoff (1988 and 1995) cites a variety of small companies who have profited handsomely for decades from the use of direct response television advertising. One case cited is that of the Grant Company of Chicago, which offered a hair-cutting comb called 'Hair Wiz'. Up until 1985, and after 23 years of selling via DRTV advertising, the company recorded sales of about 200,000 units per year. As many still do today, these commercials used the 'boardwalk pitchman' approach to create interest and hold the attention of the viewer long enough to make a sale.

Eicoff (1988), on the traditional direct response commercial formula, states:

"The presentation includes a holder, that is, a promise of something sensational to come, ranging from free prizes to a never-before-seen miracle. [Then] the presentation of the problem involved an ailment, a

difficult chore, or a substandard product performance. Then came a solution with a visual demonstration or verbal description of how the seller's product would solve the problem . . . Then came the *turn*, that part of the presentation that asked the potential customer to reach in his pocket for the money. The turn was always reinforced by a guarantee of satisfaction that ended with "or your money will be cheerfully refunded," (p. 51).

Many direct marketing commercials continue to be based on this approach, using the hard sell style and traditional tactics that were used in the early years of DRTV. And DRTV also remains a viable method of advertising for a variety of direct marketing manufacturers to this day, according to many DRTV practitioners (e.g., Douglas, 1997; Andrews, 1999; Bliwas, 2000).

A testament to the effectiveness (and longevity) of the DRTV advertising method is the fact that, within the past three decades, several books (see, for example Witek, 1981; Eicoff, 1988 and 1995), and a host of direct marketing and advertising industry magazine articles have been devoted specifically to the topic of creating broadcast DRTV advertisements. Nowak (1992), for example, cites a total of twelve articles written on the subject between 1982 and 1990, in trade magazines such as Adweek, Advertising Age, Direct Marketing, Cable World, Television/Radio Age, Adweek's Marketing Week, and Chain-Store Age. The topic is still addressed in many of the same (and other) vehicles today.

Something else which has not changed about the DRTV short format, however, is the fact that it continues to draw criticism from consumers, consumer advocacy groups, and regulatory agencies a like (see, for example, Storholm and Friedman, 1989; Collins, 1995, 1996a and 1996b; and Korgoankar, et al., 1997) (and for many of the same abuses

cited earlier). The age of television increased the already wide-spread public criticism of the advertising industry, as a whole.⁹ Citing results from Public Opinion polls over the past several decades, Fox (1984) notes, for example, that: “In 1946, 41 percent of the American people found half or more of all advertising misleading, and 54 percent said it played too much on the audience’s emotions; in 1950, 80 percent complained that it led people to buy things they didn’t need or could not afford, and 81 percent called for stricter government regulation; in 1952, 68 percent rejected testimonials as insincere,” (pg. 200).

Another occurrence which may have helped fuel these earlier criticisms was the public’s realization that marketers used the findings of motivational research to help develop their advertising. The book The Hidden Persuaders (Packard, 1958) has been credited with helping to make the general public aware of both advertisers’ interest in understanding what motivates people to buy, and of the subsequent use of motivational tactics in consumer advertising. Indeed, several experts on the subject of DRTV advertising acknowledge that many of the tactics used in these commercials were often the target of consumers’ concerns (e.g., Witek, 1981; Eicoff, 1995; Brady and Vasquez, 1996). Considering that many DRTV commercials today still rely upon virtually the same types of tactics that were used originally, it is not surprising that consumers are still critical of this particular advertising format.

⁹The advertising industry has been the subject of widespread criticism throughout its existence in the United States. The general criticism has regarded the lack of truthfulness in advertisements.

The Landscape of Television Advertising — Will Hybrids Change It?

While several figures have been reported over the past decade, there is no agreement on how brand image television advertising compares proportionately (i.e., in terms of amount of air-time) to DRTV short-form advertising. For example, a 1990 content analysis study of six TV networks concluded that direct response TV commercials accounted for approximately 17 percent of television ads (Bush and Bush, 1990). A more recent study cited in Direct Marketing (1998) magazine reported the figure at 24 percent. And Fletcher (1999) cites an unnamed study as reporting that some 20 percent of all TV commercials use a direct response mechanism (and are therefore DRTV commercials). However, this author disputes this figure, noting that, as no one knows how many new commercials are made each year, it would be impossible to determine the exact proportion of each type of commercial.

Whatever the true proportion, a recent innovation in the DRTV advertising industry has caused several DRTV practitioners to make striking predictions about the future of television advertising. Namely, that a new type of DRTV commercial will virtually replace brand image commercials in the near future.¹⁰ This new format began to emerge in the early 1990's. Using both higher production and creative quality, 'hybrids' (as they have recently come to be known) allow advertisers to blend the entertainment value of television brand image advertising with the traditional action techniques of direct response advertising. A general notion underlying the use of hybrids is that, since the

¹⁰Bliwas (2000) predicts this will occur within the next five to ten years. In 1990, Alter (1990) predicted that general and DRTV advertising would be indistinguishable within 10 to 15 years.

purchase of a product is influenced by consumers' liking of it as well as the entertainment its advertising provides, the creativity of direct marketing advertising adds value to advertised products (e.g., Wunderman, 1996; Korgoankar et al., 1997; Bliwas, 2000).

Nowak (1992) credits a variety of factors for bringing about this newer type of DRTV commercial. This author notes that the increased consumer acceptance of direct marketing; inflation in advertising costs; and demands for advertising accountability; along with the entry of automobile manufacturers, large financial service institutions, and major corporations such as AT&T, American Express, and Time/Life, have all led to the displacement of smaller firms (such as Urban products, the distributor of 'Ginsu' knives; and Ronco, the distributor of the 'Veg-A-Matic' slicer) as the major direct response advertisers.¹¹

Two more indirect reasons may also serve as a basis for the lofty predictions about hybrid DRTV short-form advertising. They are the recent advances in television technology, and the proliferation of cable television stations. Digital technology has brought interactive television closer to being a reality than ever before. Its promise to advertisers is that it will provide ways to target ads to specific audience members, allowing them to respond immediately, via interactive television. In addition, cable's narrower audience focus is expected to allow more specialized niches for advertisers. As a result, DRTV practitioners view DRTV commercials, and especially the hybrids, as a 'natural'

¹¹Although Nowak does not specify the meaning of the term 'major', it likely regards the proportion of advertising dollars spent by larger corporations as compared to that spent by smaller DRTV advertisers (as opposed to the amount of actual air-time). This is due to the fact that larger advertisers' commercials are normally run during prime-time programming, which is considerably more expensive than other dayparts, where the smaller DRTV advertisers tend to spend their advertising dollars.

for both of these new ways of using television. So far, however, it is questionable whether advertisers will make these predictions a reality.

Hybrid DRTV ads also provide advertisers with more of the options offered by other direct response methods, such as direct mail and direct response magazine advertising. For example, the inclusion of a web site address as an additional response mode provides a means of generating leads and inquiries (qualities generally associated with print direct response methods). In addition, branded direct response, a specific type of hybrid DRTV commercial, can be used to help build brand awareness, build store traffic, as well as sell the product directly (Andrews, 1999).

According to DRTV practitioners, the innovation of hybrid DRTV advertising has resulted in short-form DRTV's winning converts from among a variety of major companies, including tech firms, consumer product makers, and financial services firms. And this diversity is expected to grow, as it is anticipated that more and more major advertisers will begin to rely upon short-form DRTV advertising. Bliwas (2000) states, for example, that: "This diversity is self-perpetuating, and it's inevitable that advertisers and their agencies will continue to test innovative approaches, thereby broadening the discipline," (p. 3). Bliwas predicts that, within the next five to ten years, TV will virtually become a direct response medium.

DRTV experts concur, however, that traditional short form DRTV commercials still dominate the industry currently (e.g., Bliwas, 2000; Andrews, 1999; Hatch, 1999; Douglas, 1997). Yet, only one study, cited in an article in Direct Marketing (1998) magazine, has reported the current proportion of traditional DRTV short-form versus 'hybrid' DRTV commercials. This study, conducted by the 'Response Marketing Group',

investigated the number of these commercials that contain web site addresses, a key feature of hybrids. Its authors monitored seven networks for a month and analyzed nearly 5,000 commercials airing during 170 hours of evening, news, sports, and morning programming. They found that 19 percent of television commercials contained a web site address. However, this figure is in stark contrast to an estimate by Hatch (1999) which suggests that some 75% of all DRTV short-form commercials now include web site addresses.

And while traditional DRTV spots are expected to remain a strong category, the lead-generating hybrids are expected to provide the growth of the industry (Andrews, 1999). In particular, it is expected that dotcoms, auto manufacturers, and generally companies which are more interested in lead generation than in direct sales, will be the top industries for growth in DRTV advertising spending over the next year (Broadcasting and Cable, 2000).

One industry that appears to have embraced the hybrid DRTV short format recently is the pharmaceuticals industry. Shortly after the August 1997 announcement of new guidelines for radio and television advertising of prescription drugs by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), direct-to-consumer prescription drug advertising began hitting the airwaves. The new FDA guidelines allow manufacturers to include health claims, provided that they include information on major side effects, and list a free phone number or Internet site for consumers to obtain additional information.

There are, however, several indications that it may be some time before any DRTV short format becomes 'the future of TV'. The recent major decline in interest in e-commerce, for instance, suggests that the briefly-popular 'dotcom' advertisers may not

have as positive an outlook as DRTV practitioners thought (Detroit News, 8/10/00).

Another impediment to any immediate change in the landscape of television advertising may be short-form DRTV's image problem (a likely result of the wide-spread criticism of the format). While the efficiencies created for advertisers by this method are appealing, the realization of DRTV practitioners' predictions are dependent upon adoption of the format by major advertisers. So far, however, many major advertisers, as well as many traditional advertising agency practitioners, remain skeptical of the format in general (Douglas, 1997; Bliwas, 2000).

There are several factors that may be taken as evidence of this skepticism. First, although the DRTV category is expected to grow, industry analysts contend that network television (where brand image advertising dominates) will remain the primary television advertising vehicle through 2003 (Consoli, 1999). This suggests that major advertisers will continue using brand advertising, and thus remain largely dependent upon network television for at least the first few years of this decade.

There is also a question as to whether DRTV short-form advertising is currently seen by major advertisers at-large as a strong alternative to traditional brand image commercials. Although a recent Direct Marketing Association report (2000 Economic Impact: U.S. Direct Marketing Today, [April 6, 2000]) shows that DRTV's overall (i.e., short and long ad formats) proportion of total television ad spending has increased consecutively over the past several years (from 37 percent in 1998, to 38 percent in 1999; and it was projected to rise to 39.6 percent in 2000),¹² it should be noted that these annual

¹²Total television advertising expenditures (including network, cable, syndicated and spot) for 1998, 1999, and 2000 (estimated) were \$47.7 billion, \$50.4 billion and \$55.3

percentage point increases appear to be driven largely by pharmaceutical companies' increased television advertising spending. OnHealth (2000) magazine reports that in 1998, this industry's total television advertising spending comprised 4 percent of DRTV advertising, at \$664 million. In 1999, pharmaceuticals' advertising spending rose to \$1.1 billion, and accounted for 6 percent of total DRTV ad expenditures. Therefore, while DRTV's proportion of total television spending did actually increase,¹³ it does not appear that this was due to the format's attracting the diversity of major advertisers (as Bliwas had predicted), but to an increase in spending by this single industry. In fact, controlling for the dollars spent by the pharmaceuticals firms, total DRTV advertising spending actually decreased slightly (from 33 percent in 1998, and to 32 percent in 1999).

For 2000, the projection for pharmaceutical companies' television advertising spending was set at \$2 billion. If this goal was actually reached,¹⁴ it means that this industry's spending accounted for close to 10 percent of overall DRTV advertising for the year 2000 expenditures (the total figure for which was projected at \$21.9 billion).

Controlling again for pharmaceutical companies' DRTV expenditures, this would indicate

billion, respectively. Based upon these totals, and DRTV's proportions, non-DRTV advertising accounted for a total of \$30 billion (or 63 percent of total advertising spending) in 1998, \$31 billion (or 62 percent of total ad spending) in 1999, and an expected \$33.4 billion in 2000 (or 60 percent of total ad spending).

¹³Total DRTV expenditures (including short- and long-form infomercials) for 1998, 1999, and 2000 (estimated) were \$17.65 billion, \$19.17 billion and \$21.9 billion, respectively. *Response* magazine (<http://www.responsemagazine.com/topics/mediabillings/1Q00mediabillings.html/>) reports, however, infomercials accounted for \$.84 billion in 1998, for \$.86 billion in 1999, and \$.95 billion in 2000. This equates to a 2 percent annual contribution by infomercials to DRTV's total proportion of all television advertising dollars for this three year period.

¹⁴Compilation of actual media spending totals is published by Advertising Age in fall (2001).

that DRTV's proportion of total television advertising expenditures for 2000 that were attributable to other direct marketers actually fell to approximately 30 percent (i.e., two percentage points below the 1999 figure). Therefore, based upon the current trends in television advertising spending, it does not appear that the DRTV short format commercial is currently viewed by major advertisers at-large as an alternative to brand image television advertising. Furthermore, the skepticism on the part of many potential DRTV advertisers (as noted by Douglas [1999] and Bliwas [2000]) may be due to their uncertainty about what short form DRTV advertising has to offer them.

Consumer Responses to DRTV Advertisements and Advertiser Uncertainty

In addition to the criticisms facing DRTV advertising, two more general factors which may be having an impact on advertiser uncertainty about the format are a lack of understanding of how consumers respond to DRTV advertising, and that many practitioners' (and researchers') hold divergent views about what should be the goals of direct response television advertising.

Citing a paucity of published empirical research on consumer responses to DRTV advertising, Nowak (1992) called for researchers to investigate how and why direct response advertising techniques work. Specifically, he noted that, with few exceptions (e.g., Ahkter, 1989; Shim and Drake, 1990), research has been relatively unconcerned with how consumers process direct response advertising. Presently, while a host of articles boasting the benefits of DRTV appear in trade magazines, research examining the cognitive processing of direct response advertising (and especially DRTV advertising) remains largely unexplored.

As for published studies which have explored the area of direct response advertising processing in recent years, the focus has been on assessing consumers' attitudes toward the methodological aspects used in the field (e.g., Korgoankar et al., 1997), and their determinants (e.g., Akaah, et al., 1995). Areas receiving some attention include consumer perceptions of (e.g., Rogers, 1996) and satisfaction with mail and telephone direct response methods (e.g., Morrow and Tankersly, 1994), as well as consumers' privacy concerns about direct response methods, in general (e.g., Nowak, 1995; Milne and Rohm, 2000). Yet, several aspects of consumer response in this area still have yet to be addressed. One particular area which has yet to be examined regards their specific beliefs and perceptions about the format itself.

Nowak's (1992) own study on consumer response raises another point which could add to the uncertainty issue. It has to do with the divergent goals inherent in traditional direct response advertising methods (including DRTV) and brand image advertising. The study examined the relationship between viewer characteristics (i.e., demographics, experience and their beliefs concerning the risks associated with direct response shopping) and their subsequent responses to DRTV commercials. These responses included arousal, pleasure, attitudes (both toward the ad and the advertiser), and purchase intention. Based on his finding of non-significant correlations in two of these areas (i.e., demographics and risk-related beliefs), he concluded that these types of viewer characteristics were not related to peoples' affective responses to DRTV ads, such as enjoyability and attention. This conclusion is consistent with the general notion underlying the use of entertainment devices in DRTV commercials. That is, if beliefs nor demographics have an impact on whether consumers like the ads, and liking the ads leads

to product purchase, then entertainment (e.g., via the use of creative techniques found in brand image television) can work effectively in DRTV spots.

However, there are problems with several aspects of this conclusion. First, the beliefs investigated by Nowak relate only to the five perceived risk areas that people associate with in-home shopping (i.e., financial risk, performance risk, social risk, time-loss risk and source risk). Other types of beliefs that can influence the consumers' reactions may exist which may not be associated with any perceived risk. Also, it would be useful to learn what beliefs underlie any such perceptions.

Second, while evidence of the lead-generating capability of 'entertaining' DRTV commercials is cited in many recent practitioner articles (e.g., Bliwas, 2000; McLaughlin, 1999; Andrews, 1999), so far, evidence of their ability to directly induce product purchase appears to be limited to only a few product and service types (e.g., book, CD and video marketers, and financial product marketers).

Finally, while creative goals such as likability and enjoyability are features that lend 'entertainment value' to television commercials, they are in contrast to the generally understood traditional goals of direct response advertising methods (i.e., to inform and generate an immediate response). As Vanden Bergh and James (1990) note, while product/store image advertising attempts to elicit consumer response at a slower rate than direct response ads (since they do not call for immediate action), "the very nature of direct response offers the hope of finding an advertising strategy which requires information as part of its normal approach," (pg. 24).

Also on the issue of the slower response rates generated by brand image advertising, Fletcher (1999) notes that, while direct response advertisers want immediate

response, advertisers interested in creating awareness of their products and services (i.e., brand image advertisers) generally expect a delayed response. Thus, planting an idea in viewers' minds which will prompt them to take action the next time they visit the retailer (which may not be for a few weeks, or even years) is a lot different than spurring them into instant action.

Fletcher also points out that humorous advertising, a mainstay of image and awareness advertising, doesn't work well in DRTV ads either. As a result, a communications goal such as 'remembering' is not easily attained with this format (since people tend to better remember ads they like).

Eicoff (1988 and 1995) has long argued against the use of brand image advertising techniques in direct response television advertisements. Noting that "effective [direct response] television advertising often is interesting rather than entertaining," Eicoff suggests that the most efficient way to sell using the television medium is to "get right down to the business of selling," and not try to entertain the viewer (pp. 50-51).¹⁵

In summary, in order for DRTV to truly replace brand image advertising (as has been predicted), this would require the wide-scale adoption of the kinds of creative techniques employed in the creation of brand image advertising (e.g., humor, slice-of-life, etc.), while maintaining the important components of direct response methods (i.e., an

¹⁵On this issue, Eicoff (1988) notes that, "the entertainment aspect of advertising did not become part of the creative aspect [of direct response advertising] until the advent of broadcast. By the time broadcast became a reality, the creative personnel were so far removed from the client's overall marketing program and sales thrusts that they lost the ability to evaluate their efforts. In effect, they lost the score keeping mechanism [i.e., to return an immediate profit]. . . [thus, the advertising creative community] made up their own way to keep score: awards!" (Pg. 50).

immediate feedback mechanism, an action orientation and an emphasis on information).

Yet, both these types of advertising are, by their very nature, in conflict with one another.

This has led several DRTV experts to suggest that the notion that DRTV can truly replace brand image advertising is not probable.

Furthermore, disagreement on the issue of entertainment in DRTV commercials, along with the criticisms of direct response advertising methods (both in general and specific to DRTV), and the dearth of knowledge about consumers' specific reactions to DRTV advertising, may represent several causes for uncertainty among advertisers who are considering foraging into the area of DRTV. One way in which to help decrease their uncertainty is by broadening the understanding of consumers' specific beliefs associated with DRTV short-form advertising.

The Influence of Consumers' Beliefs about Advertising on DRTV Responses

As with any marketing-related topic, consumer beliefs (especially those which may underlie any concerns about the DRTV industry) are important because they are thought to influence consumers' subsequent evaluations and their behavioral intentions toward directly marketed goods (Peter and Olson, 1999). And Korgoankar et al., (1997) contend that "an understanding of consumers' direct marketing advertising beliefs is important if direct marketers desire to succeed in enhancing patronage of their products/services," (p. 2).¹⁶ However, despite the long history of criticisms surrounding direct response television advertising (e.g., its intrusiveness, deceptiveness and use of high pressure

¹⁶They also note that marketers have not come to understand these beliefs very well.

techniques [Fox, 1984]), consumer beliefs relating to these specific types of issues have not received much research attention, except for as they relate to the formation of attitudes toward direct marketing advertising methods, as a whole (e.g., Akaah et al., 1995; Korgoankar et al., 1997).

Another reason that it is important to begin to understand these types of beliefs is because of how consumers traditionally view other direct response advertising methods which are intended to generate leads and inquiries (e.g., direct mail). Consumer concerns in this area broadly relate to the issue of privacy (see, for example, Nowak, 1995; Phelps, Gonzenbach, and Johnson, 1994) as well as to the intrusiveness of direct response advertising, which is caused by the ever-increasing number of marketer solicitations (Storholm and Friedman, 1989; Akaah et al., 1995).

Based largely on the multiattribute attitude model of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), the study of market-related beliefs has received considerable attention in the consumer behavior literature. In this model, beliefs are defined strictly in terms of the likelihood that a specific brand (or other object) has a specific attribute. Thus, these types of studies have generally viewed beliefs as a component of attitudes toward some particular marketing-related object, such as direct marketing (Akaah et al., 1995), advertising (e.g., Kuehl and Dyer, 1977; Rossiter and Percy, 1980; Muehling, 1987; Smith and Swinyard, 1988), brands (e.g., Lutz, 1985) and product knowledge (e.g., Alba and Hutchinson, 1987).

Others note, however, that consumers' beliefs may also reflect more generalized associations. Duncan and Olshavsky (1982), for example, point out that, in the context of consumer decision making behaviors, beliefs can be associated with classes of objects (e.g., buyers, products, vendors), product attributes (e.g., price, quality) and with notions

about how the marketplace operates over time (e.g., competition, change, etc.). One way in which consumers' market beliefs become associated with such objects is through their experiences with these objects (e.g., with brands that are purchased over time). These associations also provide a way of quickly assessing newly encountered brands that have traits similar to those of other brands the consumer is already familiar with (Alpert, 1993).

These latter notions regarding beliefs are based on the psychological literature, which typically defines belief as “a proposition that conveys information about the relationship between two independent concepts” (Kendler, 1968, p. 579). Accordingly, Bem (1970, p. 4) states, “If a man perceives some relationship between two things or between something and a characteristic of it, he is said to have a belief.” Further, English and English (1958) define belief as “an emotional acceptance of a proposition or doctrine upon what one implicitly considers adequate grounds. The grounds for belief, however, are not examined, nor does the behavior imply that others need have the same grounds. Beliefs have varying degrees of subjective attitude.” Thus, although beliefs are seen to have both cognitive (meaning) and affective (emotion) components, the psychological literature treats them more generally than multiattribute models.

With respect to the field of advertising, Andrews (1989) notes that Bauer and Greyser (1968) provided evidence that consumers' overall attitudes toward advertising in general are influenced by their existing beliefs toward advertising in general. In essence, the beliefs that people were found to hold about general advertising (that it is annoying, offensive, informative and enjoyable) are the reasons for their attitudes. Duncan (1990) applies this broader view of beliefs to marketing activities, through the concept of general market beliefs. These are defined as consumers' “intermediate level beliefs that convey

information about the association between independent (marketing) variables.”

Duncan (1982) acknowledges that, although research in the area of market-related beliefs and subsequent behavior has not yet developed adequately to predict the precise direction, or the extent of the influence of beliefs on consumer behavior, on the basis of various cognitive consistency theories (e.g., Brown, 1965) it can be expected that behavior is likely to at least be consistent with beliefs. Viewed in this light, examining consumers’ prior beliefs can help explain how they make decisions about related market-place concepts. Therefore, in the present study, the beliefs construct examined will be consistent with the view held in the social psychology literature.

As noted previously, Nowak’s (1992) is one of only a few studies which has addressed the area of consumers’ beliefs about direct response methods. Other topic areas studied include consumers’ specific beliefs with respect to their knowledge of in-home shopping methods and industry practices (e.g., McCorkle et al., 1987), and those associated with shopping satisfaction (e.g., Ghert et al., 1988).

And while Nowak’s study directly addressed some of the beliefs consumers hold about direct response television (i.e., beliefs about perceived risks), these areas do not fully reflect the broader criticisms leveled at the DRTV industry. There are, however, other areas of advertising research which can shed light on beliefs about the DRTV short commercial format. These areas are direct marketing advertising and television advertising. The next section will present a review of literature on direct marketing issues regarding consumer response. A review of literature on television advertising issues will then be presented, followed by a review of issues regarding traditional DRTV short-form advertising.

Consumers' Beliefs about Direct Marketing Advertising

Storholm and Friedman (1989) investigated direct marketing practitioners' assessments of consumers' negative beliefs regarding the field of direct marketing. This work produced a listing of what practitioners feel are the biggest myths that consumers have about direct marketing (presented below in Table 2.1). Their findings indicate that consumers are believed (by practitioners) to hold a variety of negative perceptions about several of the practices (or tactics) typically used in direct marketing, the types of products offered by direct response television advertising, and the reasons underlying advertisers' use of direct advertising methods. In particular, several major underlying themes were identified. First, direct marketing practitioners noted that consumers perceive direct marketers as both unscrupulous and willing to do anything that will 'turn a buck'. "This manifested in the myths (consumers have) which refer to the perceived dishonesty and unprofessional practices of direct marketing professions," (p. 977). A related notion is that consumers perceive "that the field is peopled with unprofessional professionals," indicating that consumers believe anyone can succeed at direct marketing.

Next, these practitioners noted that consumers hold direct marketing, and especially direct mail, in low esteem. For instance, the term 'junk mail' indicates that consumers see this particular format as not read, not effective, and they believe it only works for very 'simple' items. Practitioners also noted that consumers believe that "a firm can sell anything at anytime to anybody with direct marketing." The authors note that this theme reflects the notion that the public feels certain direct marketing methods always work, and that advertisers can get rich quickly by using direct marketing.

The Storholm and Friedman study was also instrumental in bringing to light the

Table 2.1
Partial List of Direct Marketing Myths Held by Consumers

1. Direct Mail is all “junk” mail.
 2. “Junk” mail is not read, especially, if the copy is long.
 3. Most direct marketers are dishonest, unscrupulous, and unprofessional.
 4. Anybody can be successful at direct marketing.
 5. Direct mail works only for simple, not sophisticated, items.
 6. Nearly anything can be sold through direct marketing.
 7. Direct marketing has limited effectiveness, does not work, or is a very specialized field.
 8. The more money spent, the better the response.
 9. Certain methods (e.g., coupons, free offers, teasers) always work.
 10. You can get rich quickly in direct marketing.
 11. You need very little money to get started in direct marketing.
 12. Direct marketing can sell products lacking quality.
 13. Direct marketing is not as successful as standard advertising.
 14. Direct marketing (and telemarketing) is an invasion of privacy.
 15. People don’t win anything in sweepstakes.
 16. There exists a single “master list” with all kinds of information about those listed.
-

Note: Adapted from “Perceived Common Myths and Unethical Practices Among Direct Marketing Professionals,” by Gordon Storholm and Hershey Friedman, 1989, Journal of Business Ethics, 8 (2), p. 977.

fact that practitioners were aware of consumers’ privacy concerns regarding the direct marketing area. As mentioned earlier, several more recent studies indicate that this issue remains a serious one. This is the case despite the efforts of the Direct Marketing Association (DMA), which has instituted measures that allow consumers the option to remove their names from mailing lists and marketer data bases; and of Federal legislation, such as the Telecommunications Competition and Deregulation Act of 1996 (Broadcasting and Cable, 1996) which was aimed at curtailing privacy abuses by direct marketers. Citing several polls taken throughout the 1990's, Wells, Burnett and Moriarty (1998) note that a growing number of consumers feel that they have lost all control over how their personal information is circulated and used by companies.

A 1995 study which examined consumers’ attitudes toward direct marketing

advertising echoed several of the perception issues identified by practitioners in the Storholm and Friedman research. Akaah et al., (1995) found, in particular, that consumers feel overloaded with direct mail solicitations; and that they associate purchasing from home with higher risk. These authors note that this risk is “further exacerbated by the perception that direct marketers sell shoddy and nonexistent products,” (p. 212). One other important finding in this study was that these consumer perceptions were said to significantly influence consumers’ attitudes toward direct marketing, and these attitudes, in turn, significantly influence their intention to patronize direct marketing offerings. So, while Nowak (1992) found that beliefs did not influence liking of DRTV advertisements in particular, Akaah et al’s., finding indicates that cognitive variables (such as beliefs and attitudes) regarding direct response methods do appear to influence purchase intentions.

Consumer Evaluations and Beliefs About Television Advertising

While some DRTV researchers and practitioners contend that DRTV commercials’ use of creative elements used traditionally in brand image advertising¹⁷ is a positive factor, the consensus of consumer research on responses to television advertising over the past several decades has concluded that consumers are highly critical of advertising in this medium, as well. Empirical studies examining consumers’ attitudes toward television advertising have investigated a variety of consumer perceptions which underlie these attitudes. Since the landmark study by Bauer and Greyser (1968), the inventory of

¹⁷That is, due to their increased production and creative quality, or entertainment value.

consumer perceptions about general advertising has broadened beyond these researchers' initial focus on advertising's social and economic effects. Later research has examined consumers' perceptions of the information value of advertising (e.g., Haller, 1974; Durand and Lambert, 1985; Muehling, 1987), poor taste and sex in advertising (e.g., Larkin, 1977), ethics in advertising (Triff, Benningfield, and Murphy, 1987), falsehood and deception (Larkin, 1977; Muehling, 1987); materialism (Larkin, 1977, Duran and Lambert, 1985), enjoyability of ads (e.g., Shavit, Lowery and Haefner, 1998), and the need for government regulation of advertising (Durand and Lambert, 1985).

Several studies have also helped to broaden the understanding of consumers' perceptions of advertising on television. Resnik and Stern (1977), for example, developed a list of information cues found in television advertising that are useful to the consumer. More recently, Aaker and Stayman (1990) note that there have been a host of efforts intended to generate measures that can be used to tap the perceptions of advertising held by audience members. These authors cite a number of studies undertaken by individuals in the advertising industry (e.g., Leo Burnett Group and the Bruzzone Research Corporation, or the BRC) which they contend provide evidence that correlations exist between individuals' perceptual judgements of TV commercials and persuasion. Their own study identified nine factors which help explain liking and effectiveness of television ads. These were: amusing/clever, informative/effective, irritating/silly, dull, warm, lively, familiar, believable, and confusing.

Two studies conducted by Alwitt and Prabhaker (1992 and 1994) also examined consumers' perceptual judgements of TV advertising. Their first study identified six dimensions which reflect such judgements, including: perceptions of personal and social

cost/benefit, perceptions of how television commercials are executed, perceptions that television advertising is deceptive, perceptions of offensive aspects of television advertising, perceptions that television advertisements are shown too often or too much, and perceptions that television does not offer information. In the latter study, Alwitt and Prabhaker (1994) examined two demographic characteristics (age and income) in order to examine their interactions with the reasons for holding certain attitudes toward television advertising.

Mitall (1994) described consumers' perceptions and beliefs regarding television as spanning ten dimensions. Thus, taken as a whole, the overall findings produced by recent research on both advertising, in general, and television advertising are consistent with earlier studies. They indicate that consumers continue to hold negative perceptions about the practice and institution of advertising, and the particular medium delivering it, in addition to the social and economic effects of television advertising.

The findings of studies on consumers' perceptions and beliefs about direct marketing advertising, together with those regarding television advertising provide guidelines for investigating the belief issues which may underlie DRTV short-form advertising. In particular, they can help to further identify perceptions underlying consumers' beliefs about various issues relating to the DRTV format; the effects these beliefs may potentially have upon their attitudes; and more importantly to this study, on their behavioral intentions.

The Potential Impact of Consumers' Beliefs on DRTV Advertising Responses

Given the documented consumer concerns associated with both direct response advertising methods, as well as with television advertising, in general, the area of direct response television advertising already represents the 'worst' of what both types have to offer. This situation is further exacerbated by the fact that smaller direct marketers, for whom the DRTV format holds great appeal, have been accused of being the main culprits in dirtying the image of DRTV (see, for example, Witek, 1981). In particular, these advertisers are drawn to the format by its lower production and air time rates, as well as by newer features, such as the per inquiry system. This system allows advertisers to pay a fixed amount per lead, or a percentage of sales, instead of for the amount of air time actually used (McLaughlin, 1998).

The kinds of charges levied against smaller direct marketers relate to several areas, including: (1) the commonplace reliance of DRTV commercials upon a host of tactics which are often considered misleading and/or deceptive, by both consumers as well as regulatory agencies such as the Better Business Bureau (see Collins, 1995 and 1996); (2) advertisers' perceived motives for using certain tactics; and (3) the nature of many of the products typically featured in these types of commercials. Therefore, the question of whether consumers' beliefs about the format itself actually reflect these concerns is an important one which needs to be addressed.

The reliance of DRTV commercials' upon a variety of tactics over the years began as a result of early direct marketers' realization that the format could be used to present information-intensive advertising messages to large numbers of consumers (Witek, 1981). This remains a factor in DRTV's appeal to all types of direct marketers, including the first

types who used it widely (i.e., smaller advertisers). The emphasis upon information, in fact, is what gave rise to the use of a variety of executional elements often used in these types of commercials. Early direct marketers realized that many of these elements were capable of presenting highly convincing information to consumers both verbally and visually. For instance, the realization that the carnival barker, who created interest and excitement while telling customers about problem-solving products, was an effective technique led to the use of rapidly speaking announcers, which is still greatly used today.

It has been intimated that agency creatives know intuitively that the way in which executional elements of an advertisement are blended can help determine which of the consumers' mental processes become engaged, and which do not (Sutherland, 1993). And while the effectiveness of such elements in commercials often depends on the recipient's lack of awareness of them and how or why they work (e.g., subliminal messages), Witek suggests that many of these elements have become familiar to consumers. This author contends that this situation has occurred as a result of consumers' many years of exposure to DRTV commercials, which have continued to rely upon the same variety of tactics (e.g., celebrity endorsers, testimonials, product demonstrations, rapid-speech and free offers, among others).

Witek also acknowledges that many of these well-known tactics have become negatively associated with the format. He states, "as promising as DRTV is, it has always been regarded with so much suspicion that millions of people who might become customers steer clear," (p. 7). Therefore, it is highly probable that the criticisms consumers have directed toward traditional short-form DRTV advertising may relate to the fact that they perceive (and are conscious of) many of the executional elements

encountered in these commercials.

Evidence that consumers do consciously consider some of these types of elements has been found in several studies. First, a variety of studies have found that consumers evaluate the use of various types of endorsements used in television and other types of advertising. Solomon (1994) notes, for example, that studies indicate that consumers sometimes question celebrities' competence to critically evaluate a product's claims. And O'Mahoney and Meenaghan's (1997) recent investigation of consumers' attitudes toward celebrity endorsements found that consumers hold certain perceptions about their ability to gain viewers' attention. Further, these authors concluded that celebrities were not perceived as overly convincing or believable, and that consumers may not trust their motives for endorsing a product.

These findings also relate to those of an earlier study which compared the effects of endorsements,¹⁸ in general, and other executional elements (or risk-relievers) in their ability to reduce the perceived risk associated with product purchase. Roselius (1979) defines risk-relievers as devices or actions initiated by the buyer or seller, which are used to execute some risk resolution strategy.¹⁹ He notes that advertisers include certain executional elements in their messages for the purpose of relieving risk-related hesitancy to buy by serving as catalysts to facilitate purchase.²⁰

¹⁸Including testimonials, experts and celebrities.

¹⁹The two specific strategies investigated were: to decrease the probability that the purchase will fail, or to shift from one type of perceived loss to one for which there is more tolerance.

²⁰Other executional elements included for this purpose that were investigated in this study were: brand loyalty, major brand image, private testing, store image, free sample, government testing, shopping, expensive model and word-of-mouth.

Roselius found that consumers ranked the endorser tactic, along with the offering of money-back guarantees, lowest in terms of their ability to alleviate their sense of risk associated with purchases. A general implication of these findings is that, in the consumers' mind, some executional strategies may not serve the specific purposes that advertisers intend them to. In other words, consumers may not perceive an advertisement's executional elements in the way the advertiser thinks they will.

Another implication of these findings is that, when consumers do evaluate tactics they encounter, this represents that they hold knowledge (or beliefs) about the intentions which underlie an advertiser's use of certain tactics in advertisements. This notion was presented by Friestad and Wright (1994). It was also investigated by Boush, Friestad and Rose (1994), in a study which found that even adolescent respondents hold beliefs about the effects that television advertisers try to elicit when they employ certain tactics.

The specific advertiser tactics Boush et al. asked about in this study had been developed in an earlier, unpublished study of adult consumers.²¹ This earlier study had found that consumers do tend to associate certain tactics with particular effects which the advertiser intends to achieve. However, the authors noted that there was no intuitive or theoretical justification for adults to believe that some tactics were significantly more likely to be associated with a particular intended effect. Although they do not explain this comment (or investigate it directly), it may be the case that consumers could associate more than one tactic with a specific advertiser intent, or that they could associate one

²¹The authors detailed the basic methodology and findings of the earlier study in footnotes. The tactics investigated included product demonstrations, product comparisons, humor, use of someone just like me (i.e., testimonials), as well as the use of celebrities in advertisements.

tactic with more than one intended effect.

Other research has assessed a variety of executional elements used in both general and television advertising. However, these studies usually tend to focus on some measure of effectiveness, instead of on consumers' perceptions of executional elements. For example, the effectiveness of certain executional styles has been measured in terms of evaluations of the persuasiveness, comprehension and intrusiveness of commercials (see, for example, Shimp, 1974; Stewart and Furse, 1986; Laskey, et al., 1994; and Stanton and Burke, 1998).

Consumers' perceptions of tactics have also not been a focus of studies specific to their use in DRTV commercials, either. For instance, while Bush and Bush (1990) investigated the creative appeals (or creative executions) used in DRTV advertisements using a content analysis approach, no studies were found which examined such elements from the consumer perspective. Their study found that direct marketers tended to stay away from traditional creative appeals found in general television advertising (e.g., sex, humor and fear). Instead, almost 77 percent of DRTV commercials used a straight factual appeal.

Several of the studies mentioned earlier, however, (e.g., Stanton and Burke, 1998; Boush et al., 1994; and Roselius, 1979; etc.) do have implications for studying how consumers perceive executional elements commonly used in DRTV commercials. With respect to endorsements, for example, the Stanton and Burke study (which looked at the persuasion effectiveness of fifteen second versus thirty second commercials) found that persuasion in both commercial lengths is negatively associated with the use of actors playing ordinary people. This finding is relevant to DRTV, since endorsers are often actors

who portray actual product users. The finding suggests that, when potentially non-believable actors are used, they may be perceived by viewers as 'clutter'. And this is especially relevant for information-intensive commercials (such as DRTV commercials), since use of the tactic may amount to a distraction for viewers, causing them to tune out or not pay attention to the information presented in the advertisement.

The findings of these studies also serve to illustrate one other very important point. That is that, even though advertisers have specific intentions for the elements they include in their advertising messages, they cannot really be certain of how consumers will perceive them. This uncertainty is highlighted when we consider the term 'tactic'. To advertisers, for example, this term is used to describe either an executional element²², or the general nature of the creative executions used in commercials (see, for example, Laskey et al., 1994). Friestad and Wright (1994) note that consumers, on the other hand, may use the term in order to describe advertising elements which connote the advertiser's intentions. Therefore, consumers' perceptions of the advertising executions included in advertisements are likely to differ considerably from advertisers'.

In light of the importance of understanding the consumer perspective, Friestad and Wright use the term advertising 'feature' (or feature pattern) to describe the types of executional elements addressed in the studies noted above. They describe features generally as the elements that people come to perceive as representing an advertiser's tactics. Tactics, in this sense, refer to the strategies the advertiser uses in order to elicit a particular response in the viewer. For example, when an advertiser attempts to invoke

²²This is the typical usage described in advertising texts. See, for example, Wells, Burnett and Moriarty (1998), or Arens and Bovee (1996).

fear in the viewer, they use 'a scare tactic'; or, to get their attention, they may use an 'attention-getting' tactic.

Although DRTV commercials do utilize many of the same types of executional elements as general commercials,²³ according to Witek (1981), their historical reliance upon certain ones may cause consumers to associate these elements almost exclusively with DRTV advertising. The list of such tactics includes free offers, money-back guarantees, testimonials and endorsements, and response mechanisms (e.g., toll-free telephone numbers). However, distinctions between the types of executional elements used in DRTV versus brand image television advertising were rarely made in either the published empirical literature, or textbooks on advertising (see, for example, Wells, et al., 1998; Arens and Bovee, 1996).

Therefore, a need exists for research which investigates tactics that consumers commonly associate with DRTV advertising. And, based upon the fact that they may also associate these tactics with other beliefs they hold about advertising — negative ones, in particular — the focus of such research should include the examination of these types of beliefs. One body of research which provides direction for examining this latter area is deceptiveness research.

Research on Consumer Perceptions of Deceptiveness in Advertising

Research on the topic of deceptive and misleading advertising was of considerable interest in the 70's and 80's. During this period, researchers were attempting to broaden

²³Hybrid DRTV advertisements, for example, use many of the same elements as branded commercials.

regulatory agencies' (e.g., the Federal Trade Commission's) understanding of how advertising deception affects consumers' brand-related beliefs (Cohen, 1972). The general approach of marketing and communications research of this period was to identify communications that may deceive consumers so that effective measures could be taken (through regulation or consumer education) to minimize the effect of deception on the recipient. Key measurement variables included consumers' normative (e.g., Dyer and Kuehl) or salient brand beliefs and attitudes held after an advertising exposure (Armstrong, Kendall and Russ, 1975; Harris, 1977; Harris, et al., 1981 Barbour and Gardner, 1982), and their purchase intentions (Gardner, 1975; Olson and Dover, 1978; Armstrong, Gurol and Russ, 1979; and Russo, Metcalf and Stephens, 1981). The normative-beliefs technique assessed consumers' post-exposure brand beliefs and attitudes as compared to beliefs about the product category, while the salient-beliefs approach focused on consumer perceptions of false claims (either asserted or implied) in an ad (Armstrong, Gurol and Russ, 1979).

With few exceptions (e.g., Haefner, 1972; and Haefner and Permut, 1974)²⁴, the general goals of advertising deception research in the marketing and communications areas were to understand the extent to which consumers may be deceived, and to identify the variables that determine the occurrence of deception. However, no acceptable definition of deceptive advertising was ever established (Armstrong, Gurol and Russ, 1980; Richards, 1990).

In contrast to the marketing and communications approach, the social psychology

²⁴These researchers examined consumers' ability to detect deception in advertisements.

literature has taken quite a different approach to the study of advertising deception. Here, deception is generally defined as a communicator's deliberate attempt to foster in others a belief or understanding which the communicator considers to be untrue. The criterion for research in this area has been to look at the intent of the communicator, classifying an act as deceptive if the person tries to give a false impression (DePaulo, et. al., 1989).

Zuckerman and Driver (1985) offer this definition: "Deception is an act that is intended to convince another person to believe in something that the deceiver considers false" (p. 131).

There is both theoretical and empirical support for the notion that consumers perceive some advertising tactics as deceptive, and that they may hold beliefs about the deceptive intentions underlying their use by advertisers. DePaulo (1988) offers theoretical support, hypothesizing that consumers may be 'tipped off' about an advertisers' intention to deceive by certain cues (or tactics) in their ads. These lie-perception cues (also termed lie-detection cues) are correlated with an audience's impressions of deceptiveness (i.e., beliefs about what constitutes deceptiveness). Furthermore, people are thought to rely upon these cues to help them detect deceptiveness in ads.

Drawing upon the findings of several studies, DePaulo identified a variety of tactics that could be termed lie-perception cues, and which consumers may use to evaluate advertisements they encounter for deceptiveness. An example of one such cue is extreme favorableness in advertisements.²⁵ DePaulo suggests that this extreme favorableness cue

²⁵This cue was derived from a study by Beltramini and Evans (1985), which found that consumers perceived more extreme claims about consumer preference for an advertised brand as less believable than less extreme claims.

might be triggered when an ad recipient encounters an ad claim that seems 'too good to be true'.

This issue has also been examined in light of attribution theory. Conducted mostly in the social psychology area, attribution studies generally look at differences in how individuals attribute the causes of events. In a classic attribution study by Settle and Golden (1974), they found that consumers judged ads as more credible when these ads disclaimed the superiority of some of the product's attributes (as opposed to claiming that all the attributes were superior in the ad). Although they did not explain their findings in DePaulo's terms, the Settle and Golden experiment is consistent with the idea that certain cues may indeed be triggered when claims seem too favorable.

The findings of O'Mahoney and Meenaghan's (1997) study (cited earlier) also point up another issue which is related to consumers' perceptions of endorsements in advertising. Namely, that consumers think about 'why' certain types of tactics are used in advertisements (e.g., to get their attention, or because the featured individual is trusted). Thus, the findings of studies on these (and other) executional elements are directly related to the DRTV advertising format, since these commercials often rely upon the use of many of the same elements.

Cohen (1972) also notes that, because consumers evaluate products through both subjective and objective advertising material, surrogate indicators such as colors, symbols, or even endorsements, are capable of conveying deception to consumers. And, while many of these types of executional elements are certainly not exclusive to DRTV advertising, some may be more commonly associated with DRTV commercials. This may especially be the case for traditional hard sell tactics which have been used in these types

of ads since the early days of television.

An additional tactic that experts note is often associated with DRTV advertising is the use of disclaimers (see Witek, 1981). On this tactic, Muehling (1997) concludes that consumers may see fine print (or disclaimers) as an indicator of advertisers' deceptive intent. "Consumers may come to believe that advertisers use fine print as a means of protecting their own self-interests . . . present(ing) information they do not want to tell the audience in nearly illegible print" (p.1). Because this element may substantially alter claims that were made in the audio portion of an ad, some viewers (upon encountering this element in ads) may see it as an indication of the advertiser's intention to deceive. Thus, it may act as a signal to consumers that advertisers who use small print may be attempting to convey a false or deceptive impression to audience members.

On the basis of these studies (and DePaulo's work), support is provided for DRTV experts' (e.g., Witek, 1981; Brady and Vasquez, 1996; Eicoff, 1995) general contention that consumers do realize that certain tactics are included in advertisements in an effort to influence them in a particular way. The notion that they also seem to give consideration to 'why' these tactics are used is also supported. If consumers do have these realizations, and make such considerations, then they may indeed interpret many DRTV tactics as stemming from advertisers' intention to deceive or mislead the consumer through their commercial messages.

Consumer Perceptions of Deceptiveness in Advertisers' Motives

In response to marketers' interest in understanding the deeper meanings of products and advertising to consumers, researchers began investigating the motivations

which underlie various consumer behaviors in the 1950's. Since this period, the topic of motivational research has received a great deal of attention in consumer behavior-related fields, such as psychology and sociology.²⁶ This research has yielded a number of theoretical approaches which have helped broaden marketers' understanding of consumption behavior. Many of these findings have been used to develop effective advertising campaigns. For example, Solomon (1994) notes that, after motivational research pioneer Ernest Dichter found that people responded well to animal symbolism in ads, Esso (now Exxon) reminded consumers for many years to "Put a Tiger in Your Tank".

In addition to the use of motivational research in advertising, Hanna and Wozniak (2001) note that a variety of product categories have also capitalized on these findings. One example of how this research has led to the development of a new product is the time-saving technology known as 'Speedpass', which allows consumers to fill their tanks without having to pay at the pump or go inside of the station. This product developed out of research that found that consumers have a need to save time and effort. Hanna and Wozniak also note that both the recent growth in the gambling industry, and in 900-number services also reflect research findings regarding human desires, which are an element inherent in motivation.

Conversely, considerably less attention has been focused on research which seeks to learn what perceptions consumers hold for the motives marketers have for engaging in

²⁶Solomon (1994) defines motivational research as "a qualitative research approach, based on psychoanalytic (Freudian) interpretations, with a heavy emphasis on unconscious motives for consumption," (p. 622).

persuasive activities. However, research in several marketing-related areas does provide useful insight into how consumers perceive the motives which underlie advertisers' behaviors. These areas include attribution research, research on the deceptiveness of advertising directed toward children, and corporate image research.

Attributions studies which have examined consumers' attributions for a variety of marketplace outcomes perceived as caused by marketers, are useful in exploring consumer beliefs about advertisers' motives. Studies in this area have examined consumers' attributions associated with inequitable exchange (e.g., Hunt et al., 1983), product failure (e.g., Folkes, 1984), and beliefs regarding businesses' practices and consumerism (e.g., Barksdale and Darden, 1972; Hustad and Pessimier, 1973). Practitioners' ethical beliefs have also been examined (e.g., Storholm and Friedman 1989; Chonko and Hunt 1985). Additionally, studies have identified some of the specific traits that may reflect advertiser motives. These traits include advertiser credibility, (e.g., Settle and Golden 1974), trustworthiness, prestige, competence and competitive(ness) (e.g., Vanden Bergh et al., 1981).

Research on children's television advertising is another area which has implications for studying how motives are perceived by consumers. Advertisements targeting this special audience became a major focus of study in the early 1970's. Two important issues in this area were children's understanding of the intent and content of television commercials. These two constructs were generally examined for their relationship with the age demographic (as well as others).

The general findings in this area were that distrust in commercials was positively correlated with age (Blatt, Spencer and Ward, 1972; Ward and Robertson, 1972; Rossiter

and Robertson, 1974); and distrust of specific commercials was found to begin by the time children reached second grade (Blatt et al., 1972). Also, Ward (1972) found that, by the time children reach the 6th grade, they reached what he characterized as 'global distrust' of advertising. Even more important was Ward's finding that, for older children, the basis of this distrust was the perceived intent of the commercials.

More recently, Boush et al's., (1994) study of adolescent skepticism toward advertising confirms Ward's finding. Specifically, the study sought to examine how older children (grades 6 through 8) who are moving through adolescence, think and feel about both about the tactics that advertisers use to persuade them, as well as their overall attitude toward advertisers' motives (i.e., what advertisers are trying to accomplish when they use particular tactics). According to these researchers, such cognitions reflect children's perceived intentions of the persuasive agent (in this case, advertisers).

These researchers identified two dimensions of advertiser skepticism: mistrust of advertisers' motives and disbelief of advertising claims.²⁷ Moreover, they found that adolescents have high levels of both mistrust for advertisers' motives and disbelief of advertising claims. Therefore, it appears that younger consumers (as well as older ones) also hold certain negative perceptions about the motives underlying advertisers' use of tactics in TV ads.

Another research focus which has implications for how consumers view

²⁷Because of the focus of the Boush et al., study (i.e., adolescents), the survey items used to measure skepticism were designed to assess: 1) the degree to which subjects could differentiate between their own interests and those of the advertiser, and 2) the degree to which they discriminated between truthful and untruthful advertising, rather than categorizing all advertising as the same.

advertisers' motives is corporate image research. This area can provide insight into consumers' cognitions about firms, in general.

Corporate associations is a concept which refers to various types of knowledge (e.g., perceptions, inferences, and beliefs) that people have about companies (Dacin and Brown 1997). In particular, one study that explored the possible antecedents of attitude toward companies found that consumers' impressions of the ads used in a campaign affect their general perception of the company which produced the advertised product (Kilbourne and Mowen 1986). This finding implies that consumers do rely upon their evaluations of persuasive messages in an effort to make inferences about the producer of an ad.

On the basis of research in these areas, it can be concluded that individuals do hold perceptions about the motives that underlie many of the specific tactics that advertisers employ in their television advertising. Yet, these studies do not go very far toward explaining how they come to their overall beliefs about motives. One way in which to develop this understanding is to look more closely at the concept of motives itself.

Rotzoll, et al., (1996) provide a theoretical perspective for looking at how people come to infer advertisers' motives.²⁸ First, these authors posit that an individual's perception of advertising stems partly from their overall view of how the advertising institution functions in society. Essentially, motives can be seen as emanating either out of one's self interest, or out of altruism. Then, individuals relate the reasons why advertisers rely upon the particular advertising mechanisms that they do (and why they engage in

²⁸Solomon (1994) notes that motives must be inferred because of the difficulty in studying them directly.

specific marketing activities) to their particular viewpoint. Thus, consumers who see advertising as driven by self interest tend to believe advertisers' practices are designed to take advantage of consumers. On the other hand, those who see advertising as driven by altruism believe advertising practices are intended to facilitate the needs of rational-minded consumers.

Other scholars note that, when marketers' behaviors are viewed as motivated by self-interest, they tend to reflect the notion of unfairness in the areas of profits and/or financial issues, competition, as well as the promotional methods which advertisers rely upon (Pollay and Gallagher, 1984). And these kinds of actions are often perceived by many individuals as deceptive and/or misleading.²⁹ It is for this reason that advertisers' self-interested motives have been at the crux of many critics' concerns regarding advertising's pervasive social and unintended effects for several decades (see, for example, Gossage, 1986).

Consumer Perceptions, Beliefs and Attitudes About the Nature of DRTV Products

In addition to their perceptions about DRTV tactics and advertisers' motives, another aspect of DRTV advertisements for which many consumers express concern has to do with the types of products that are typically offered in these ads. Research has identified several areas of concern. First, Storholm and Friedman's (1989) finding that practitioners perceive that many consumers feel most directly-marketed products fulfill no

²⁹An example of how perceptions of direct marketing advertising can reflect a profit motive comes from the Storholm and Friedman study findings that consumers think that direct marketing advertising is used to get rich quickly, and that these practitioners will do anything to turn a buck.

real need is an issue that has been examined in other studies. Several studies which focus on in-home shoppers versus retail shoppers have examined the issue of how directly-marketed products are perceived.

In-home shoppers were found to perceive that DRTV advertising exposes them to more brands than people who shop only at stores (Rosenberg and Hirschman, 1980), and that it offers new and different products (Darian, 1987), while store shoppers tend to view it as not offering any such product-related advantages.

Donthu and Gilliland (1997) suggest that this issue (i.e., DRTV products' need fulfillment) is related to impulsiveness, since it reflects the fact that DRTV products are often purchased with little or no search for alternatives. They found that in-home shoppers were significantly more impulsive and innovative than store shoppers.

Another problem area regards the lack of opportunity to examine products before purchase. Weigold et al., (1992) note that a direct response purchase is typically seen by consumers as a risky venture, since the consumer must rely almost exclusively on advertising information (as opposed to first-hand experience provided by the retail experience). And Akaah et al., (1995) concluded that some consumers have a strong need to examine products before purchase. For these consumers, this need is related to the perception that direct marketers sell shoddy and nonexistent products.³⁰

Donthu and Gilliland (1997) contend that DRTV advertising is faced with one other, more general problem that branded advertising does not face. That is, while DRTV advertising focuses upon the product itself (which is often unfamiliar to consumers),

³⁰These findings are consistent with the perceptions about consumers' criticisms of DRTV advertising held by practitioners in the Storholm and Friedman study.

branded advertising (i.e., for retail goods) can often rely upon the reputation of either the brand or the advertiser. Therefore, whereas brand names may help reduce any risk that consumers may associate with a purchase, unfamiliar products (such as those offered through DRTV advertising) do not enjoy this perceived advantage.

Several studies which have examined consumers' perceptions of general brand attributes offer support for the contention that individuals evaluate brands and other market-related issues to learn their causes (i.e., by making associations between the brand and some related concept). For instance, Zeithaml (1988) examined consumer perceptions of general brand attributes and found that individuals appear to hold perceptions about brands' quality, value and price. These perceptions develop as a result of experience and marketer promotional efforts. Kirmani and Wright (1989) found that firms' perceived advertising expenditures influence consumers' brand perceptions, as well.

Another consideration that consumers may make regarding the nature of DRTV products regards their view of how rational DRTV buyers are. Although no studies were found which examined how DRTV shoppers are perceived by other shoppers (e.g., store-only shoppers), this notion can be seen as an extension of Rotzoll et al's., (1996) view of how one attributes the advertising industry's practices and functions in society (i.e., that advertisers are either self-interested or altruistic). Thus, some individuals may see the DRTV advertising format itself as a self-interested attempt to 'pass off' useless, inferior and/or unsafe goods to consumers who are incapable of making rational buying decisions. Others, however, may view it more positively. For example, some consumers may see DRTV short form advertising as a means of providing them with information about new products that are not available in retail stores.

In summary, a variety of consumer perceptions and attitudes toward DRTV advertising have been addressed in several studies in the marketing and social psychology literature. A major goal of several of these studies has been to determine whether a relationship exists between these areas and consumers' subsequent behavioral intentions toward DRTV purchasing (Nowak, 1992), as well as toward purchasing through other direct marketing methods (e.g., Akaah et al., 1995; Korgoankar et al., 1997). Two other aspects of consumer response which have also been investigated are purchase likelihood (Whitlark et al., 1993), and willingness-to-buy (e.g., Garland and Rhea, 1988). Both of these variables have been shown to be influenced by consumers' perceptions and attitudes toward marketplace variables.

Furthermore, based on the social psychology literature on individuals' beliefs, and especially the idea that they may be associated with any marketing-related object, the present study presents a multi-dimensional construct which is intended to help examine consumers' beliefs regarding short-form direct response television advertising. This construct will be investigated within the framework of the persuasion knowledge model (Friestad and Wright, 1994). Prior to presenting this model, however, a general overview of the cognitive processing model will be presented.

Consumers' Cognitive Processing of Advertisements

Cognitive processing theory provides a useful framework for investigating consumer beliefs about the DRTV advertising format. This theory presents an explanation of how individuals develop and use knowledge to aid them in understanding and interpreting their environment. Generally-speaking, they accomplish this by forming

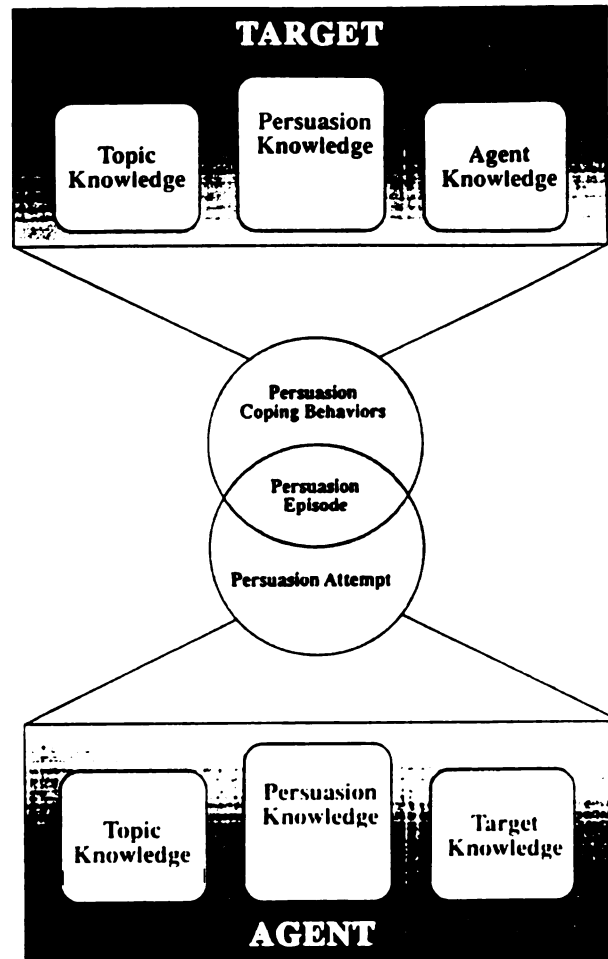
meanings (formally called cognitive representations) about various stimuli which they encounter in their environment. This knowledge helps them carry out a variety of cognitive tasks, such as identifying goals and objectives, and developing and evaluating alternative courses of action to meet these goals (Peter and Olson, 1999).

With respect to the marketplace environment, consumers rely upon their existing knowledge to help them interpret and form meanings about a variety of market-related events and objects. Advertising and promotions are two marketing activities about which consumers typically form meanings; and they attempt to interpret them when they encounter them, or when thoughts about them are stimulated by some related event.

Friestad and Wright (1994) contend that one cognitive task for which consumers use their market-related knowledge is to help them evaluate and cope with persuasive attempts, such as advertisements. These authors present a model which conceptualizes how peoples' persuasion knowledge influences their responses to everyday persuasion attempts.

The persuasion knowledge model, or PKM (depicted in Figure 2.1), presents the phenomenon of persuasion from the consumers' (or target's) point of view, as well as from the advertiser's (or agent's) point of view. Its basic premise is that both the target and the agent rely upon their existing knowledge about how persuasion occurs in individuals. Agents (i.e., the firm responsible for constructing the persuasion attempt) rely upon this knowledge in order to guide the design and delivery of such attempts. In turn, targets (i.e., the individuals for whom the persuasion attempt is intended) rely upon this

Figure 2.1
The Persuasion Knowledge Model



Reprinted with Permission: From "The Persuasion Knowledge Model: How People Cope with Persuasion Attempts," by Marian Friestad and Peter Wright, 1994, Journal of Consumer Research, 21 (June), p. 2.

knowledge to direct their coping responses.³¹

According to the model, the consumer's existing knowledge about persuasion attempts is contained in three knowledge structures which interact to shape and determine their responses to a particular persuasion event. As shown in figure 2.1, these are topic knowledge, agent knowledge and persuasion knowledge. The topic knowledge base consists of beliefs about the particular topic featured in an advertising message (e.g., the brand or product); and the agent knowledge base consists of beliefs about the traits, competencies and goals of the communicator (e.g., the specific advertiser).

The persuasion knowledge base is the broadest and most complex of the three knowledge structures, since it contains all of a person's existing beliefs regarding how persuasion occurs, in general.³² These beliefs reflect several aspects of how a persuasion attempt actually persuades. With respect to an advertisement, for example, a person's persuasion knowledge base may hold beliefs about the psychological states and processes³³ that must be tapped (or cued by a particular tactic) in order to bring about the effect the agent desires; beliefs about the effectiveness and appropriateness of tactics used in ads; beliefs about the marketer's overall persuasion goals, as well as beliefs about his/her own coping behaviors and goals.

The persuasion knowledge base works by guiding the observer's attention to any

³¹ Because the focus of this study is on the consumer, however, the discussion of the model will be limited to the target's response to a persuasion attempt, such as an advertisement.

³² This is referred to as an individual's 'naive psychology' (from Heider, 1958) about how a particular event actually works to bring about persuasion.

³³ Friestad and Wright call these *psychological mediators*.

aspect of the message that becomes of interest; it then guides his/her subsequent reactions to the persuasion attempt (e.g., the elicitation of related beliefs, coping responses, etc.). For example, in interpreting an advertisement, a person's beliefs about a particular technique (or tactic) shown in the ad would be activated automatically upon exposure to it. This belief may then spread to other beliefs, perhaps ones regarding a specific mental state that is typically brought about in viewers when they associate this advertising technique with the specific meanings already held.³⁴

One possible mental state might be credibility (or, the state of perceiving someone as credible), which may be brought about through the use of a testimonial in a commercial. However, the observer may believe that credibility is only achieved when the individual featured in the ad is perceived as believable to viewers.

Observing this feature may also trigger other related beliefs which may aid the observer in further assessing the persuasion attempt. For instance, he/she may wonder why the advertiser chose to use this particular feature in their advertisement, or wonder about the appropriateness of using this feature for either the particular product advertised in the commercial, or for the particular audience they appear to be targeting with the ad.

Furthermore, the mere observation of this feature may even prompt him/her to call up related beliefs from the other knowledge bases (i.e., agent and topic). Questioning what the possible reasons are for an advertiser to use such a tactic, for example, may draw forth beliefs held in memory about what the persuasive agent is trying to achieve, while recalling from memory other products that have used the particular tactic in their

³⁴This phenomenon is thought to occur as a result of classical conditioning (Peter and Olson, 1999).

advertising may elicit thoughts about what the viewer knows about the particular product category.

The organization of these causal-explanatory beliefs is thought to be in the form of knowledge structures called schemas. Schemas represent the personally meaningful associations between two (or more) meaning concepts which are linked in the consumer's mind. They are conceptualized as higher-order cognitive structures which guide perception, thought, and action (Akhter, 1989). And a consumer can have belief schemas which represent his/her knowledge about virtually any concept, including product categories, stores, specific market-related behaviors, other people, and even themselves.

The Development of DRTV Advertising Belief Schemas and the PKM

Cognitive theorists conclude that consumers acquire their belief schemas about marketplace objects (e.g., products, brands, etc.) in three ways. Schemas may develop as a result of the individual's direct experiences in the marketing environment, by observing others experiencing a product (e.g., in a commercial), and from external sources, such as the mass media, friends, family or other consumers they encounter.

A particular direct experience variable which leads to the development of beliefs about direct marketing is past purchase. Studies have investigated consumers' past purchase experience for its influence on attitudes toward specific methods of direct marketing advertising (e.g., Korgoankar, 1997), Akaah et al., 1995), and toward various types of store patronage (e.g., Korgoankar, Lund and Price, 1985). Research findings suggest that consumers' attitudes are a function of one's past purchase experience with a particular stimulus. However, Korgoankar (1997) also found that a lack of experience

with a particular type of shopping can also be reflective of one's attitude toward that shopping mode. For example, choosing not to engage in a certain shopping method may be the result of holding a negative attitude toward that method. Therefore, while a person's belief schema can be derived from certain direct experiences, he/she may also hold beliefs about why they choose not to engage in certain activities.

Vicarious learning is an indirect way in which consumers can learn about marketplace experiences. It occurs by way of observing the actions of others and the consequences of those actions (Peter and Olson, 1999). One example with respect to advertising is when commercials show an individual demonstrating the use of a particular product. And because of direct response advertising's reliance upon demonstrations and other types of tactics which try to teach consumers what to expect from a particular product, it is likely that consumers may have developed belief schemas for tactics used in DRTV advertising via vicarious learning.

Obtaining information about the marketplace from external sources is another factor in the development of belief schemas about advertising. Friestad and Wright (1994) suggest that both this method, and that of learning one's beliefs vicariously may reflect the development of 'folk knowledge' about the marketplace. The folk psychology model posits that, in addition to their personal experiences, individuals acquire general knowledge about human phenomena as a result of their exchanges with personal sources (e.g., social exchanges with family, friends and other consumers) and through interactions with mediated sources (e.g., published commentary from journalistic sources). With respect to persuasion processes, for example, these exchanges occur when people describe their beliefs about persuasion to others, or when they hear or read media reports having to

do with some persuasion event.

The PKM takes the folk psychology model into account in its explanation of how persuasion occurs. It contends that, over time, perceptions and interpersonal communications are pooled, and a socially-constructed conceptualization of how persuasion occurs emerges. This conceptualization, then, represents the culturally-shared set of common-sense beliefs that individuals come to hold about the internal, psychological events that bring about persuasion. These common-sense beliefs (or 'folk wisdom') are what people will reference when they describe how they think persuasion occurs (Friestad and Wright, 1995).

Parodies and satirical skits, such as those performed by comedians (e.g., on Saturday Night Live), provide anecdotal evidence that consumers have folk wisdom about the tactics typically used in direct response television commercials. This is because viewers must have expectations and knowledge about DRTV advertisements in order to understand them. The fact that they do understand them (and perhaps find them humorous) is an indication that they are not only familiar with the tactics, but also with the negative issues associated with the advertising format.

Based upon the ways in which belief schemas are thought to develop, it seems likely that most adult consumers' schemas for DRTV short-form advertising include beliefs derived from vicarious learning, as well as from information gathered from external sources. Consumers' schemas may also include beliefs about the purchasing aspects involved with DRTV advertising, although they may have never made such a purchase before.

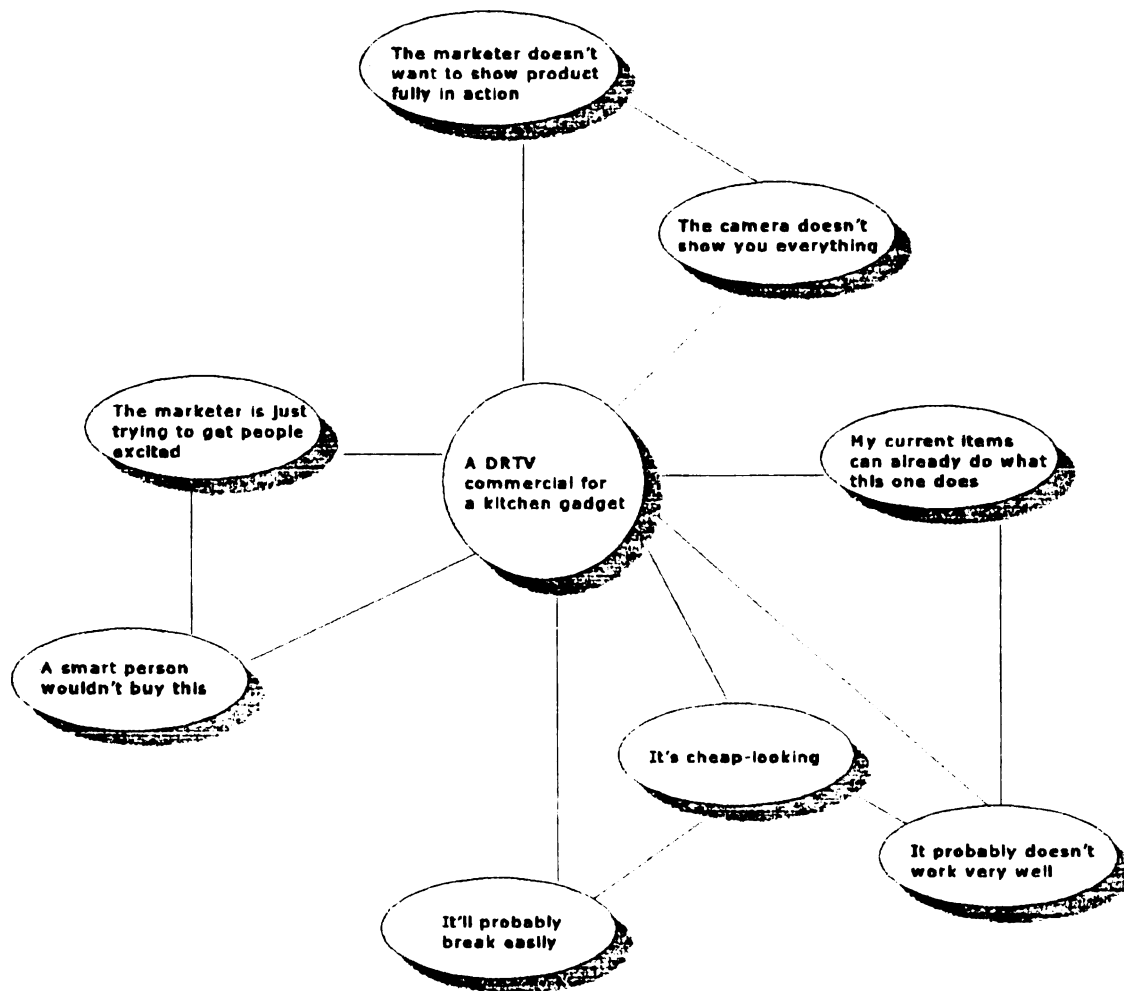
The Potential Impact of Curiosity on DRTV Deceptiveness Schemas

The persuasion knowledge model describes how consumers come to learn about persuasion events that they encounter in the marketplace. With respect to advertisements, two of the PKM's key propositions are that consumers develop and hold schemas (or a set of shared beliefs) about how certain advertising tactics work, and that exposure to certain tactics may trigger these schemas, as well as other related schemas.

Given the long-time use of various familiar tactics in DRTV commercials, it is probable that adult consumers have developed schemas regarding what many of these tactics are intended to do, and how they work in viewers' minds to induce persuasion. And because the formula used in traditional DRTV commercials often features an initial attention-getting tactic (followed by presentation of the problem and then the product as its solution) (see Eicoff 1988), viewer exposure to tactics would be the most likely trigger of a DRTV belief schema (should one exist). Furthermore, because many of these tactics are perceived as misleading or deceptive, they also may trigger schemas that relate to other aspects of the commercial that are also perceived negatively. Two such possible related belief schemas are the motives of the advertiser, and the nature or character of the particular product featured in the commercial. Thus, consumers may come to hold what might be termed a 'DRTV deceptiveness schema' which may be activated when they encounter such a tactic, or when prompted to think about tactics (e.g., upon exposure to an advertisement). A hypothetical example of a consumer's cognitive representations for a DRTV deceptiveness schema is depicted in Figure 2.2.

The PKM perspective provides a useful framework which can incorporate all of the issues raised in research studies and by DRTV experts regarding consumers' negative

Figure 2.2
A Hypothetical Consumer's DRTV Deceptiveness Belief Schema



perceptions of the DRTV short form commercial. In particular, it can be helpful in investigating whether consumers' perceptions associated with the traditional DRTV short format are likely to affect their perceptions of the new hybrid format. This is a specific concern because hybrids frequently include the familiar toll-free telephone number as a response mode, in addition to a web site address. Hatch (1999) notes that this is because many consumers are not comfortable with using the Internet for the purpose of purchasing items.

According to the PKM, if the inclusion of a telephone number (or some other familiar tactic) is perceived by consumers as a deceptiveness tactic, it may trigger a DRTV deceptiveness schema. If so, this may cause consumers to engage in some coping behavior in order to keep from being persuaded, or to simply not attend to the ad (thereby preventing them from moving through to purchase).

There is also the possibility that consumers' exposure to unfamiliar DRTV executional elements (such as web site addresses) might somehow cause such a deceptiveness schema to not be triggered, thereby possibly allowing persuasion to occur. An explanation for this possible occurrence is offered by Maloney (1962 and 1963). Maloney notes that there is evidence to suggest that, despite whatever specific negative beliefs one may hold about advertising, he/she may still become inclined to act in ways that are totally contrary to those beliefs.

Maloney (1962) investigated female consumers' beliefs about the believability of advertising. He suggests that, because consumers understand the goal of persuasive communications (such as advertised messages), such messages are likely to induce low believability in the individual in the form of overt criticism. However, this type of overt

criticism of an ad's believability, "is likely to be a curious or uncertain non-belief, (p. 3)."³⁵

When this is the case, such criticisms may actually be conducive to persuasion.

This notion is based on the theory of cognitive dissonance. Maloney (1962) states:

"If we are to persuade someone to hold a point of view contrary to that which he now holds, we must first get him to "doubt" his present viewpoint and become "curious" about the viewpoint we espouse. . ." (p. 4), ". . . if the advertising claim is supported by information or experience available to the consumer from sources other than the advertisement itself, the main contribution that an ad can make to persuasion may be to engender a curious disbelief (p. 5)."

In other words, in the case of an 'uncertain non-belief', curiosity is expected to occur because the consumer is more likely to seek out other information upon exposure to something contrary to his/her prior beliefs, than they would upon exposure to something consistent with those beliefs.

This could occur whenever unfamiliar features appear in advertising; and especially when these elements are contrary to the familiar tactics that consumers expect to see.

Lynch and Srull (1982) explain that persuasion results in this instance because the unexpected information captures more of the individual's attention and is better recalled than is expected information. This occurs, however, at the expense of the other information that also appears in the ad (or that is stored in short-term memory). This other information may include other, more familiar tactics, or the observers' particular beliefs about any other aspect of the advertisement (e.g., the brand, product, advertiser, etc.).

³⁵Here, Maloney was referring to previous studies' findings that ads were considered 'hard to believe' by respondents. He contends that this statement can either mean that a person finds the message so unbelievable that they would not be interested in trying the product, or that, although they find it unbelievable, they might try it merely out of curiosity.

Compared to the more traditional tactics used in DRTV advertising, the new features used in hybrid DRTV advertisements are likely to be relatively unfamiliar to consumers. The use of a web site address as a response mode, for example, has only come about within the past several years, or so (Hatch, 1999). Additionally, although some major advertisers have used the format for several years, such use remains limited to only a relative few industries (e.g., financial and insurance services firms; telecommunications firms; CD, book and magazine marketers; automobile companies; pharmaceutical companies; and tech firms). Another factor is that, while smaller DRTV advertisers continue to air their commercials during the less expensive day-parts, major brand advertisers tend to air their advertisements in the much more costly prime-time periods.

For these reasons, it is likely that consumers have not yet incorporated these newer features into existing belief schemas about DRTV advertising. And since they have probably not come to hold expectations about them at this point in time, these features may well represent information that is contrary to any negative prior beliefs one may hold about the DRTV advertising format.

Another factor with regard to unfamiliar features in DRTV advertising has to do with the possibility that well-known brands (e.g., brands that have a reputation with consumers, often as a result of the use of brand image advertising) may contribute positively to perceptions about the DRTV short form advertising format. In essence, consumers may consider the use of well-known brand names in DRTV commercials as a positive simply because they carry over the reputation of the brand itself, or of a well-known advertiser (e.g., General Motors, Ford, or Time-Life).

Therefore, based upon cognitive dissonance theory, one effect of the newer features used in hybrid DRTV commercials could be that they will increase consumers' willingness to purchase DRTV advertised-products. This should be especially likely to occur when one holds the belief that the DRTV format is deceptive, since there will be a desire to reconcile his/her beliefs with the new, inconsistent information they have encountered (i.e., the new features).

The PKM: A Broader Perspective on Consumer Cognitions

Although the PKM has been influenced by several of the more prominent, traditional persuasion models which attempt to explain consumers' cognitive behavior, Friestad and Wright (1994) note that most of these have neglected (to some degree) the role of the individual's experience with and understanding of persuasion tactics. Attitude-toward-the-Ad models (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1981; MacKenzie, Lutz and Belch 1986), for example, are concerned with how peoples' thoughts and/or feelings about an ad may influence their attitudes toward the brand. The major difference between this approach and the PKM's is that, in the former model, causes for the individual's beliefs are generally not considered for their role in the formation of attitudes.

The elaboration likelihood model (or ELM) (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) is another model which, like the PKM, seeks to examine various causal effects of particular features of persuasion attempts. The basic premise of the ELM is that people are sometimes influenced mainly by an ad's peripheral cues. However, this model does not explain how or why certain types of cues 'signal' consumers to evaluate them, nor does it consider tactics which the viewer is conscious of. The PKM, on the other hand, does consider that

people are aware of and may react to advertisers' actions in an effort to cope with them.

The heuristic-systematic model (or HSM) (Chaiken, 1987), like the PKM, emphasizes individuals' use of certain types of knowledge other than topic (e.g., product) knowledge. Also in common with the PKM, this model posits that people attempt to conserve mental effort by using simple diagnostic rules which may or may not be based in an understanding of why an advertiser has used a particular tactic. The key difference, however is that the individual may or may not actively 'consider' (i.e., be conscious of) the tactics involved in the persuasion attempt. Therefore, the heuristical rules they rely upon may simply reflect covariation learning (i.e., the individual may not ever attempt to understand why the advertiser chose the tactic they did). The HSM also does not take into account the role of an individual's maturation, or the development of persuasion knowledge over time.

The attribution framework (Hovland, Janis and Kelley, 1953) is another model which attempts explain consumers' interpretations of the causes of advertising and marketing practices. However, so far, these studies have had a limited view of the consumer's interest in interpreting persuasion attempts. The PKM, on the other hand, conceives of consumers' interests in understanding these events more broadly.³⁶ It also considers how consumers cope with persuasion events in order to achieve their own goals.

Statement of the Problem

The broad range of research findings relating to consumers' concerns about both

³⁶This is a goal which several attribution researchers agree has not been fully achieved by this approach (e.g., Eagly and Chaiken, 1984; Folkes, 1988).

television and direct response advertising (including DRTV's short form) indicates that consumers perceive that advertisers use a variety of deceptive and misleading tactics which are intended to elicit specific responses in audience members. The perceived intentions underlying the use of such tactics may reflect what consumers believe are an advertiser's deceptive motives, as well as specific beliefs about the nature of products typically advertised in this type of commercial. Because such beliefs may potentially influence consumers' behavioral intentions (e.g., Duncan, 1986; Alpert, 1988), this issue should be of importance to advertisers, especially those considering using the DRTV short advertising format.

However, the recent predictions of DRTV advertising practitioners about the potential of hybrid DRTV commercials (e.g., that they are 'the future of television' [Bliwas, 2000]) indicate that consumers' concerns with the traditional DRTV advertising format are not considered a threat to the acceptance of such advertising. Interestingly, the notion that consumer concerns are not a problem may be supported by cognitive dissonance theory. Generally-speaking, this theory holds that, when consumers' disbelief of advertising is uncertain, exposure to inconsistent information may cause them to become persuaded (Maloney, 1962). With respect to the DRTV short format, if the unfamiliar and/or positive techniques currently used in hybrids (e.g., web site addresses and major brands) can effectively 'by-pass' consumers' beliefs about the deceptiveness of the format, then DRTV advertisers may do well to consider using the format.

In light of this possibility, the present study will seek to investigate the following research questions: (1) Do consumer beliefs about DRTV short-form advertising reflect the existence of folk wisdom? (2) Do certain demographic and personal factors influence

these folk wisdom beliefs? (3) Can new and unfamiliar DRTV tactics persuade (i.e., increase their willingness-to-buy via DRTV advertising) individuals who hold negative DRTV beliefs (or have demographic or personal traits that past research has found to be associated with negative beliefs about direct marketing advertising)? (4) Are positive, new tactics (e.g., major brands) in DRTV advertisements more capable of increasing persuasion than neutral ones (e.g., web site addresses)? These questions will be investigated through the hypotheses that are presented in the next section.

Study Hypotheses

The present study is intended to explore the beliefs that consumers hold about the intentions underlying advertisers' use of certain tactics typically associated with the DRTV advertising short format, their perceptions of what motivates advertisers to use the format, and the character of the products which are typically advertised using the format. First, the study will attempt to determine whether consumers do, in fact, hold a DRTV deceptiveness belief schema. The specific hypothesis to be investigated is:

Hypothesis 1: Consumers' beliefs about the tactics, product character and advertiser's motives for using the DRTV format, reflect cultural folk knowledge. Folk knowledge will be considered as being present if:

- 1 a): Collectively, respondents' beliefs regarding each DRTV aspect diverge (i.e., are not all correlated), and
- 1 b): their beliefs across each of the three aspects of DRTV converge (i.e., are correlated to some degree).

Because the consumer DRTV deceptiveness beliefs measure is a newly-developed one, it was decided that it should first be investigated to determine the potential influence of personal factors under investigation in the study, such as demographic variables and the past purchase of DRTV-advertised goods on these beliefs. This will be done prior to examining the measure's potential impact on the dependent variable in the study, which is consumers' willingness to purchase when unfamiliar features are included in DRTV advertisements. Also, because this study represents a new research focus, it was determined that there was no basis upon which to expect the beliefs measure to moderate or mediate the other independent variables of interest. This may be a point of interest in future research, however.

In previous studies, direct marketing advertising beliefs were found to affect the behavioral issue of purchase intentions in specific ways. Akaah et al., (1995) note, for example, that consumers' past purchase experience influences attitude. Particularly, the more positive a consumer's past purchase experience, the greater the likelihood that he/she would evince positive attitudes toward the product (and vice versa).

Korgoankar et al., (1997) measured respondents' past direct marketing purchases based on the method of ordering, dollars spent, and the number of orders last year. However, they did not investigate respondents' level of satisfaction with their direct marketing purchases. Their study found that individuals who are critical of direct marketing advertising (all formats) make the fewest direct marketing purchases of all, and hold the most negative beliefs about it. This finding suggests that certain individuals may hold beliefs that influence them to refrain from purchasing via direct marketing advertising, period. Indeed, as Tixier (1987) states: "The customer infers a high degree of

commonality among all direct marketers. Whenever one of your fellow direct marketers generates dissatisfied or unsatisfied customers, you run the risk of being considered an accomplice,” (p. 62).

On the other hand, the mere fact that an individual has purchased through any direct marketing mode in the past may be an indication that he/she has a more positive outlook toward direct marketing than one who has not made such a purchase. If so, then it might be expected that, regardless of the level of satisfaction one felt with their purchase experience, past purchasers will be more inclined to see DRTV advertising in a better light than individuals who have never purchased, and perhaps don't intend to. This notion implies that people who have never purchased via DRTV may hold beliefs about the format that cause them to not even consider such offers. Thus, the following hypothesis will be investigated:

Hypothesis 2: The deceptiveness ratings of respondents who have made DRTV purchases before on the DRTV deceptiveness beliefs scale will be significantly lower than will those of non-purchasers.

Although consumer demographic variables have also been found to affect beliefs about direct marketing advertising, the specific findings have been inconsistent. For instance, Korgoankar et al., (1997) found that critics of direct marketing advertising methods were mostly college-educated males in technical, managerial, or professional occupations, and in the upper income category. This contrasts with individuals who were more positive toward direct marketing advertising; they were younger, of lower income and education levels, and employed in less-skilled occupations.

These findings are consistent with those of a study on consumers' reactions to "800" and "900" inbound telephone calls, which suggests that males, retirees, students, and individuals in trade occupations are more likely to be dissatisfied with this type of call than females and middle-aged consumers (Morrow and Tankersley, 1994). An industry study (Lenihan, 2000) which profiled the television shopper (all in-home methods) also found that the average TV shopper is female.

Earlier studies that examined differences between television ad shoppers and non-shoppers, found conflicting results, however. For example, while studies by James and Cunningham (1987), and by Darian (1987) both found differences in age, the former study found significant differences in gender, but the latter found differences in income. Neither study, however, found differences in education between in-home and store shoppers.

A later study by Donthu and Gilliland (1996), however, found that infomercial shoppers did not differ significantly in terms of age, income, gender or education from non-shoppers. Finally, Akaah et al., (1995) found that consumers' patronage of direct marketing offers varies as a function of their income status; it was higher for upper income consumers than for those of lower income levels.

The findings of the studies cited above indicate that it is not clear exactly how direct marketing (and especially DRTV) shoppers differ from non-shoppers in terms of the specific demographic variables examined. For this reason, it is important to investigate the relationship between DRTV beliefs and these consumer demographic variables.

Considering that several of the earlier studies found that females are more likely to shop from home than males (e.g., Korgoankar, et al., 1997; Morrow and Tankersley, 1994; and James and Cunningham, 1987), the following hypothesis will be investigated

with respect to differences in DRTV deceptiveness beliefs:

Hypothesis 3: The deceptiveness ratings of females on the DRTV deceptiveness beliefs scale will be significantly lower than will males’.

Further, while several of the studies noted earlier found differences between shopper-types based upon income (e.g., Korgoankar, et al., 1997; Darian, 1987; and Akaah et al., 1995), only one study (Korgoankar et al’s., 1997) found differences based upon education. However, studies that have examined consumer responses to television advertising, in general, suggest that individuals with more education tend to hold less favorable attitudes (e.g., Mittal, 1994) and beliefs (e.g., Alwitt and Prabhaker, 1992 and 1994)³⁷ toward television than those with more education. Therefore, the following hypotheses will be investigated in this study:

Hypothesis 4: The deceptiveness ratings of individuals with lower incomes (i.e., incomes below \$35K) on the DRTV deceptiveness beliefs scale will be significantly lower than those of individuals with higher incomes.

Hypothesis 5: The deceptiveness ratings of individuals with the least education (i.e., a high school diploma) on the DRTV deceptiveness beliefs scale will be significantly lower than those with more education.

Another general finding in the available literature examining consumer beliefs and attitudes toward television advertising is that these cognitive variables do appear to affect subsequent behaviors, such as purchase intentions. In particular, in the same way that

³⁷Alwitt and Prabhaker’s latter study also found that higher income was associated with less favorable beliefs.

attitudes have been found to correspondingly influence purchase intentions (e.g., Akaah et al., 1995; Korgoankar et al., 1997), so should beliefs. That is, when consumers hold negative beliefs about a specific advertising format such as DRTV, it is probable that these beliefs will similarly influence their purchase intentions about DRTV-advertised products. On the basis of this reasoning, it should be expected that when negative beliefs are held about the DRTV format, they should negatively influence consumers' willingness to purchase via DRTV advertising.

However, because unexpected features that are contrary to one's existing beliefs can cause the viewer to try to reconcile this inconsistent, new information with his/her existing beliefs (due to cognitive dissonance), the effect of these features may be that they actually increase willingness to purchase. This situation reflects what Maloney (1962) referred to as 'low believability', or a state of 'curious non-belief', where the individual's overt criticism of the message features actually causes them to become more amenable to being persuaded when inconsistent or unexpected information is encountered.

Therefore, when positive and/or unfamiliar features (such as major brands and web site addresses) appear in DRTV short-form commercials, their effect on an individual who holds the belief that the format is deceptive should be to increase his/her willingness-to-buy from the commercial. Thus, the following hypotheses will be investigated:

Hypothesis 6a: High DRTV deceptiveness belief ratings will be inversely³⁸

³⁸An inverse relationship was expected here because, while the response sets for the DRTV deceptiveness scale ranged from 'weaker' to 'stronger' beliefs about the items (i.e., [1] represented strong disagreement that an item was deceptive, and [5] represented strong agreement that an item was deceptive), the response sets for the willingness-to-buy

associated with willingness-to-buy ratings when web site addresses are included in DRTV advertisements.

Hypothesis 6b: High DRTV deceptiveness belief ratings will be inversely³⁹ associated with willingness-to-buy ratings when major brands are featured in DRTV advertisements.

Furthermore, because it is probable that major (i.e., well-known) brands are more likely to be seen as a positive feature than web site addresses (due to the reputation of the brand and/or the advertiser), the following related hypothesis will also be investigated:

Hypothesis 6c: When DRTV deceptiveness belief ratings are high, the major brands feature will produce significantly higher willingness-to-buy ratings than will web site addresses.

However, when an individual already holds more positive beliefs about the format, such features should not be expected to increase willingness-to-buy, since the features are consistent with (not contrary to) his/her existing beliefs. The following hypotheses will investigate this notion:

Hypothesis 7a: Low DRTV deceptiveness belief ratings will be inversely⁴⁰ associated with willingness-to-buy ratings when web site addresses are included in DRTV advertisements.

Hypothesis 7b: Low DRTV deceptiveness belief ratings will be

measures ranged from 'highest' to 'no' increase in willingness-to-buy (i.e., [1] represented great increase in willingness-to-buy, and [5] represented no increase in willingness-to-buy).

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

inversely⁴¹ associated with willingness-to-buy ratings when major brands are featured in DRTV advertisements.

It can be assumed that one reason people may have for never having made a DRTV purchase before is because of their negative beliefs about the format (e.g., it is deceptive and/or misleading). If so, then based upon cognitive dissonance theory, the addition of new features should make these individuals more inclined to purchase (i.e., they should show an increase in willingness to purchase). To examine this notion, the following hypotheses will be investigated:

Hypothesis 8a: Willingness-to-buy ratings (when web site addresses are included in DRTV ads) will be significantly higher among individuals who have not purchased via DRTV than they will be for individuals who have made such purchases before.

Hypothesis 8b: Willingness-to-buy ratings (when major brands are included in DRTV ads) will be significantly higher among individuals who have not purchased via DRTV than they will be for individuals who have made such purchases before.

And again, because major brands are more likely to be seen as a positive feature than web site addresses (due to the reputation of the brand and/or the advertiser), the following related hypothesis will also be investigated:

Hypothesis 8c: Among individuals with no DRTV purchase experience, the major brands feature will produce significantly higher

⁴¹Ibid.

willingness-to-buy ratings than will web site addresses.

Finally, while previous study findings regarding the influence of various demographic variables on direct marketing issues are conflicting, it is still important to examine other aspects of the direct marketing experience that may be influenced by these types of consumer characteristics. One issue that can be investigated is whether willingness-to-buy is affected by new features in DRTV commercials among various demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, age, income and education).

First, because females have been shown to be more inclined to purchase from direct marketing advertisements, it can be assumed that they hold more positive beliefs toward DRTV short-form commercials than do males. If so, then based upon dissonance theory, males should perceive new features as more contrary to their existing beliefs than females. Therefore, males should become more willing to purchase when such features are added to DRTV advertisements than females. The following hypotheses will investigate this notion:

Hypothesis 9a: Willingness-to-buy ratings (when web site addresses are included in DRTV ads) for male respondents will be significantly higher than they will be for female respondents.

Hypothesis 9b: Willingness-to-buy ratings (when major brands are included in DRTV ads) for male respondents will be significantly higher than they will be for female respondents.

Hypothesis 9c: Among males, the major brands feature will produce significantly higher willingness-to-buy ratings than will web site addresses.

On the same basis, the following hypotheses will be investigated regarding

education levels and willingness-to-buy when new features are included in DRTV

advertisements:

Hypothesis 10a: Willingness-to-buy ratings (when web site addresses are included in DRTV ads) will be significantly higher for individuals with more education than they will be for those with less education.

Hypothesis 10b: Willingness-to-buy ratings (when major brands are included in DRTV ads) will be significantly higher for individuals with more education than they will be for those with less education.

Hypothesis 10c: Among higher educated individuals, the major brands feature will produce significantly higher willingness-to-buy ratings than will web site addresses.

And, with respect to income level and willingness-to-buy when new features are included in DRTV advertisements, the following hypotheses will be investigated:

Hypothesis 11a: Willingness-to-buy ratings (when web site addresses are included in DRTV ads) will be significantly higher for individuals with higher incomes (i.e., above \$35K) than they will be for individuals with lower incomes (below \$35K).

Hypothesis 11b: Willingness-to-buy ratings (when major brands are included in DRTV ads) will be significantly higher for individuals with higher incomes (i.e., above \$35K) than they will be for individuals with lower incomes (i.e., below \$35K).

Hypothesis 11c: Among individuals with higher incomes (i.e., above \$35K), the major brands feature will produce significantly higher willingness-to-buy ratings than will web site addresses.

The next chapter will describe the methods that were used to investigate the study

hypotheses. Following a description of the various methods used in selecting the sample and developing and administering the instrument, the procedures for carrying out the investigation of the hypotheses will be presented.

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CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter will describe the methods used in the examination of the problem under study. Following the presentation of the study sample characteristics, development of the research instrument will be described. Part of this process involved a preliminary study that utilized a series of focus groups, which will also be described. Next, the procedure used in administering the questionnaire will be discussed. Finally, the chapter will describe the analyses that were performed in investigating the study hypotheses.

The research design of the study was a correlational design which involved a cross-sectional survey methodology using a newly-developed questionnaire. The major purpose of the design was to correlate respondents' ratings on the DRTV deceptiveness beliefs measure with their ratings on two items that were intended to measure willingness-to-buy from DRTV advertisements when two unfamiliar features are included in such ads.

Sample Selection

The questionnaire was administered to a non-random, convenience sample consisting of adults that ranged in age from eighteen to fifty-five and older.⁴² In order to ensure that a broad age range of adults was included in the sample, recruitment of subjects was carried out in several ways.

⁴²Wimmer and Dominick (1991) note that non-probability sampling techniques are considered acceptable when the goal of the research is to investigate the various relationships among variables.

First, three community and church-based organizations in the metropolitan-Detroit area were approached and permission was obtained to address members at upcoming meetings.⁴³ These organizations were the Little Rock Baptist Church Optimist Club, the Metropolitan Detroit-area Kiwanis Club, and the Redford YWCA.

Over a period of three months in the Spring of 2000, the researcher attended meetings of both the Little Rock Optimist Club and the Kiwanis Club in order to ask members for their participation in a study on Advertising. A list of interested persons was gathered, and they were informed that the study would be administered following one of their upcoming meetings. A total of 88 adults were recruited from both of these organizations.

To recruit members from the YWCA, the researcher visited the facility several times over a month-long period, and gathered a list of names and phone numbers of older-appearing members and employees (i.e., over the age of twenty-five) who were willing to participate. They were instructed that they would receive a call regarding when the questionnaire was to be administered. A room in the facility was secured and one session was held for the administration to this portion of the sample. A total of 27 adults were recruited from this organization.

In order to recruit the younger adults for the sample, orientation directors at both Michigan State University and Wayne State University were contacted with a request to recruit individuals for this study. The researcher obtained permission to attend the 'New Student Orientation' sessions at the two universities, and made presentations near the end

⁴³ This was done in an effort to ensure a sizeable representation of older individuals (e.g., twenty-four and older).

of the morning sessions to students regarding an interest in recruiting individuals for participation in a study on Advertising. Interested students were asked to come to a predetermined location following the lunch break in order to complete a survey that would last approximately 25 minutes.⁴⁴ A total of 87 individuals were recruited through these efforts.

Measurement Instrument

The study instrument was a self-administered inventory consisting of several independent measures, including consumer beliefs about DRTV advertising deceptiveness, their beliefs regarding the addition of certain new and/or positive features in DRTV commercials (namely, web site addresses and major advertised brands), their direct experience with DRTV purchases, and various demographic characteristics that have been investigated in previous studies in this area. These independent variables are examined for their impact on consumers' willingness to purchase from DRTV advertisements, the main dependent variable under study. The entire questionnaire is presented in Appendix A.

The DRTV deceptiveness beliefs measure was used to operationalize the main independent variable in the study, consumer beliefs about the DRTV short advertising format. The final measure consists of twenty-two belief statements regarding three specific aspects of DRTV short-form advertisements: beliefs about the intentions of certain tactics used in the format, beliefs about the motives of advertisers who use the format to advertise their goods and services, and beliefs about the character of the

⁴⁴ The researcher was allowed to administer the survey in on-site facilities.

products that are advertised using the format. Responses to the items were indicated using 5-point Likert scales that ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5); positively worded items were reverse-ordered (see Appendix A). Ratings on the measure were interpreted as high in DRTV deceptiveness when the mean score was above 3.00, and as low in DRTV deceptiveness when the mean score was 3.00 or below. The scale reliabilities are presented in Chapter 4.

Development of the DRTV Deceptiveness Beliefs Measure

Because no instrument existed which examined adult consumers' beliefs about this particular advertising format, the DRTV deceptiveness beliefs measure had to be developed for the study. The procedure used to develop the main areas of focus for the measure are presented next.

Following a review of the literature examining consumers' perceptions of television and direct response advertising, a general list of tactics used in television commercials and in direct response advertisements (and possible underlying motives) was developed (e.g., Boush et al., 1995; Storholm and Friedman, 1989). Next, a preliminary study was conducted to help expand this initial list to include other tactics that adult consumers identified and associated with DRTV commercials, as well as the intentions that they perceived DRTV advertisers have for using these tactics.

The preliminary study involved the use of three focus groups. The participants were college-aged males and females enrolled in an Advertising Ethics course at a large, mid-western University. These individuals were used because of their exposure to issues regarding advertising deception (e.g., what constitutes advertising deceptiveness from a

legal perspective, etc.). Thus, it was determined that these individuals could provide a fuller perspective on what advertisers' potential motives might be (especially with respect to Rotzoll et al's., [1996] perspectives on self-interest and altruism). Additionally, this age group also represented the younger end of the adult age spectrum to be used in the main study. Essentially, their familiarity with DRTV tactics served as a general indication that the variety of tactics used in the traditional DRTV short advertising format are readily identifiable by adult consumers of all ages, including those with the fewest number of years of exposure to the format.

The general procedure for the focus group sessions involved recording participants' responses to questions regarding the advertising appeals (i.e., tactics) used in a series of video-taped DRTV commercials (see Appendix B for this questionnaire). The commercials were taped over a three-month period in 1996, during various day-parts (including early and late fringe, and prime-time); and from a variety of cable, network, and independent television stations. Participants' responses were later transcribed for use in the development of the initial measurement instrument.

The focus group participants identified a total of fourteen tactics which were associated with potentially deceptive intentions on the part of advertisers who use the DRTV short-form advertising method. This list was later narrowed to include only tactics that were also discussed in DRTV experts' writings (e.g., Witek, 1981; Eicoff, 1988), and in empirical studies on direct marketing and television advertising (e.g., Muehling, 1997, Korgoankar, 1997; Akaah, 1995; and Bousch et al., 1995). The tactics included in the measure for this study were: celebrity and consumer endorsers, disclaimers, use of rapid speech, free (premium) offers, money back guarantees, shipping and handling fees, and

demonstrations/ illustrations.

The practices identified in the research by Storholm and Friedman (1989) were used as a guide in the development of specific items regarding consumer beliefs about DRTV-advertised products, and advertisers' motives for using the format. Rotzoll et al's., (1996) theoretical perspective was also used in order to design items intended to tap how respondents viewed individuals who purchase DRTV-advertised products (and services), and the specific motives that advertisers are thought to have for choosing the format (as opposed to choosing other advertising formats). Finally, general studies on consumer attitudes toward marketing were also reviewed (e.g., Barksdale and Darden, 1972) for perspective on the construction of belief statements to be used in this study.

The DRTV deceptiveness beliefs measure developed as a result of this process comprised the main independent variable in this study. Although it originally consisted of forty-four items (the original DRTV belief measure items are indicated in Appendix A), sixteen of the original items were dropped as a result of elimination following the factor analysis and reliability analysis processes (described in Chapter 4). Thus, the final measure consists of twenty-two items.

Development of New Advertising Features and Willingness-to-buy Measures

Because of the recent trend of so-called 'hybrid' DRTV advertisements to include new features which consumers may not readily associate with the traditional DRTV short format, two items were also developed to investigate the potential impact of such features on consumers' willingness to patronize short-form DRTV advertising, the main dependent variable in the study. Web site addresses and advertising for major advertisers' brands

represent two additional independent variables under study. Specifically, these variables were developed to measure the ability of relatively unfamiliar and/or positive tactics to increase the persuasiveness of DRTV short-form commercials (i.e., as measured by increased willingness-to-buy) when they are included in this type of commercial.

Although no published studies were found which examined either of these features, the idea that they may enhance the persuasiveness of DRTV short-form commercials (that is, trigger positive beliefs about the format) is based on cognitive dissonance theory, as well as on the PKM's (Friestad and Wright, 1994) notion that exposure to tactics can trigger related beliefs. In this instance, the appearance of new features in DRTV commercials may tend to increase the likelihood of purchase because consumers are not likely to readily associate these new features with the DRTV format (and thus call up their DRTV deceptiveness schema).

The willingness-to-buy purchase intention variable has been examined in other studies that were addressed in the literature review (e.g., Garland and Rhea, 1988). For the present study, this variable was included in two items which were intended to assess the ability of the new features (i.e., the independent variables) to increase willingness-to-buy via DRTV advertising. Specifically, respondents were asked to read two short paragraphs regarding the inclusion of web site addresses and major advertisers' brands in DRTV short-form ads. The paragraph regarding the inclusion of web site addresses in DRTV ads suggested that this was a way for customers to place orders (or get more information). For the item concerning major advertisers' brands, the paragraph discussed how well-known advertisers have recently begun to use the advertising format (both items are presented in Appendix A, part 3, section 2).

Respondents were then asked to indicate whether the inclusion of each of these features would increase their likelihood of purchasing the product or service. Responses were indicated on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) “greatly”, (2) “a good deal”, (3) “somewhat”, (4) “very little”, or (5) “none at all”.

Measurement of Personal and Demographic Variables

The past purchase variable has been investigated for its influence on purchase intentions in a number of studies regarding direct marketing advertising (e.g., Akaah et al., 1995; Korgoankar et al., 1997). The purchase experience variable used in the present study is intended to generally assess whether or not this method of purchase has ever been used in the past. It was measured by response to the following question: “To the best of my memory, I ____ purchased item(s) as a result of seeing it/them advertised in a DRTV advertisement.” The response options were “have” and “have never”.

Finally, a variety of demographic variables that have been investigated in television and direct response advertising studies were also measured in an effort to help clarify their impact on the dependent variable. These demographic variables were: age, gender, income, education, ethnicity, and occupation.

Measurement Issues and Pretesting of the Instrument

Alpert (1993) identifies three measurement issues that can be problematic with respect to the survey methodology. First, social desirability may be a potential problem in survey methodology. However, it is unlikely to be an issue when investigating consumers’ market beliefs, since these types of beliefs are not intensely personal, nor do they regard

controversial issues. Additionally, confidentiality is assured, so respondents will probably feel little need to impress the researchers who administered and processed the results.

Second, leading questions refer to whether or not the beliefs are stated in a leading fashion. To help ensure against this in the present study, an attempt was made to include grossly overstated belief statements in which wide spread disagreement was expected.

Finally, Alpert suggests that measures should be taken to help assure that the same person would respond the same way if asked the question at a later time (i.e., reliability). In an effort to help assure reliability of the items, several nearly duplicate beliefs that were added to the questionnaire were examined to determine whether responses to similar belief statements were consistent.

Upon completion of the development of the initial instrument, it was pretested on a convenience sample of ten adults in order to identify potential problems, such as item wording and other issues. After adjustments to the wording of items were made, the questionnaire was used to test the first hypothesis, which addressed the question of whether consumers share a set of beliefs regarding DRTV short-form advertising.

Instrument Administration Procedure

The data for this study was collected through a self-administered questionnaire booklet (see Appendix A). Upon arrival at the administration site, each group of respondents was informed that they would be taking part in a university study which sought their opinions about direct response television advertising. The researcher then read instructions regarding how to proceed through the survey (see Appendix A for the exact instructions given to participants).

Next, respondents were shown a video-tape which included five traditional direct response television advertisements; after each ad the tape was stopped and respondents were asked to complete a series of questions (see Appendix A, part 1). The purpose of asking these questions was two-fold. First, they were intended to prompt respondents to differentiate between the traditional DRTV short-form advertisements under study, and brand image advertisements. Additionally, they served as a means of ensuring that subjects would believe that the focus of the study was on their evaluations of DRTV advertising, in general, instead of on their perceptions about the deceptiveness of this particular format.

Next, respondents were asked to rate how confident they were that they knew what a direct response television commercial was. Respondents then proceeded on to the main study items, followed by the demographic and personal items (see parts 2 and 3 in Appendix A).

Upon completion of the entire questionnaire, respondents were debriefed and told the specific purpose of the study (that is, to identify consumers' perceptions about the deceptiveness of the DRTV short advertising format). As compensation, members of each group wrote their names and phone numbers (and club name, where applicable) on a form and deposited the form into a ballot box upon leaving the site (to ensure anonymity). A total of three \$25.00 drawings were held. A drawing took place following each of the university administrations, while a separate drawing was held following the completion of administration to all club members. The winner of the latter drawing was contacted by phone and later received a \$25.00 check by mail.

Data Analysis

Because the DRTV beliefs measure had to be constructed from the individual items regarding the DRTV format (e.g., tactics, product character and advertiser motives), the first analytic procedure that was performed was a principal components factor analysis. The principle components analysis was selected because, in addition to extracting the common variance, this method allows for the extraction of both the variance unique to an indicator, as well as the variance attributed by error (Pedhauzer and Pedhauzer, 1991).⁴⁵

In order to run this procedure and later test the hypotheses, the total sample of 202 adults was randomly split in half using the SPSS program. The factor analysis procedure was then run on approximately half of the sample (n=93), and the DRTV deceptiveness beliefs measurement scale was constructed. The remaining half of the sample (n=109) was used to examine the reliability of the scale, as well as to test the study hypotheses.

Prior to analyzing the data in order to address the study hypotheses, univariate and comparative analyses were conducted to examine possible abnormalities (such as limited variability and skewness) in the data which might affect the results. The data was plotted and examined for outliers and for the shape of the distributions.

In some cases, potential problems were identified. Most notably, three of the main variables' distributions were negatively skewed (namely, the DRTV measure, and both of the willingness-to-buy measures); and one of these distributions (the DRTV measure) contained an extremely low score (or, outlier). Further investigation of the distributions revealed that they were all abnormally distributed. Even after removing the outlying case

⁴⁵These authors suggest that, when over 50% of the variance is extracted in the first two or three factors, the method is the most useful.

for the DRTV measure, neither the distribution nor skewness improved.

These abnormal distributions dictated the use of distribution-free (or non-parametric) statistics to test the study hypotheses. Unlike other inferential statistics (such as t-tests and Pearson correlations), non-parametric statistics do not require that any assumptions be made about the distribution of the population from which the samples were taken (Saslow, 1982). Therefore, all of the hypotheses were tested using non-parametric statistics.

Hypothesis 1, which expected that consumers share a set of core beliefs about DRTV advertising, was examined based on the concepts of convergent and divergent beliefs, devised by Friestad and Wright (1995). Convergence is described as a pattern of significantly-correlated beliefs across different people in the sample, while divergence is a discernable pattern of differences in beliefs held by the same individual. With respect to the DRTV beliefs scale, if a set of shared beliefs does exist, then individuals should show some agreement (that is, converge) across the three belief areas (tactics, product character, and advertisers' motives); but they should discriminate (or diverge) within the three belief areas.

Hypothesis 1 was analyzed following the factor analysis procedure. Once the underlying dimensions of each of the three belief areas have been identified, Spearman's rho correlations were run across of all the dimensions of each belief area (that is, tactic beliefs, product character beliefs and beliefs about advertisers' motives). The resulting correlation matrix was then examined to determine whether convergence and divergence appeared to exist.

Though Friestad and Wright (1995) used this particular method for investigating

the existence of shared core beliefs about advertising, they note that it is not yet known what degree of convergence and divergence should be taken as an indication that shared beliefs actually reflect folk knowledge. No other studies were cited in this research which utilized this particular method of investigating the existence of folk knowledge, either. However, because of the exploratory nature of the Friestad and Wright study, as well as of the present study, this method seems reasonable for examining generally whether or not folk knowledge appears to exist regarding the DRTV short advertising format.

Using Friestad and Wright's (1995) study as a guideline, convergence will be said to exist if all three of the belief areas in the correlation matrix are significantly inter-correlated. In other words, if one (or more) tactic belief dimension(s) is significantly correlated with at least one advertiser motive belief dimension, and with at least one product character belief dimension; and one or more of these latter belief dimensions are also significantly correlated, then convergence exists.

In order to test for divergence, intra-item correlations were examined to determine whether or not individuals varied in terms of how deceptively they view the various items within each of the three belief areas (that is, beliefs about different DRTV tactics, product character, and advertisers' motives). If intra-item correlations are not all significant, then this will indicate that divergence does exist (i.e., individuals do not appear to view all items within a belief area as 'deceptive'). If, however, all of the intra-item correlations are significant, this would indicate that individuals do not vary in their view of how deceptive the various tactics (and other belief issues) are. In this case, divergence would not be said to exist. Hypothesis 1 will be accepted only if both convergence and divergence are found.

Next, the remaining hypotheses were addressed. Hypotheses 2 through 5; and hypotheses 8(a) and (b); 9(a) and (b); 10(a) and (b); 11(a) and (b) were all examined using the Mann-Whiney U-Test to compare differences between groups on the variables of interest in these hypotheses. Hypotheses 6(a) and (b), and 7(a) and (b) were examined using Spearman's rho to determine whether associations existed between high DRTV (and low) deceptiveness beliefs and increased willingness-to-buy when unfamiliar features (web site addresses and major brands) are included in DRTV commercials. Hypotheses 6(c), 8(c), 9(c), 10(c), and 11(c), which all addressed whether a positive unfamiliar feature (major brands featured) produced higher willingness-to-buy scores than a neutral unfamiliar feature (web site addresses as a response mode), were examined by using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. This test allowed for comparison of a respondent's scores on two measures.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

As construction of the DRTV deceptiveness beliefs measure was an initial focus of the analysis, this chapter will begin by discussing the results of the factor analysis which was performed. This section will also include a description of the respondent sample used to obtain the factor analysis results. Next, the chapter will present the descriptive statistics for the main study variables, beginning with a profile of the sample used to test the eleven hypotheses.

In order to provide better insight into the research questions that this study sought to examine (presented at the conclusion of the problem statement section), discussion of related hypotheses will be grouped by the research question they address. Therefore, the results of hypothesis 1 will be discussed in conjunction with the question of whether or not consumers' DRTV beliefs reflect folk wisdom. The results of hypotheses 2 through 5, which addressed the question of how demographic and personal factors (i.e., past purchase experience) influence DRTV deceptiveness beliefs, will be discussed next.

Hypotheses 6(a) and (b), and 7(a) and (b) addressed the question of whether unfamiliar tactics can increase the willingness of individuals who hold negative DRTV beliefs to purchase from DRTV advertising. Another related area has to do with whether individuals with certain demographic characteristics (e.g., males, individuals with more education, and individuals with higher incomes) and personal traits (e.g., those who purchase less frequently via direct response methods) become more persuaded when unfamiliar features are present in DRTV advertising. This notion is based in the fact that

past research has shown that consumers possessing these traits tend to hold more negative views of direct response methods and television advertising than do other consumers (see, for example, Korgoankar et al., 1997; Morrow and Tankersley 1994; Alwitt and Prabhaker, 1992 and 1994). The results of hypotheses 8(a) and (b), 9(a) and (b), 10(a) and (b), and 11(a) and (b) will address this area.

A final research question of interest was whether or not a positive feature is more apt to produce persuasion (i.e., increase willingness-to-buy) than a neutral one among individuals who hold (or are more likely to hold) negative DRTV beliefs. This area will be discussed in conjunction with the results of hypotheses 6(c), 8(c), 9(c), 10(c) and 11(c).

Factor Analysis Results

In order to develop the DRTV deceptiveness beliefs measure, each DRTV belief area (beliefs about tactics, product character and advertisers' motives) was subjected to a factor analysis. The underlying structure of each belief area was assessed by using a principal components analysis.

As it was expected that the factors were uncorrelated, the initial factor solutions were orthogonally-rotated and these factors were retained. The factor loading criteria used required that a variable have a minimum of a .40 loading on a factor to be considered as loading meaningfully on to that factor, and a loading of no more than .30 on to any other factor. As a result of this process, a total of twelve items were removed from each set of belief statements (six from the tactics beliefs area, two from the product character beliefs area, and four from the advertisers' motives area). The specific items that were removed because they loaded on more the one factor are indicated in Appendix A (these

items are in bold print). An additional general criteria was that a factor must have at least three items loading on to it in order for the direction to be known. While this rule was adhered to in most cases, because of the exploratory nature of this study, in some cases two items that appeared to be good indicators of a dimension were retained. This was done in the case of one tactics factor (factor V) and two advertisers' motives factors (factors II and III).

After rotation, the decision for the number of extracted factors for each of the three belief sub-scales was based upon their having eigenvalues of at least one. This yielded a total of five tactics dimension, three product character dimensions, and three advertisers' motives dimensions which were considered for further analysis. The underlying dimensions of each belief area will be explained following a description of the respondent sample.

Respondent Profile for Factor Analysis Results

A summary of the demographic data for the respondents used in the factor analysis is presented in Table 4.1. Most notably, 57 percent of these individuals were aged 25 or older; and females (58%) out-numbered males (39%).

With respect to ethnicity, 54 percent were African-Americans, and 34 percent were Caucasians. In terms of education, 28 percent had a high school diploma, while 50 percent had attended college.

As indicated in the table, respondents were very confident to somewhat confident that they understood what a DRTV commercial was. Additionally, approximately 40 percent had made a DRTV purchase in the past, while 59 percent had not.

Table 4.1
Respondent Profile - Factor Analysis Sample

Variable	Percent (n = 93)	Frequency
<u>Age range</u>		
18 - 24	43%	40
25 - 34	11%	10
35 - 44	22%	20
45 - 55	18%	19
55 plus	5%	5
Missing		0
<u>Gender</u>		
Female	58%	54
Male	39%	36
Missing	3%	3
<u>Ethnicity</u>		
African-American	54%	50
Caucasian	34%	32
Asian-American	2%	1
Other	9%	8
<u>Education</u>		
High school degree	26%	28
Some college	50%	56
4-Year degree	18%	17
Graduate degree	4%	4
<u>HH Income</u>		
Below \$20,499	13%	12
\$20,500 - \$30,499	10%	9
\$30,500 - \$40,499	14%	13
\$40,500 - \$50,499	9%	8
\$50,500 & higher	48%	45
<u>Confidence (DRTV knowledge)</u>		
Very	47%	44
Confident	27%	25
Somewhat	26%	24
<u>Past purchases?</u>		
Have made	40%	37
Have not made	59%	55
Missing	1%	1

Underlying Structure of DRTV Tactics Beliefs

The factor analysis procedure identified five dimensions that reflect the intentions consumers perceive to underlie advertisers' use of certain tactics in DRTV commercials. These are: Distraction tactics, Risk-diminishing tactics, Embellishment tactics, Enticement tactics, and Deterrence tactics. The item loadings, means, standard deviations and percent of variance explained are presented in Table 4.2.

The four items loading on factor 1 (distraction tactics) relate to four different tactics that are frequently featured in DRTV advertising. These tactics are: use of celebrities, use of illustrations to show how the product works, use of free offers, and failure to specify exact charges for shipping and handling (e.g., featuring only the phrase "plus shipping and handling" in the advertisement).

Based upon the findings of studies that have examined consumer perceptions of all but one of the tactics in these items (i.e., the shipping and handling tactic has not been addressed previously), factor 1 suggests that consumers perceive that these items are intended to distract the viewer from examining non-flattering information too closely. Previous studies have found, for instance, that consumers view tactics such as the use of celebrities, and free offers as reflecting the advertiser's goal of capturing viewers' attention. Boush et al., (1994) found that adolescent (and undergraduate-aged) consumers rated tactics that show how a product works (such as the use of illustrations item in factor 1) as consistent with the effect of trying to grab viewers' attention, as well.

The notion that consumers view tactics which attempt to capture attention as intended to distract the viewer relates to the findings of earlier research. Both O'Mahoney and Meenaghan (1997), and Stanton and Burke (1998), for example, suggest that

Table 4.2
DRTV Tactic Beliefs Item Summary^a

		Mean	SD	% Variance Explained
Factor I	Distractors			32%
•	DRTV ads use celebrities to make people think that just purchasing the product will somehow magically transform their life. (.72)	3.68	1.07	
•	When DRTV ads use <u>illustrations</u> that show how well a product works, they usually try to make people think it will perform better than it actually will. (.50)	3.94	.76	
•	DRTV ads use 'free offers' to get people to pick up the phone and dial, <u>without</u> thinking it over first. (.72)	4.06	.80	
•	Ads that <u>purposely</u> don't tell the consumer exactly how much shipping and handling will cost do this to make the product seem less expensive. (.70)	4.04	.87	
Factor II	Risk-diminishers			11%
•	Whenever DRTV ads feature a "fast-talking" announcer, this is done so that viewers won't <u>think</u> about what is actually being said in the ad. (.78)	3.59	.91	
•	Small print at the bottom of the screen in DRTV ads really means the viewer should <u>discount</u> almost everything the announcer said in the ad. (.75)	2.63	.86	
•	Whenever a DRTV ad offers a money-back guarantee, people should expect <u>returning</u> the product to be a big hassle. (.71)	3.59	.91	
Factor III	Embellishers			7%
•	DRTV ads that mention a money-back guarantee do so because they know that, even if purchasers are <u>not</u> satisfied, most of them won't take the time to return the product. (.77)	3.90	.88	

Table 4.2 (cont'd)

<u>Factor III (cont'd)</u>		Mean	SD	% Variance Explained
•	When DRTV ads offer free items with a purchase, this is strictly done to reward people for being customers. ^b (-.70)	2.82	1.18	6%
	DRTV ads only use small print just to reinforce things the announcer already said. ^b (-.66)	2.34	1.07	
<u>Factor IV</u> <u>Enticers</u>				
•	When DRTV ads feature a 'regular' consumer, this is done to make viewers believe that merely buying the product will make them just as happy as the consumer in the ad seemed to be. (.54)	3.67	.88	5%
	If an ad doesn't specifically state what it costs for shipping and handling a product, people should expect the shipping fees to be higher than normal. (.57)	3.54	.96	
	When DRTV ads use a successful-looking consumer's testimony, it's usually done to make viewers believe the product had something to do with their success. (.48)	4.28	.76	
<u>Factor V</u> <u>Deterrents</u>				
•	When DRTV ads use <u>small print</u> , it always makes me think they're trying to trick me. (.84)	3.78	.96	5%
	DRTV ads with small print use it to tell the viewer things they don't <u>want</u> to tell them, but <u>have</u> to tell them. (.45)	4.33	.65	

Note: Mean rating is based on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree).

^a N=93

^b Positively-worded items were reverse-scored.

consumers may view the use of endorsers as an effort to distract the viewer from perhaps looking more thoroughly at other advertising elements (such as claims or other informational features). The relatively high means for the items in factor 1 also indicate that these items convey a sense of deceptiveness on the part of the advertisers who use them in their advertising. When these issues are taken into consideration, this factor appears to reflect advertising features which, though intended by advertisers to have a positive effect, are perceived by consumers as an intent to make the viewer pay attention to them (perhaps so that other, less-flattering features have a lesser likelihood of being noticed or processed).

Factor II (risk-diminishing tactics) consists of items which relate to three specific tactics: use of fast-talking announcer, small print (or disclaimers), and money-back guarantees. The items in this factor appear to reflect the perception that they are included to make it appear that the offer being made in the commercial is risk-free. Specifically, these tactics try to put forth the idea that they act to 'shield consumers from any risk'.

This factor is consistent with Roselius' (1972) notion of risk-relieving tactics. These are executional elements that advertisers include in their messages for the purpose of relieving consumers' hesitancy to buy. Yet, Roselius' study also found that consumers ranked money-back guarantees as ineffective in alleviating their sense of risk.

The higher mean rating for this particular tactic, and for the fast-talking announcer tactic, indicates that these tactics are seen as relatively deceptive. Although the disclaimer item was not rated as deceptive, it may be that respondents have come to associate this particular tactic with the other two, since two or more are often used together in the same advertisement. For example, fine print flashed at the bottom of the screen in an

automobile ad may be perceived as working in tandem with a rapidly-speaking announcer to make it appear that everything the viewer needs to know in order to make a decision is indeed presented in the ad.

Three items loaded on factor III (embellishment tactics). The tactics these items regard are money-back guarantees, free items, and use of small print. While these items relate to tactics that have been addressed in other factors, what is apparent is that consumers see the intentions underlying their use in these specific items as different from those in the other factors. For example, these items may be seen by consumers as intended to embellish or add value to DRTV offers. Perhaps they perceive that the advertiser wants viewers to think he/she may be taking a loss, or that he/she believes so much in their product that they are willing to go above and beyond what other sellers would do. A further indication that they are seen differently stems from the lower means and negative factor loadings for the two positively-worded items (regarding free items and small print). These items do not appear to be viewed as deceptive.

The fact that the guarantee tactic was rated as relatively deceptive, however, may indicate that this particular item is viewed by consumers as 'too good to be true'. This relates to DePaulo's (1989) notion of an 'extreme favorableness' cue, as well as to Settle and Golden's (1974) study findings regarding the perceived lower credibility of ad elements that 'seem too favorable'.

Factor IV (enticement tactics) consists of three items, two of which relate to consumer testimonials, and one relating to the shipping and handling tactic. Given the wording of these items, consumers may perceive these tactics as an attempt to lure or entice viewers by making the outcome of a DRTV purchase appear to be an irresistible

temptation. The fact that the means for all of these items were relatively high indicates that consumers do see these particular tactics (and their intentions) as deceptive.

The items loading on the final factor (deterrence tactics) relate to the use of disclaimers in DRTV advertising. Although this factor consists of only two items, they both appear to be in the direction of the notion that the use of small print tries to make viewers think that everything that should legally be stated in the ad is there. Or, it may be that consumers think that advertisers are attempting to be seen as forthcoming and responsible regarding all of the important aspects of the deal being offered.

Furthermore, because the means for these items are toward the higher end, indicating that they are perceived as deceptive, another aspect of this explanation is that consumers may perceive that advertisers, while wanting to give the appearance of being forthcoming, do not actually want the viewer to know the specifics of the deal. Therefore, they use disclaimers in an effort to deter the viewer from questioning the offer. This interpretation is consistent with Muehling's (1997) finding that consumers perceive fine print in television advertising as a means of protecting advertisers' own self-interests by presenting things they don't really want to say (but have to say, for legal reasons) in illegible type.

Underlying Structure of DRTV Product Character Beliefs

Three dimensions were identified regarding the character of the products typically advertised in DRTV commercials. These were: bad products, better products, and any product. The item loadings, means, standard deviations and percent of variance explained are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3
DRTV Product Character Beliefs Item Summary^a

		Mean	SD	% Variance Explained
Factor I	Bad Products			28%
•	If a product is useless, no one will buy it (no matter what kind of advertisement is used). (.93)	2.88	1.25	
•	If a product is no good, people won't buy it (no matter what kind of advertisement is used). (.92)	2.78	1.20	
•	If a product is unsafe, no one will buy it (no matter what kind of advertisement is used). (.81)	2.83	1.07	
Factor II	Better Products			19%
•	DRTV items provide more solutions to household problems than the kinds of products found in retail stores. ^b (.79)	2.94	1.07	
•	Products sold through DRTV are usually much better than those offered in retail stores. ^b (.88)	2.39	.82	
•	DRTV ads usually offer goods that are of equal or higher quality than those that are sold in stores. ^b (.84)	2.57	.96	
Factor III	Any product			17%
•	Advertisers can sell practically anything successfully in a DRTV commercial. (.73)	3.39	.93	
•	Merely showing a product in a DRTV ad is a sure way to get somebody to buy it. (.74)	3.35	.98	
•	The people who buy things from DRTV ads are people who will buy just about anything. (.54)	3.11	.87	
•	No matter what the product or service, anybody can be successful if they use DRTV ads to sell it. (.62)	2.55	.79	

Note: Mean rating is based on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree).

^a N = 93

^b Positively-worded items were reverse-scored.

The three items that loaded highly on factor I (bad products) reflect the notion that it is not the type of ad (i.e., ad format) that is responsible for causing negative perceptions about DRTV advertisements, but bad products, in general. The low means for these items support this notion.

This factor is consistent with Storholm and Friedman's (1989) findings regarding the perception that directly-advertised products are simple, useless and of low quality. The items in this factor also indicate that, consistent with the findings of Zeithaml (1989) and Kirmani and Wright (1989), consumers consider the extrinsic attributes of these products when they see them advertised. Another issue reflected in these findings regards a statement that Witek (1981) makes about DRTV advertisers. "The underlying philosophy has been to put a lot of products on the air in the hope that the one that sells will make up for the nine that don't," (p. 5). Indeed, it appears that consumers may perceive that this is a goal of DRTV short-form advertisers.

Factor II (better products) consists of three items which reflect the perception that DRTV products are better than those offered in retail settings. This finding suggests that consumers perceive these products to have extrinsic attributes (such as quality), and that they provide functional benefits, as well. The finding is also consistent with what Donthu and Gilliland (1997) found among DRTV-shoppers. That is, it suggests that a wider variety of new and different products are available through DRTV than through retailers.

Four items highly loaded onto factor III (any product). These items reflect consumers' perceptions about how susceptible consumers are to being persuaded by DRTV advertising. Although most of these items are consistent with the idea that DRTV advertisers take advantage of less rational consumers, the fact that the last item in factor

III was not rated as deceptive indicates that the onus appears to be on the consumer to act rationally in these purchase situations (instead of on the seller not to take advantage of individuals).

Underlying Structure of DRTV Advertisers' Motives Beliefs

Three dimensions were identified which reflect the motives that advertisers are perceived to have for using the DRTV short format. The item loadings, means, standard deviations and percent of variance explained are presented in Table 4.4.

The first factor (low cost/big profits) reflects the perception that advertisers choose this format (over others) for two reasons: because it requires very little money to produce and air DRTV commercials, and it is a more effective way of making money. The high means for the items on this factor indicate that it is consistent with issues raised in the Storholm and Friedman (1989) study. Most notable is that the public feels certain direct marketing methods allow advertisers to get rich quickly. This finding also reflects Rotzoll et al's. (1996) view that people relate the reasons advertisers use the format to their own self-interests (such as that of making a lot of money).

The two items loading on factor II (convenient/cost-effective) reflect the notion that advertisers use the DRTV format out of an interest in providing consumers with a convenient shopping option (i.e., shopping from home, via television). This perception is consistent with Rotzoll et al's., (1996) opposite view of advertisers, that they are altruistic. However, the high means for these items indicate that consumers view them as deceptive. This implies that, while advertisers may believe that their motivation for using the format is positive, consumers do not agree. In fact, the negative factor loading for the

Table 4.4
DRTV Advertisers' Motives Beliefs Item Summary^a

		Mean	SD	% Variance Explained
Factor I	Low Cost/Big Profits			26%
•	Advertisers use the DRTV format mainly because they know it takes only a small investment, but it will produce huge profits. (.82)	3.75	.68	
•	DRTV commercials are used mainly because advertisers know it's a quick way to make lots of money. (.65)	3.68	.72	
•	The main reason advertisers use the DRTV format is because it is a sure way to sell lots of their merchandise. (.81)	3.68	.80	
Factor II	Convenient/Cost-effective			18%
•	The primary reason that advertisers use the DRTV format is because they want to give consumers a convenient way to shop ^b . (.71)	3.16	.88	
•	The primary reason advertiser use the DRTV format is because it is a low cost way to sell their products/services on television. (-.81)	3.57	.82	
Factor III	Easy to use			12.5%
•	A major reason advertisers use this format is because they know it is easier to tap people's emotions using a DRTV commercial than with other advertising methods. (.79)	3.75	.83	
•	A major reason that advertisers use this format is because they know it is easier to persuade people to buy a product through a DRTV commercial than through other advertising methods. (.85)	3.83	.72	

Note: Mean rating is based on a five-point scale (where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree).

^a N = 93

^b Positively-worded item was reverse-scored.

second item (regarding the idea that the format is used because it is a low cost way to sell their goods) indicates that this is not at all what people perceive to be advertisers' true reason for using DRTV advertising.

The two items loading on the third factor (easy to use) reflect the perception that DRTV advertising does not require much skill on the part of marketers. This notion is consistent with several of findings of Storholm and Friedman (1989), namely those relating to ideas such as 'anyone can succeed at direct marketing' because these methods 'always work'. The high means for these items indicate that they are viewed as deceptive.

Main Study Analyses

This section will address the results of the analyses for the main study hypotheses. It will begin with a description of the respondents whose scores were used to develop the final DRTV Deceptiveness Beliefs measure. Next, reliability analyses for all of the dimensions identified in the factor analysis will be presented. Descriptive statistics of the main variables will then be presented, prior to discussing the results of the hypotheses.

Respondent Profile for the Main Study

The demographic data for the belief scale respondents is presented in Table 4.5. Fifty-six percent of the individuals in this sample were 25 years old or older. Females (63%), again, out-numbered males (36%). Fifty-two percent were African-American, while 33% were Caucasian. With respect to education, 43% of the sample had attended some college, and 33% had a high school degree (or equivalent). Forty-nine percent of the sample had a household income of \$50,500 or more.

Table 4.5
Respondent Profile - Main Study

Variable	Percent	Frequency (n = 109)
<u>Age range</u>		
18 - 24	44 %	48
25 - 34	13 %	14
35 - 44	17 %	19
45 - 55	20 %	20
55 plus	6 %	6
Missing		0
<u>Gender</u>		
Female	63%	69
Male	36%	39
Missing	1%	1
<u>Ethnicity</u>		
African-American	53%	58
Caucasian	33%	35
Asian-American	4%	4
Other	8%	9
Missing	3%	3
<u>Education</u>		
High school degree	33%	36
Some college	43%	47
4-Year degree	11%	12
Graduate degree	12%	12
Missing	2%	2
<u>HH Income</u>		
Below \$20,499	11%	12
\$20,500 - \$30,499	11	12
\$30,500 - \$40,499	13%	14
\$40,500 - \$50,499	11%	12
\$50,500 & higher	49%	54
Missing	5%	5
<u>Confidence</u> <u>(DRTV knowledge)</u>		
Very	38%	42
Confident	34%	37
Somewhat	28%	30
<u>Past purchases?</u>		
Have made	34%	37
Have not made	66%	72

Respondents were very confident (38%), confident (34%), and somewhat confident (28%) that they knew what a DRTV commercial was. Thirty-four percent had purchased from DRTV offers in the past, while 66% had not.

DRTV Deceptiveness Beliefs Scale Reliability

The factor analysis procedure dictated the removal of a total of twelve of the original questionnaire items from the DRTV Deceptiveness Beliefs measure (the removed items are emboldened in Appendix A). The remaining items in each of the three belief areas were then subjected to a reliability analysis. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to determine the internal consistency of each of the eleven dimensions identified using the factor analysis procedure. The reliability measures of these dimensions is presented below in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6
DRTV Deceptiveness Beliefs Scale Reliabilities

Belief Area	Dimension	Alpha Coefficient
Tactics	Distractors	.59
	Risk-diminishers	.56
	Embellishers	.26
	Enticers	.32
	Deterrents	.56
Product Character	Bad Products	.88
	Better Products	.58
	Any product	.61
Advertisers' Motives	Low Cost/Big Profits	.67
	Convenient/Cost-effective	- .10
	Easy to Use	.34

Note: Scale dimensions with an acceptable alpha level are in bold print.

The guidelines used to determine the acceptable reliability level for each dimension is based upon the work of Nunnally (1967), and upon other studies which have examined consumers' advertising-related beliefs. Nunnally suggests that, in the early stages of research on hypothesized measures of a construct, modest reliability of .50 or .60 will suffice. And, noting that the conceptual value contributed by their scale, Alwitt and Prabhaker (1992) reported an internal consistency level of .43. Boush et al., (1994) also report alpha levels of .57 and .58 in their study of adolescent beliefs about television advertising. Therefore, given that the present study is an initial step in investigating the beliefs of consumers regarding the DRTV short advertising format, a scale reliability of .50 and above will be accepted.

Based upon this criteria, a total of seven belief scale dimensions were included in the final DRTV Deceptiveness Beliefs measure. This measure consists of twenty-two belief statement items. These items, along with their means, medians, and standard deviations, are presented in Table 4.7 below.

Descriptive Statistics for Main Study Variables

Upon completion of the DRTV Deceptiveness Beliefs scale, descriptive statistics were run for this measure, as well as for the two other main measures (i.e., the items measuring whether willingness-to-buy would increase if web site addresses and major advertisers' brands were featured in DRTV short-form advertisements). The means, medians and standard deviations for these measurements are presented below in Table 4.8

Based upon the criteria that scores above 3.00 reflect the perception of deceptiveness, the grand mean for the DRTV Deceptiveness Beliefs scale (mean = 3.33)

Table 4.7
DRTV Deceptiveness Beliefs Scale Item Summary^a

Dimension - Items	Mean	Median	SD
<u>Distractors</u>			
• When DRTV ads use illustrations that show how well a product works, they usually try to make people think it will perform better than it actually will.	3.87	4.00	.77
• Ads that purposely don't tell the consumer how much shipping and handling will cost do this to make the product seem less expensive.	4.00	4.00	.83
• DRTV ads use celebrities to make people think that just purchasing the product will somehow magically transform their life.	3.69	4.00	.92
• DRTV ads use free offers to get people to pick up the phone and dial, without thinking it over first.	4.05	4.00	.64
<u>Risk-Diminishers</u>			
• Whenever a DRTV ad offers a money-back guarantee, people should expect returning the product to be a big hassle.	3.59	4.00	.83
• Whenever DRTV ads feature a fast-talking announcer, this is done so that viewers won't think about what is actually being said in the ad.	3.37	4.00	.90
• Small print at the bottom of the screen in DRTV ads really means the viewer should discount almost everything the announcer said in the ad.	2.66	2.50	.89
<u>Deterrents</u>			
• When DRTV ads use small print, it always makes me think they're trying to trick me.	3.87	4.00	.93
• DRTV ads with small print use it to tell the viewer things they don't <u>want</u> to tell them, but <u>have</u> to tell them.	4.26	4.00	.65

Table 4.7 (cont'd)

Dimension - Items	Mean	Median	SD
<u>Bad Products</u>			
• If a product is useless, no one will buy it (no matter what kind of advertisement is used).	2.61	2.00	1.09
• If a product is no good, people won't buy it (no matter what kind of advertisement is used).	2.67	2.00	1.08
• If a product is unsafe, no one will buy it (no matter what kind of advertisement is used).	2.69	2.00	1.08
<u>Better Products</u>			
• DRTV items provide more solutions to household problems than the kinds of products found in retail stores.	2.95	3.00	.99
• Products sold through DRTV are usually much better than those offered in retail stores. ^b	2.40	2.00	.77
• DRTV ads usually offer goods that are of equal or higher quality than those that are sold in stores.	2.88	3.00	.88
<u>Any Product</u>			
• Advertisers can sell practically anything successfully in a DRTV commercial.	3.20	3.00	1.02
• Merely showing a product in a DRTV ad is a sure way to get somebody to buy it.	3.50	4.00	.85
• The people who buy things from DRTV ads are people who will buy just about anything.	3.12	3.00	.89
• No matter what the product or service, anybody can be successful if they use DRTV ads to sell it.	2.76	3.00	.88

Table 4.7 (cont'd)

Dimension - Items	Mean	Median	SD
<u>Low Cost/Big Profits</u>			
• Advertisers use the DRTV format mainly because they know that it takes only a small investment, but it will produce huge profits.	3.71	4.00	.63
• DRTV commercials are used mainly because advertisers know it's a quick way to make lots of money.	3.67	4.00	.71
• The main reason advertisers use the DRTV format is because it is a sure way to sell lots of their merchandise.	3.72	4.00	.73

Note: Mean rating is based on a five-point scale (where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree).

^aN = 108

^bPositively-worded items were reverse-scored.

Table 4.8
Descriptive Statistics for Three Main Variables

Variable	Mean	Median	SD	n
DRTV Deceptiveness Beliefs Scale	3.33	3.36	0.29	107 ^a
Willingness-to-buy when web site addresses featured in DRTV ads	3.79	4.00	1.03	108
Willingness-to-buy when Major Advertisers' brand featured in DRTV ads	3.68	4.00	1.04	108

^adenotes sample size after removal of 1 outlying score.

indicates that respondents' overall perception of the DRTV short advertising format is that it is deceptive. With respect to whether unfamiliar features would increase willingness-to-buy from DRTV advertising, the mean scores for each of these items indicate that neither feature would increase respondents' likelihood of purchasing goods through this method (web site addresses mean = 3.78; major advertisers' brands mean = 3.68).

It should be noted, however, that a total of 39 percent of respondents said that the inclusion of web site addresses would increase their willingness-to-buy. A total of 40 percent said that if major advertisers' brands were featured, this would increase their willingness-to-buy. Table 4.9 presents a breakdown of the frequencies for both of these responses.

Table 4.9
Frequency of Responses for Increased Willingness-to-buy from DRTV Ads

	%When Web site is included:	%When Major Brands are featured:
Willingness-to-buy would increase ^a :		
A great deal	2%	2%
A good deal	8%	13%
Somewhat	30%	24%
Very little	30%	37%
None at all	30%	24%

Note: N = 108 for both items.

^a The response sets ranged from 1 = "A great deal" to 5 = "None at all."

Research Questions and Study Hypotheses

Do Consumers' DRTV Beliefs Reflect 'Folk Wisdom'?

In order to address the question of whether consumers share a set of core beliefs (i.e., folk wisdom) regarding the DRTV short advertising format, the hypothesis that respondents' beliefs would (a) converge across the three belief areas, and (b) diverge within each belief area was investigated by examining a correlation matrix of each of the seven DRTV Deceptiveness Belief dimensions (identified earlier). This matrix is presented below in Table 4.10.

Hypothesis 1(a) addressed the issue of convergence. Convergence was tested by examining each pair of belief measures across all seven dimensions to determine whether or not significant correlations existed. This examination revealed that significant moderate correlations do exist across all three belief areas. Namely, a moderate r of .30 ($p \leq .001$) was found between the 'Low Cost/Big Profits' (advertisers' motives) and 'Any product'

Table 4.10
DRTV Deceptiveness Beliefs Correlation Matrix

Variable:	T ₁	T ₂	T ₃	PC ₁	PC ₂	PC ₃	AM ₁
T ₁ : Distractors	1.00						
T ₂ : Risk-diminishers	0.45**	1.00					
T ₃ : Deterrents	0.20	0.32*	1.00				
PC ₁ : Bad Products	-0.17	-0.16	-0.13	1.00			
PC ₂ : Better Products	-0.13	-0.12	-0.08	0.31**	1.00		
PC ₃ : Any Product	0.13	0.30*	0.05	-0.06	0.09	1.00	
AM ₁ : Low Cost/ High Profits	0.40**	0.22	0.08	-0.07	-0.08	0.30**	1.00

Note: N = 108

* $p \leq .05$

** $p \leq .001$

(product character) dimensions; an r of .40 ($p \leq .001$) was found between the 'Low Cost/Big Profits' and the tactics dimension, 'Distractors'; and an r of .30 ($p \leq .05$) was found between the tactics factor 'Risk-diminishers' and the product character dimension 'Any product'.

Based upon the guidelines presented in the Friestad and Wright (1995) study, there appears to be some convergence across all three belief areas regarding DRTV advertising. This finding indicates that respondents appear to agree (i.e., converge) in how they view these different aspects of this DRTV short commercial format.

Hypothesis 1(b) addressed the issue of divergence. In order to determine whether or not individuals found differences within the three aspects of the DRTV format (or, diverged), the correlation matrix in Table 4.10 was examined again. Of specific interest this time was whether the correlations between dimensions within a particular belief area were low and non-significant.

Examination of the three r 's produced for the three tactic belief dimensions revealed two significant moderate positive correlations. These were between 'Distractors' and 'Risk-diminishers', ($r = .45$, $p \leq .001$), and between 'Risk-diminishers' and 'Deterrents' ($r = .32$, $p \leq .05$). This indicates that respondents saw the distractor and risk-diminishing tactics, and the risk-diminishing and deterrent tactics as similarly deceptive. However, based upon a non-significant r of .20 ($p > .05$) between the distractor and deterrent tactics, it appears that they do not see these two as similarly deceptive. Therefore, while two of the correlations for the three tactic belief areas were significant, one was not. This finding indicates that respondents did diverge in their beliefs about DRTV tactics.

Examination of the three r 's produced for the product character beliefs area indicated that only one significant r was found among these dimensions. 'Bad Products' and 'Better Products' were moderately correlated, with an r of .31 ($p \leq .001$). Neither of these dimensions were correlated with the other dimension ('Any Product'), however.

Given that only one of the advertisers' motives belief dimensions was retained in the DRTV scale after the reliability analysis, it is apparent that individuals did show divergence in this belief area. Furthermore, based on the finding that two (out of three) correlations were significant for the tactics belief area, and one correlation (out of three) was significant for the product character beliefs area, it appears that respondents did not view all of the items within these belief areas similarly (i.e., they did diverge in their beliefs about the items in each of these areas). Therefore, because both convergence and divergence was found among these belief areas, hypotheses 1(a) and (b) received support.

Do Past Purchase and Demographic Variables Affect DRTV Beliefs?

In order to address whether past DRTV advertising purchasers and non-purchasers differ in their beliefs about the deceptiveness of the format, hypothesis 2 was examined using the Mann Whitney-U test. Like the t-test, this test allows for the comparison of two groups, but it is not based upon the assumption that these groups come from the same population.

Of the total 107 respondents, only thirty-seven (or 35%) had ever made a DRTV purchase before.⁴⁶ The mean for the DRTV deceptiveness beliefs measure for this group

⁴⁶One score was missing from this analysis.

was 3.27 (standard deviation = .30). The mean for the seventy individuals who had not made such a purchase before was 3.37 (standard deviation = .28).

The results of the Mann Whitney-U test show that the difference in these belief scores was not significant ('have' purchased mean rank = 47.36; 'have not' purchased mean rank = 57.51; $U = 1049.5$; $p > .05$). On the basis of these results, hypothesis 2 was rejected.

Hypothesis 3 investigated whether females rated the DRTV Deceptiveness Beliefs measure as significantly more deceptive than did males. The total sample of 106 for this measure included 68 females (64%) and 38 males (36%).⁴⁷ The mean for females was 3.38 (standard deviation = .28); for males it was 3.26 (standard deviation = .30).

A visual comparison of these means indicates that, contrary to what was predicted, females actually rated the measure as slightly more deceptive than males. The results of the Mann Whitney-U test indicates that this difference was significant (female mean rank = 58.22; male mean rank = 45.05; $U = 971$, one-tailed $p \leq .05$). Therefore, hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Hypothesis 4 addressed whether respondents of low-income versus high-income levels would differ in their ratings of the DRTV Deceptiveness Belief measure. The mean for the lower income group (income of less than \$35K; $n = 23$) was 3.65 (standard deviation = 1.12), compared to a mean for the higher income group (income above \$35K; $n = 79$) of 3.34 (standard deviation = .30). Again, contrary to expectations, the lower income group rated the measure as more deceptive than did the higher income group. The

⁴⁷Two scores were missing from this analysis.

results of the Mann Whitney U-test, however, indicate that this difference was not significant (below \$35K mean rank = 47.50; above \$35K mean rank = 52.66; $U = 816.5$; $p > .05$). Therefore, hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Hypothesis 5 addressed whether respondents of low and high education levels differed in terms of their ratings of the DRTV Deceptiveness Beliefs measure. The mean for the lower education group (high school only; $n = 35$) was 3.31 (standard deviation = .27), and the mean for the higher education group (some college and beyond; $n = 70$) was 3.34 (standard deviation = .30).

The results of the Mann Whitney U-test indicates that the difference between these groups' scores were not significant (low education mean rank = 50.84; high education rank = 54.08; $U = 1149.5$, $p > .05$). Therefore, hypothesis 5 was also rejected.

Overall, the results of these four hypotheses suggest that past purchase, education and income do not account for differences in the scores on this particular measure. Gender, however, does appear to affect beliefs, although not in the expected direction. Table 4.11 presents the mean-ranks and U-statistics for each of the variables measured in these four hypotheses.

Can Unfamiliar Features Increase Willingness-to-Buy Among Certain Respondents?

In order to examine whether groups that are likely to hold high deceptiveness beliefs about DRTV advertising are more persuaded to buy when new features (such as Web sites and brands by major advertisers) are included in ads, Spearman's Rho correlations were run. This method of analysis was used because it does not assume the data are normally distributed. Hypotheses 6(a) and (b), and 7(a) and (b) addressed this

Table 4.11
Mean-rank and U-statistics for Personal and Demographic Variables

Hypothesis		Mean rank	U-statistic	One-tailed Probability
Two	Past purchase	47.36	1049.5	$p > .05$
	No purchase	57.51		
Three	Females	58.22	971.0	$p \leq .05$
	Males	45.05		
Four	High income	52.66	816.5	$p > .05$
	Low income	47.50		
Five	High education	54.08	1149.5	$p > .05$
	Low education	50.84		

question.

Hypothesis 6(a) and (b) dealt specifically with whether high deceptiveness beliefs were inversely associated with increased willingness-to-buy when (a) web sites, and (b) major advertisers' brands were featured in DRTV ads. It should be noted that the response sets for the two willingness-to-buy measures were polarized in the same direction as the response sets for the DRTV measure. That is, possible responses for the these measures ranged from an increase of (1) a great deal, to (5) none at all for each new feature; and the response set for the DRTV measure ranged from positive scores (1 = strongly disagree) to negative scores (5 = strongly agree). Therefore, the correlations were expected to be negative, indicating that, as scores on the DRTV measure increased

(or, became more negative), scores on the willingness-to-buy measure decreased (or, became more positive).

The correlation produced for the analysis of variables in hypothesis 6(a) indicates that a low, significant association ($r = -.24$; $p \leq .05$) was found between high DRTV deceptiveness beliefs and an increased willingness-to-buy rating when web site addresses are included in these ads.⁴⁸ Therefore, hypothesis 6(a) did receive a small measure of support.

The analysis of hypothesis 6(b), regarding whether these high deceptiveness responses were negatively associated with increased willingness-to-buy scores when major brands are featured in DRTV ads, produced an r of $-.07$ ($p > .05$). Therefore, hypothesis 6(b) did not receive support.

To further assess how these unfamiliar features influence willingness-to-buy ratings, hypotheses 7(a) and (b) were analyzed. These hypotheses predicted that the scores of respondents who were low in DRTV deceptiveness beliefs would be significantly inversely associated with lower willingness-to-buy scores when the two features are used in DRTV ads. Therefore, the r here was also expected to be negative.

The r produced for the web site feature was $-.07$ ($p > .05$).⁴⁹ Therefore, hypothesis 7(a) was rejected. The r for the major advertised brands feature was also not significant ($r = -.45$; $p > .05$), indicating that hypothesis 7(b) was also not supported.

⁴⁸It should be noted that the sample size for the group with high DRTV deceptiveness beliefs was ninety.

⁴⁹It should be noted that the sample size for the group with low DRTV deceptiveness beliefs was seventeen.

Together, these results indicate that individuals who hold high DRTV deceptiveness beliefs may be positively influenced (i.e., their willingness-to-buy may increase) when web site addresses are included in DRTV ads. However, the use of this format by major advertisers did not appear to have this same effect. Furthermore, it appears that no association exists between low deceptiveness beliefs and lower willingness-to-buy when either of these features are included.

Hypotheses 8(a) and (b), 9(a) and (b), 10(a) and (b), and 11 (a) and (b) all carry further the question of how unfamiliar features affect willingness-to-buy ratings. They do this by examining whether individuals who are likely to hold high DRTV deceptiveness beliefs show an increase in willingness-to-buy when either of these features are included. Here, inclination toward high deceptiveness beliefs is based on demographic characteristics (such as being male, and having higher education and income) and on having not made DRTV purchases before.⁵⁰

Hypothesis 8(a) addressed this issue with respect to whether the inclusion of web site addresses would increase willingness-to-buy ratings for individuals who had never made a DRTV purchase before significantly more than for individuals who had made such a purchase. The results of the Mann Whitney-U test for this analysis ('have' purchased mean rank = 49.76; 'have not' mean rank = 56.97; $U = 1138$; $p > .05$) indicates that these two groups did not differ significantly in their willingness-to-buy scores.

The result for hypothesis 8(b), which examined this issue for the inclusion of major advertised brands, was a $U = 1151.5$ ('have' purchased mean rank = 50.12; 'have not'

⁵⁰The rationale for this assumption is based in the findings of Korgoankar et al., (1997), who found that critics of direct marketing are less likely to have made purchases.

mean rank = 56.78; $p > .05$). This result indicates that significant differences were not found on this measure either. Therefore, hypotheses 8(a) and (b) were both rejected.

Hypothesis 9(a) examined whether or not willingness-to-buy ratings when web site addresses were included would increase for males as opposed to for females. The results of the Mann Whitney U test were not significant (female mean rank = 55.56; male mean rank = 51.28; $U = 1220$; $p > .05$). The results for hypothesis 9(b), which examined these groups' ratings for willingness-to-buy when major brands were featured in DRTV ads, were also not significant (female mean rank = 53.85; male mean rank = 54.27; $U = 1315$; $p > .05$). On the basis of these results, neither of these hypotheses received support.

Hypothesis 10(a) assessed willingness-to-buy ratings when web site addresses are included to determine whether education was a factor in any score differences. The results of the Mann Whitney-U test here were not significant (low education mean rank = 55.85; high education mean rank = 52.29; $U = 1146$; $p > .05$).

Hypothesis 10(b) examined whether education level led to differences in willingness-to-buy ratings when major brands are featured in DRTV ads. The results for this hypothesis were also not significant (low education mean rank = 56.67; high education mean rank = 51.87; $U = 1146$; $p > .05$). Therefore, hypotheses 10(a) and (b) were not supported.

Hypotheses 11(a) and (b) were the final tests for the willingness-to-buy variable. The variable was tested with respect to whether increased ratings would result based on demographic differences and the inclusion of unfamiliar features. Hypothesis 11(a) examined willingness-to-buy when web sites were included to determine whether income was a factor in score differences. The results of the Mann Whitney U-test for this

hypothesis were not significant (low income mean rank = 52.74; high income mean rank = 51.79; $U = 903$; $p > .05$); therefore hypothesis 11(a) was not supported.

These groups also did not differ significantly in their ratings of willingness-to-buy when major advertised brands are featured (low income mean rank = 51.89; high income mean rank = 52.03; $U = 917.5$; $p > .05$). Therefore, hypothesis 11(b) also did not receive support.

Can 'Positive' Unfamiliar Features Persuade More than 'Neutral' Ones?

To assess whether or not a positive, unfamiliar feature is more apt to persuade (i.e., increase willingness-to-buy) than a neutral one among individuals who hold (or are more likely to hold) the belief that the DRTV format is deceptive, hypotheses 6(c), 8(c), 9(c), 10(c), and 11(c) were tested.⁵¹ The Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks (or, Signed-ranks) test was used to investigate these five hypotheses.

Hypothesis 6(c) examined the two unfamiliar features for respondents with high DRTV deceptiveness belief scores to determine whether the positive feature was ranked higher than the neutral one by respondents. The means for the items measuring these two features were 3.74 (for the positive feature), and 3.83 (for the neutral feature). The Signed-ranks test produced a rank sum of 327 for the positive feature; and a rank sum of 414 for the neutral feature. These rank sums indicate that the positive feature was seen by individuals as less persuasive than the neutral feature, although the difference was not

⁵¹The positive, unfamiliar feature refers to the use of the DRTV format by popular brands, while the neutral feature refers to web site addresses.

significant ($Z = -.668$, one-tailed $p > .05$).⁵² Therefore, hypothesis 6(c) was not supported.

Hypothesis 8(c) addressed this same difference among the non-DRTV purchasers. The mean for the positive feature among this group was 3.76 (standard deviation = 1.06); the mean for the neutral feature was 3.87 (standard deviation = 1.04). The results of the Signed-ranks test indicate that the sum of ranks for the positive feature was lower than that for the neutral feature among this group, as well. The rank sum for the positive feature was 276, and it was 354 for the neutral feature ($Z = -.678$; one-tailed $p > .05$). This indicates that hypothesis 8(c) was not supported.

Hypothesis 9(c) tested the difference in these features among males. The means for the positive and negative features were 3.67 (the standard deviation for the positive feature was 1.18; the standard deviation for the neutral feature was 1.11). The sum of ranks for each of these features was 159.5 (for the positive feature), and 140.50 (for the neutral feature). The results produced by the Signed-ranks test indicate that, although the ranks for the positive feature were slightly higher, this difference was not significant ($Z = -.292$; one-tailed $p > .05$). Therefore, hypothesis 9(c) was rejected.

Hypothesis 10(c) tested the differences in positive and neutral features among individuals with higher education levels. The mean for the positive feature among this group was 3.63 (standard deviation = 1.11); the mean for the neutral feature was 3.74 (standard deviation = 1.02). The sum of ranks for the positive feature in this test was 197; it was 268 for the neutral feature. Again, the neutral feature was rated higher than the

⁵²It should be noted that the Signed-ranks test produces Z statistics when the sample size is larger than 25.

positive one. However, the Signed-ranks test was not significant ($Z = -.786$; one-tailed $p > .05$). Thus, hypothesis 10(c) was rejected.

The final hypothesis, 11(c), tested the differences in these features among the higher income group. The mean for the positive feature among this group was 3.69 (standard deviation = 1.05); the mean for the neutral feature was 3.81 (standard deviation = .99). The sum of ranks was 310 for the positive feature, and 431 for the neutral feature. With a Z statistic of $-.941$ (one-tailed $p > .05$), the Signed-ranks test was also not significant for this measure. Therefore, hypotheses 11(c) was rejected.

Based on the results of these five hypotheses (6, 8, 9, 10 and 11[c]), it appears that inclusion of the positive feature was not more persuasive than the neutral feature among high DRTV deceptiveness groups. In fact, it can be seen from Table 4.12 below that the

Table 4.12
Rank Sum and Z-statistics for Positive and Neutral Features

			Positive Feature (Major Brands)	Neutral Feature (Web site)
Hypothesis 6c	Rank Sum		327	414
	Z-statistic	-.668		
Hypothesis 8c	Rank Sum		276	354
	Z-statistic	-.678		
Hypothesis 9c	Rank Sum		159.5	140.5
	Z-statistic	-.292		
Hypothesis 10c	Rank Sum		197	268
	Z-statistic	-.786		
Hypothesis 11c	Rank Sum		310	431
	Z-statistic	-.941		

Note: All p 's $> .05$

neutral feature was rated higher than the positive feature in four of the five hypotheses tested (i.e., the neutral feature's sum of ranks is higher in all except hypothesis 9[c]).

The next chapter will present a discussion of the findings, along with some of the conclusions that may be drawn from these findings. It will also present the limitations of the study, as well as some recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview of Findings and Implications

This study was conducted to determine whether consumers' negative perceptions of the DRTV short advertising format reflect folk knowledge; and if so, what implications this may have for the ability of relatively unfamiliar advertising executional features to persuade individuals. Persuasion was measured in terms of increased willingness to purchase through this direct response method.

The preceding chapter presented the results of a factor analysis which was used in the development of the construct 'DRTV Deceptiveness Beliefs'. This construct was then examined, along with four demographic and one personal variable, for their influence upon consumers' willingness-to-buy from DRTV short-form advertisements. The two unfamiliar features used in DRTV hybrid advertising were also assessed for their impact upon the latter variable. These analyses were carried out through the examination of several hypotheses and sub-hypotheses. Four additional hypotheses also assessed whether the more positive of the two unfamiliar features (major advertised brands) was perceived as more persuasive than the more neutral feature (web site addresses). Here again, persuasiveness was measured in terms of increased willingness-to-buy from DRTV advertisements.

Presented in the next section is a discussion of the significant findings of this research. These findings are presented in the context of the research questions they addressed.

Do DRTV Beliefs Reflect ‘Folk Wisdom’?

The initial goal of this study was to learn the core beliefs that consumers hold about DRTV short-form advertising and whether or not these beliefs are shared by adult consumers, in general. This expectation was based upon the Persuasion Knowledge Model (or PKM) (Friestad and Wright, 1994), which contends that shared beliefs, along with direct experience, form the basis of consumers’ knowledge about how advertising persuades. Cognitive theory suggests that this knowledge is represented in the form of schemas, or the causal-explanatory beliefs that allow for interpretation of events. Schemas are activated upon exposure to a familiar tactic in advertisements. In turn, schemas activate other beliefs which also help the individual interpret marketplace occurrences and make decisions about how to respond.

The finding that a DRTV Deceptiveness Beliefs Schema does appear to exist (hypothesis 1) indicates that consumers appear to be aware of the tactics DRTV advertisers use in an effort to persuade, and that they have do evaluate advertisers intentions underlying the use of many tactics typically used in the DRTV short format. Furthermore, individuals also appear to assess the motives for using this particular format (as opposed to other possible formats), as well as the products which they use the format to advertise.

The study also found that this belief schema is deceptive in nature, although the grand mean (of 3.33) for this measure suggests that it is only slightly so. This finding may be explained by the fact that, while the vast majority of items measuring advertisers’ motive beliefs and tactic beliefs were rated as deceptive, the majority of the product

character items were rated as not deceptive.⁵³ Furthermore, the items in the product character belief set that were seen as deceptive all reflect the notion that it is the individual consumer's responsibility to act rationally to avoid being persuaded by techniques that are typical of DRTV commercials. The rationale here may be that rational consumers generally understand that DRTV advertisers are unscrupulous in their use of misleading and deceptive tactics. Therefore, the onus is on the consumer to guard against being misled or deceived by this particular format. If this is the meaning of these findings, then one implication is that the 'caveat emptor' position currently held by regulatory agencies like the FTC may be appropriate, at least with respect to the DRTV short advertising format.

Do Past Purchase and Demographics Affect DRTV Beliefs?

With one exception (which will be discussed shortly), the results of the analyses which examined the effects of personal and demographic variables for their impact on DRTV deceptiveness beliefs failed to show any such impact. Of particular interest, however, are the results of the investigation of the first variable, past purchase experience (in hypothesis 2). The finding that this variable had no impact may indicate that, while having made purchases in the past does not influence DRTV beliefs, people who refrain from purchasing via DRTV do not necessarily do so out of their beliefs about the format (e.g., because they think it is deceptive), but because of some other reason. This

⁵³ All but one of the items that measured tactic beliefs were rated as deceptive. The item that was not rated as deceptive had to do with small print in ads. Conversely, seven out of ten of the items relating to product character beliefs were rated as not deceptive (see Table 4.7).

interpretation is consistent with Akaah et al's., (1995) finding that, while intention to purchase through direct marketing is significantly influenced by attitude toward direct marketing, intention to purchase through this method does not influence attitude toward direct marketing. One possible implication of the present study's finding is that, regardless of how people feel about DRTV short-form advertising, the possibility still exists for anyone to become persuaded enough to buy from it (provided they become interested enough in the offer).

There were also noteworthy results regarding the demographic variables, although only one was statistically significant. First, while individuals with more education did view the DRTV format as slightly more deceptive than those of lower education levels (hypothesis 5), those with higher incomes perceived the format as less deceptive than did those with lower income levels (hypothesis 4). Neither of these results, however, were significant.

The result for the gender variable (in hypothesis 3) was also unexpected, since it indicates that females view DRTV short-form advertising as more deceptive than do males. Yet, while this finding is contrary to what other studies that have examined the DRTV format have found, one explanation may lie in the fact that these studies have generally examined longer formats of DRTV (such as infomercials [e.g., Darian, 1987; James and Cunningham, 1982; and Donthu and Gilliland, 1997]). Therefore, the significant finding in this study may indicate that females view the various DRTV formats differently; and perhaps they view the short format as the worst.

Can New Features Increase Persuasion in DRTV Ads Among Certain Groups?

With respect to whether DRTV short-form commercials are more persuasive among high deceptiveness groups when unfamiliar features are included, the results of hypothesis 6(a) indicate that only the inclusion of web site addresses was significantly associated with higher willingness-to-buy via this method (no association was found for the major brands feature, tested in hypothesis 6[b]).

However, given that the correlation was low ($r = -.24$, indicating that only 6 percent of the variance was explained), this should be viewed as cause for further examination of the web site address feature as a response mode in DRTV commercials. For instance, one possible factor in why this feature was more persuasive may be that, at the time this study was conducted (in the spring and early summer of 2000), the subject of businesses' web sites (a.k.a. dot.coms) was being heavily reported on in the media.⁵⁴ This suggests that consumers may have had a greater awareness of web sites during this time.

The rejection of hypotheses 8(a) and (b), 9(a) and (b), 10(a) and (b), and 11(a) and (b) indicates that the inclusion of web site addresses and major brands in DRTV commercials did not increase willingness-to-buy among individuals who were more inclined toward high deceptiveness beliefs (i.e., on the basis of being male, more educated, and of higher income). One general implication of this finding may be that, when consumers recognize a DRTV commercial (regardless of whether it includes unfamiliar features), their deceptiveness schema is triggered.

⁵⁴Shortly after the study, however, the 'fall of the dot.coms' began to be reported on (e.g., *Detroit News*, 8/30/00). Had the study been conducted following this period, the results might have been affected.

It should be noted, however, that because the mean rating for DRTV beliefs indicates that they were not viewed as extremely deceptive, they may represent what Maloney (1962) called 'uncertain non-beliefs'. When this is the case, according to Maloney's interpretation of dissonance theory, exposure to information that is contrary to such beliefs may effectively persuade. Therefore, based on finding that the inclusion of web site addresses in DRTV advertising did increase willingness-to-buy, a small degree of support for Maloney's contention may be offered by this study.

Are Positive New Features More Persuasive than Neutral Ones?

The final area of interest in this study addressed whether a more positive unfamiliar feature would improve the persuasiveness of DRTV commercials more than a neutral one. Because the study results indicated that the four hypotheses addressing this area were not supported, not much can be drawn from this finding. However, given that the neutral feature (web site addresses) produced more high ratings on the willingness-to-buy measure than did the more positive feature (major advertisers' brands), this may bolster the earlier findings about inclusion of the web site feature in DRTV short-form advertising.

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations regarding the findings of the current study. First, it is important to note that respondents' reactions to specific DRTV advertisements were not assessed, but rather their generalized beliefs about the types of tactics that these commercials commonly rely upon, and what the advertiser has in mind when these ads are

being conceived.

Second, the study did not assess level of satisfaction among those who had made DRTV purchases before. The reason for this was based in an attempt to isolate lack of purchase as a possible indication of high DRTV deceptiveness beliefs. This notion stemmed from Korgoankar's (1997) finding that critics of direct marketing advertising also make the lowest number of purchases using this method.

Another limitation is that, while the sample utilized does reflect a range of adult consumers, it does not necessarily represent the entire U.S. population. This is especially important given the fact that the data in the study were not normally distributed. As a consequence, the specific levels of the construct 'DRTV deceptiveness beliefs' may not be generalizable to the entire population..

A fourth limitation of this study has to do with the fact that it used survey methodology. Although this method offers several advantages (e.g., it can assess a wide range of information at a relatively low cost), it does have disadvantages when it is compared with other research methods. Kerlinger (1986) notes, for example, that the scope of survey information is usually gained at the expense of depth (that is, it does not contribute as well to the full understanding of an issue as other methods might). Another weakness of the survey method is that it can temporarily lift the respondent out of his/her own social context, and thereby elicit unnatural responses. Additionally, other methods may work better to rule out the influence of (or control for) extraneous variables that may affect the study results. However, Babbie (1990) notes that, while a comprehensive inquiry would profit from the use of different methods focused on a specific topic (such as DRTV advertising beliefs), the survey method can provide a rigorous, first step in

explaining a phenomenon.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based upon the findings of this research, hybrid DRTV commercials that use a combination of traditional (e.g., telephone response mode) and new features (e.g., a web site address) may have to do more to distinguish themselves if they are to bypass consumers' deceptiveness schemas. Given the controversy that stems from DRTV practitioners' contention that hybrid DRTV can supplant brand image advertising, and DRTV experts' contention that the main purpose of direct response is to move consumers through to purchase, research should be carried out which examines how effective executional features that are not currently in the traditional DRTV repertoire (such as humor, for example) are at moving consumers through to purchase. This line of research would be of interest to practitioners, as well as to academic researchers.

Also, although advertising tactics were the focal point of the present study, they are not the only features which can trigger beliefs upon exposure to DRTV commercials. According to the PKM, the persuasion knowledge base (where knowledge about advertising tactics and intentions is held) works by guiding the observer's attention to whatever aspects of a message become of interest. Theoretically then, when one is exposed to anything they consider novel or unexpected (such as an extremely unique product, for example), this exposure may cause other belief schemas (and perhaps more positive ones) to be activated.

The cognitive response method could be used to identify the responses generated by consumers when they are exposed to DRTV products that are innovative. This method

could also help broaden both advertisers' and researchers' understanding of how consumers process information upon exposure to variety of tactics, products and brands in an experimental setting.

APPENDIX A—Questionnaire Booklet

Consumer Beliefs about Direct Response Television Advertising Survey

— General Instructions —

- This survey will ask you about your beliefs and opinions regarding a *particular type of **television advertisement**: Direct Response Television (or, DRTV)* commercials. It consists of three parts and will take about 20 minutes to complete.
- Please take a few moments to read the instructions preceding each section before you begin to answer any questions. Your answers will be kept anonymous, so please do not write your name or any other personal information on any part of this questionnaire.
- Please note that you indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by completing and returning this questionnaire. However, you may choose not to answer any question, or to discontinue at any time. Thank you very much for your participation.

Moderator Instructions for Evaluating DRTV Advertisements:

“Direct Response Television Advertisements (or, DRTV Ads) are a particular kind of television commercial that advertisers use to sell products directly and to inform consumers about their products and services.”

“The two most important features about this commercial format is that 1) they ask the viewer to respond immediately by calling a toll-free phone number to order; and 2) they are usually approximately one or two minutes long (in other words, we’re not talking about “infomercials”, which are usually 15 minutes or longer). Other commercial formats do not usually include this feature. These days, this format is used for a variety of products and services.”

“What I would like to do now is have you watch a series of five television commercials for various products/services. Please answers the questions regarding each commercial in Part 1 of the questionnaire.” (Moderator will stop after each spot is shown and wait for approximately 2 minutes for respondents to record answers. S/he will also review the definition for DRTV commercials if asked to.)

“Finally, there is one last question for this part of the survey. Please read question 6 and indicate how confident you are that you now know what “Direct Response TV Ads” are.” (They will indicate their answer on a five-point scale ranging from (1) very confident to (5) not confident at all.)

Part 1

Consumer Opinions of DRTV Commercials

Instructions: Please answer the following questions about each of the five ***DRTV*** commercials you see (in order of their appearance).

(DRTV commercial #1 was shown here):

1. DRTV Commercial? Yes No (Circle one)

What was the product/service? _____

Did you like or dislike the commercial? (Circle one)

Give a short reason why or why not: _____ (Example:
Humorous, informative, etc.)

(DRTV commercial #2 was shown here):

2. DRTV Commercial? Yes No (Circle one)

What was the product/service? _____

Did you like or dislike the commercial? (Circle one)

Give a short reason why or why not: _____

(DRTV commercial #3 was shown here):

3. DRTV Commercial? Yes No (Circle one)

What was the product/service? _____

Did you like or dislike the commercial? (Circle one)

Give a short reason why or why not: _____

(DRTV commercial #4 was shown here):

4. DRTV Commercial? Yes No (Circle one)

What was the product/service? _____

Did you like or dislike the commercial? (Circle one)

Give a short reason why or why not: _____

(DRTV commercial #5 was shown here):

5. DRTV Commercial? Yes No (Circle one)

What was the product/service? _____

Did you like or dislike the commercial? (Circle one)

Give a short reason why or why not: _____

6.) How confident are you that you now know what a ***Direct Response Television Ad*** is? (Check the number which describes your confidence level.)

Very
confident

Not
confident
at all

1

2

3

4

5

Part 2 - Section 1

Consumer Beliefs About DRTV Commercials

Instructions: The following statements represent beliefs that people have about many of the tactics or techniques they recognize in DRTV commercials.

Although other types of commercials may use some of these same tactics, please evaluate each statement *only with respect to ads done in the DRTV format* discussed earlier.

1. When DRTV ads use small print, it always makes me think they're trying to *trick* me.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

2. **DRTV ads that use a “fast-talking” announcer are merely done that way to get the viewer excited about the opportunity to buy the product being advertised.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

3. When DRTV ads offer free items with a purchase, this is strictly done to reward people for being customers.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

4. DRTV ads with small print use it to tell the viewer things they don't want to tell them, but have to tell them.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Note: Bold print indicates items that were dropped following factor analysis.

5. When DRTV ads use a successful-looking consumer's testimony, it's usually done to make viewers believe *the product* had something to do with their success.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

6. DRTV ads only use small print just to *reinforce* things the announcer already said.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

7. DRTV ads use celebrities to make people think that just purchasing the product will somehow *magically* transform their life.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

8. Ads that purposely don't tell the consumer exactly how much shipping and handling will cost do this to make the product *seem* less expensive.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

9. People who buy products from DRTV ads that feature a consumer testimonial *never* end up as satisfied as the consumer in the ad seemed to be.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

10. DRTV ads that demonstrate how the product works usually do give people a *realistic* idea of what they can expect when they try the product at home.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

11. Whenever DRTV ads feature a “fast-talking” announcer, this is done so that viewers won’t think about what is *actually* being said in the ad.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

12. Small print at the bottom of the screen in DRTV ads really means the viewer should discount almost everything the announcer *said* in the ad.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

13. DRTV ads use hard-to-read print because it includes things they don’t really *want* people to notice.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

14. DRTV ads use ‘free offers’ to get people to pick up the phone and dial, without thinking it over *first*.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

15. If an ad doesn’t *specifically* state what it costs for shipping and handling a product, people should expect the shipping fees to be higher than normal.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

16. *Celebrities* are usually used in DRTV ads to get people to think that if they use this product, then their life can be just as ‘worry-free’ as the celebrity’s probably is.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

17. DRTV ads that mention a money-back guarantee do so because they know that, even if purchasers are not satisfied, most of them won't take the time to *return* the product.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

18. Whenever a DRTV ad offers a money-back guarantee, people should expect returning the product to be a *big hassle*.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

19. When DRTV ads feature a '*regular*' consumer, this is done to make viewers believe that merely buying the product will make them just as happy as the consumer in the ad seemed to be.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

20. DRTV ads that show *before* and *after* pictures are usually altered; results for people who *buy* the product aren't nearly as good as was shown in the ad.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

21. When DRTV ads use illustrations that show how well a product works, they usually try to make people think it will perform *better* than it actually will.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Part 2 - Section 2

Consumer Beliefs about the Products Sold in DRTV Ads

Instructions: The following statements represent beliefs that people have about the products advertised in DRTV commercials.

Although other types of commercials may use some of the same tactics, please evaluate each statement *only with respect to ads done in the DRTV format* discussed earlier.

1. Advertisers can sell practically *anything* successfully in a DRTV commercial.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

2. Merely showing a product in a DRTV ad is a sure way to get *somebody* to buy it.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

3. DRTV items provide more solutions to household problems than the kinds of products found in retail stores.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

4. Products sold through DRTV are usually much better than those offered in retail stores.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

5. DRTV ads usually offer goods that are of equal or higher *quality* than those that are sold in stores.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

6. If a product is *useless*, no one will buy it (no matter what kind of advertisement is used).

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

7. If a product is *no good*, people won't buy it (no matter what kind of advertisement is used).

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

8. The people who buy things from DRTV ads are people who will buy just about *anything*.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

9. No matter what the product or service, *anybody* can be successful if they use DRTV ads to sell it.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

10. If a product is *unsafe*, no one will buy it (no matter what kind of advertisement is used).

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

11. **Products sold in retail stores are generally safer than the products people buy through DRTV ads.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

12. **The safety standards for products sold through DRTV are just as high as those sold in retail stores.**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Part 3 - Section 1

Consumer Beliefs about DRTV Advertisers

Instructions: For this part of the survey you will be asked to read several statements that relate to why “*YOU*” think Advertisers use the DRTV commercial format discussed earlier.

Please read the items below and indicate *how much you agree or disagree* with each statement by circling the number that corresponds with your response.

1. The primary reason advertisers use the DRTV format is because it is a low cost way to sell their products/services on television.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

2. Advertisers use the DRTV format mainly because they know that it takes only a small investment, but it will produce huge profits.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

3. The primary reason that advertisers use the DRTV format is because they want to give consumers a convenient way to shop.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

4. A major reason advertisers use DRTV ads is because they really are interested in saving consumers money (by eliminating the retailer's profits).

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

5. Advertisers who regularly use the DRTV format know more about how to get consumers to react in the ways they want them to than advertisers who don't use it.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

6. A major reason advertisers use this format is because they know it is easier to tap people's emotions using a DRTV commercial than with other advertising methods.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

7. DRTV commercials are used mainly because advertisers know it's a quick way to make lots of money.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

8. The primary reason they use DRTV commercials is because these advertisers are genuinely interested in benefitting the consumers who purchase their products and services.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

9. A major reason that advertisers use this format is because they know it is easier to persuade people to buy a product through a DRTV commercial than through other advertising methods.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

10. DRTV advertisers really believe in the products/services they sell.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

11. The main reason advertisers use the DRTV format is because it is a sure way to sell lots of their merchandise.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Part 3 - Section 2

Consumers' DRTV Purchase Intentions

Instructions: Please read the paragraphs below about DRTV advertisers and then answer each of the statements that follow.

- A. Many DRTV advertisements now include web site addresses as a way for customers to place orders (or get more information about the product/service). With this in mind, please read the following statement and indicate how much *you would be influenced to order a product (or service) from a DRTV commercial* because of this new feature (a web site).

1. An ad featuring an advertisers' web site would *increase my likelihood of purchasing* the product/service _____.

Greatly	A good deal	Some- what	Very little	None at all
1	2	3	4	5

- B. Recently, many well-known advertisers have started to use DRTV commercials to sell their products/services (and also as a way for consumers to learn more about their brands). Please read the following statement and indicate how much *you would be influenced to order a product (or service) from a DRTV commercial* if major advertisers (like Procter and Gamble, General Electric) started to use this type of commercial.

2. If more major advertisers started to use DRTV ads to sell their products, this would *increase my likelihood of purchasing* the product/service _____.

Greatly	A good deal	Some- what	Very little	None at all
1	2	3	4	5

Part 3 - Section 3

Consumer Demographics

Instructions: Please answer the following questions about yourself by placing a check mark next to the appropriate response category.

1. Within the past year, I ___ purchased item(s) or service(s) as a result of seeing it/them advertised in a DRTV advertisement.

___ Have

___ Have not

2. To the best of my memory, I ___ purchased item(s) or service(s) as a result of seeing it/them advertised in a DRTV advertisement.

___ Have

___ Have never

4. I am:

___ a. Female

___ b. Male

5. My ethnicity or nationality is:

___ a. Caucasian

___ b. African-American

___ c. Hispanic or Latino

___ d. Asian or Asian-American

___ e. Other

3. My age is:

___ a. 18 - 24

___ b. 25 - 34

___ c. 35 - 44

___ d. 45 - 54

___ e. 55 or older

6. My household income is:

___ a. Below \$20,499

___ b. \$20,500 to \$30,499

___ c. \$30,500 to \$40,499

___ d. \$40,500 to \$50,499

___ e. \$50,500 or above

7. My highest education level or degree attained is:

- ☐ a. High school or equivalent
- ☐ b. Some college
- ☐ c. Four-year degree
- ☐ d. Graduate degree

8. My current occupation is in the _____ area:

- ☐ a. Technical
- ☐ b. Managerial
- ☐ c. Professional
- ☐ d. Clerical
- ☐ e. Other

APPENDIX B—Focus Group Questionnaire

Focus Group Questions

Instructions: For each of the ads that you see, you will be asked a series of questions which you should think about and express your opinions about.

(DRTV Ad #1 was shown here)

1. Do you recall seeing this Ad?
2. What types of persuasion appeals or approaches does the advertiser seem to be using in this ad?
3. By using each kind of appeal you've mentioned, what do you think the advertiser is trying to do?
4. Specifically, what do you think the advertiser is trying to make the viewer think or feel about the product?
5. How does this work? In other words, what do you think is the association that people make in their minds when they see, for example, a celebrity in this ad?
6. Who do you think this ad is targeted to?
7. Now, considering the appeals used and the intended target, how appropriate do you think this ad is for the target group? Probe: Do you think it's 'fair' to use this appeal for this target audience?
8. By using these appeals, do you think the advertiser is taking advantage of the targeted viewer in any way? Why? Why not?
9. How effective do you think this ad will be on the intended target audience?
10. What is the net impression that the target consumer might get after seeing this ad?
11. Does this ad misled the target consumer in any way you can think of?

(Next, DRTV Ads # 2 through 12 were shown; each was followed by these 11 questions)

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