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THE HEURISTIC AND SYSTEMATIC PROCESSING OF  
BRAND ATTRIBUTES AND NEUTRAL INFORMATION  
SOURCES IN THE DECISION TO SEE A FILM  
AT THE THEATRE

presented by

WILLIAM J. WARD

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**THE HEURISTIC AND SYSTEMATIC PROCESSING OF  
BRAND ATTRIBUTES AND NEUTRAL INFORMATION SOURCES  
IN THE DECISION TO SEE A FILM AT THE THEATRE**

**By**

**William J. Ward**

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**ABSTRACT**

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By

William J. Ward

Low or high motivation related to personal relevance has been an important indicator of the likelihood that receivers will engage in elaboration or thinking about the information contained in a persuasive effort (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). However, the concept of systematic, in-depth cognitive analysis and / or heuristic, superficial processing of information, have not previously been applied to moviegoers. In this study, ten hypotheses were tested and the data provided additional validation to involvement and “market maven” measures (Feick and Price 1987) with the frequency of movie attendance and with the Heuristic-Systematic Model (Todorov, Chaiken et. al. 2002) for total thoughts and heuristic thought processing. The significance of this research is that it incorporates involvement, heuristic and systematic processing, and motivation constructs into theories of moviegoing behavior.

The study administered an intercept survey to moviegoers (N=373) at a Midwest cinema and applied the Heuristic-Systematic Model to the entire decision process to see a film at the theatre, considering all of the information a consumer used before a decision was made. The study found both involvement (Zaichkowsky’s 1987) and “market maven” measures (Feick and Price 1987) to

be correlated with frequency of movie attendance. The findings also supported the role of involvement with the combined number of systematic and heuristic thoughts and the number of heuristic thoughts. Contrary to expectations, there was no support for the role of involvement with the number of systematic thoughts or with the familiarity of a film, and with different levels or types of processing related to the genre of the film. Explanations and implications for these findings are discussed and the study concludes with suggestions for future research.

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**To my wife, Severine,  
and my parents**

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## **Chapter 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Introduction**

**This study examines the persuasive influence of various factors on an individual's decision to see a specific film at the theatre. Moviegoers can form impressions about a movie based on film characteristics (brand attributes) and on information provided by independent (non-studio) sources. These independent, or third-party, sources are referred to as neutral information sources, although the content of their communications are often far from neutral (Henning-Thurau, Walsh et al. 2001). Brand attributes include pre-sold elements or information about a movie such as a film's genre, star, director, and story and are included in the advertising and public relations of a new film. Neutral sources of information about a film include word-of-mouth, critics' comments and awards. Neutral information sources can be included in third party communications and are also often included with studio promotion of a new film (Henning-Thurau, Walsh et al. 2001). Previous research has examined the influence of brand attributes of films and neutral information sources at the aggregate level, but these factors have not been used to help understand the individual decision process to see a specific film.**

**The Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) is typically used as a way to distinguish between the different modes of processing a persuasive communication as well as to characterize the different features that may activate**

these modes. In this study, the HSM is applied to the entire decision process, considering all of the information a consumer used before a decision was made. Presence or absence of personal relevance, belief strength, and motivation are all ways to initiate systematic or heuristic processing. It is important to understand the factors that determine exactly when consumers might engage in systematic process and when they might be influence by heuristic cues (MacKenzie and Spreng 1992).

Understanding how consumers decide to see a specific film is of increasing importance with overall ticket sales for the summer 2005 film season down 8% and attendance down 11% to the lowest levels in four years (Bowles 2005). Currently six or seven movies out of any 10 major theatrical films produced are unprofitable at the theater. Changing consumer tastes and the nearly two-year lead time required to produce and release a new film complicate the needs of studios to have a continual stream of new ideas that will match consumer demand (Litman 1998). This makes for a risky return on investment proposition for individual participants coupled with a short life cycle and rapid decay in revenue after a motion picture's opening release in the theatre (Vogel 2001).

Studios are able to recoup their investment across the other home exhibition windows to maximize and generate their profits after the first theatrical release through options such as DVD and Video on Demand (VOD), but remain frustrated with the inability to predict whether a specific film will be successful at the box office. The success of the first theatrical release in 1985 accounted for

over 70% share of sales, however, films today often pull in 60-70% of their total grosses from the home entertainment market and recoup their investment across the other home exhibition windows after the first theatrical release (Stanley 2005). However, the success of a film at the box office remains critical to its downstream success in the other exhibition windows (Litman 1998).

Research on how to attract people to see a particular film and the predicted success of a film at the box office has been the goal of much confidential proprietary industry research (Litman and Kohl 1989). The unpredictability of what movie people decide to see combined with a decline in attendance have studios using surveys, test screenings and public opinion polls to re-evaluate what moviegoers want. It is not certain what is causing the decline in attendance at movie theatres. However, there are many possible explanations. The decline in attendance at theatres may be a result of a variety of factors including changing movie-going habits and industry release patterns made possible by an increasing variety of digital technology delivery, recording and viewing options. Large screen, high definition television and digital surround sound systems for home theaters combined with DVD home delivery, digital VOD via cable, satellite and internet delivery, digital recording devices such as TiVo, and portable viewing devices such as laptop computers, new video cell phones, and Apple's new portable Video I-Pod, combined with a shortened release window from theatre to home now allow consumers almost complete control of when, where, and how they choose to see a movie (Stanley 2005).

Digital technology also increases the opportunity for piracy, or the illegal recording or downloading of a film, and makes it possible to see the film outside of the theatre or studio release windows such as DVD or VOD. In the summer of 2002 an estimated 1 million to 3 million people illegally downloaded or viewed *Spider-Man* and *Star-Wars: Attack of the Clones* before the films were released to movie theatres (Levack 2002). Film industry losses to movie piracy are estimated by the Motion Picture Association of America to be more than \$2 billion each year (MPAA 2003). Despite recent developments in encryption technology there are still concerns about theft using digital distribution (Isailovic 2000). This unauthorized copying or leakage between windows to piracy short-circuits the windowing process and denies the product the full benefits of price discrimination (Owen and Wildman 1992). Threats of video piracy are already causing studios to simultaneously release big budget films domestically and internationally. This is also being discussed as a viable strategy to reduce piracy by simultaneous releasing a film in theatres and through downstream video release windows such as DVD and VOD.

Frustrations with the movie-going experience in theatres such as annoyance at noisy patrons, cell phones ringing, pre-show ads, and the cost of movie tickets may also be factors contributing to the decline in attendance. The lack of quality product and economic factors such as a slow economy, rising gas prices, and competition from other entertainment options like video games and the Internet are also suggested as explanations for the decline (Bowles 2005; Stanley 2005). The National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO), the primary

trade group for exhibitors, is pushing to address the in-theatre complaints by proposing bans on small children after a certain hour to cut down on crying babies, checking cell phones at the theater door or blocking cell phones inside theaters, and policing auditoriums and asking people to leave after they've been warned for being too noisy (Waxman 2005). A combination of some or all of these factors may be contributing to the decline in attendance at the theater and increasing the importance of determining how best to market a film to an audience and to understand how they choose to see a specific film at the theater.

Given the risk and uncertainty of a film being successful and declining attendance, the question raised is how do consumers decide to see a specific film at the theatre? What factors about a specific film influence a consumer to choose to see it at the theatre? What type of processing is used in determining whether to see a specific film?

### **Structure of This Research**

This research into the Heuristic and Systematic Processing of brand attributes and neutral information sources in the decision to see a film is divided into five chapters. The rest of the first chapter will consider the economic characteristics of film content and its relationship to large investments in creative and production inputs that contribute to the success of a film. The economic characteristics of film also explain the relationship between media content and industry practices in motion pictures. The second chapter will review the literature on previous research on brand attributes and neutral information sources of a film and the use of the Heuristic-Systematic Processing Model

(HSM) of low and high involvement users and the significance of the proposed research. The role of involvement, motivations and marketplace influencers or 'Market Mavens' and the HSM will be used to present a series of hypotheses that will provide a foundation for the current investigation. The third chapter will provide the methods for the investigation. Chapter Four will present the results of that research, which involves a study of heuristic and systematic processing of brand attributes and neutral information sources with low and high involvement individuals and their decision to see a particular film. The final chapter will discuss the findings of this research both broadly and specifically in light of previous work.

### **Experience Goods**

Economic theory and its sub-discipline, economics of information, posit that consumers try to assess a product's performance before consuming it to reduce uncertainty and avoid the risk of an unsatisfactory experience and loss of time and money (Stigler 1961; Nelson 1970; Nelson 1981; Hirshleifer and Reiley 1992). However, the information exchange between buyer and seller is not equal among product types (Eggertsson 1990). Search qualities of many physical goods such as features or attributes like color, size, ingredients, etc. can be more easily and objectively evaluated by the customer without personally consuming a product. Entertainment products (e.g., movies, concerts, sporting events) and services (e.g., vacation packages, hair styling, restaurant meals) are considered to be experience goods because they have to be experienced by the consumer before he or she is able to more objectively evaluate them (Nelson 1970; Nelson

1981; Sawhney and Eliashberg 1996). Attributes of experience goods generally lack many of the characteristics that consumers' can evaluate before deciding to consume a physical product and limit market-related activities and options of both consumers and companies (Henning-Thurau, Walsh et al. 2001). Film consumers face uncertainty because film is also a unique "experience" product, and moviegoers cannot know beforehand if the experience will be satisfactory (Bakker 2001). To overcome this state of being under-informed consumers have two options. First, they can draw on attributes that can be evaluated in advance and that enable the consumer to infer salient attributes that replace the transfer of an experience quality into a search quality (Henning-Thurau, Walsh et al. 2001). Second, consumers can rely on non-commercial information or word-of-mouth from people (friends, colleagues, critics) who have already experienced the service and pass on their assessments to them (Neelamiegham and Jain 1999). Consumers tend to place a high level of trust and credibility on information passed on from critics and through word-of-mouth (Westbrook 1987). The skills and assets, or creative and production inputs, that go into a film have to be leveraged to generate awareness and to persuade a consumer to see a new film and reduce the uncertainty or risk of an unsatisfactory experience (Bakker 2001). However, movie industry specialists continually fail to predict accurate sales or market shares based on tangible product attributes of movies and their corresponding marketing activities (Austin 1989).

## **Public-Good Character of Media**

Media content, such as motion pictures, has a characteristic that develops a unique relationship between content and industry practices. In the beginning, between 1894 and 1900, motion pictures were seen as a technological novelty by a receptive public (Bakker 2001). The early “peep” hole viewing machine, the kinetoscope, introduced by Edison in 1894, rotated forty seconds worth of celluloid film strips in penny arcades, halls and amusement centers (Balio 1985). The process required relatively low upfront sunk costs to produce and relatively low cost tickets and investment in time by the viewer to experience the film (Litman 1998). The film product could only be viewed by one person at a time using the viewing machine but by 1896 projector systems meant that economies of scale could begin to be realized as multiple participants could now simultaneously view a motion picture while production costs remained fixed (Fulton 1960).

Media content contained in books and films are said to be a “public good” because one person’s consumption does not reduce the quantity or utility available to other consumers or increase the cost of production. A public highway, national defense or national security are other examples of public goods. The public-good characteristic of media allows movies or books to be distributed geographically in multiple media forms over time for economic advantage and relates to the economic theory of production and consumption of commodities (Owen and Wildman 1992). Once media content is produced it can be consumed by multiple participants simultaneously with a fixed production cost.



In contrast, a “private good,” such as a candy bar, is no longer available if consumed by someone else and production costs are related to the number of people consuming each unit. Although media content is a public good, it also has private good characteristics in the tangible form in which the content is delivered such as making additional copies of a book or video cassette (Owen and Wildman 1992).

### **Toward Industry Standardization**

In the beginning, economies of scale could not yet be fully realized as there was no standardization in the industry for filming and projection systems. Over a half dozen different companies produced their own films and projector systems with patent and licensing requiring operators to purchase all the different systems or choose one incompatible projector system over another (Litman 1998). Between 1905 and 1914, storefronts were converted with projector and screen and seating for up to a few hundred in fixed nickelodeon theatres. Nickelodeon theatres with motion picture programs of four or five consecutive one-reelers (shorts), emphasizing different genres (e.g., newsreels, comedy, drama) were able to surpass live vaudevillian entertainment and build a mass audience for movies (Merritt 1985).

The industry took steps toward standardization in 1909 with different patent holders agreeing to a cartel arrangement, in the form of a trust, creating a monopoly on cameras, projectors, film stock and top quality producers. Independent producers, internal bickering by the Trust members, and an antitrust suit in 1915 disbanding the monopoly weakened industry stability (Alllen 1976;

Anderson 1985). The rise of the longer feature film (four reels or more), deluxe theatres, and a receptive audience resulted in a new distribution organization replacing the trust and ensuring industry standardization needed to sustain the emerging mass medium. Between 1914 and 1925, a handful of giant vertically integrated firms would emerge to control the film industry in a tight oligopolistic market structure that still exists today (Balio 1985).

In 1948 the Supreme Court issued the "Paramount" decrees which banned block booking and unfair trade practices and ordered studios to relinquish control of their affiliated theatres. Currently theatre circuit reorganizations, merger mania and consolidation are seen as attempts at controlling the marketplace for digitally distributed content. These activities have reinstated monopolistic concerns over vertical reintegration and the unfair and anti-competitive control of production and distribution by the leading studio distributors (Litman 1998; Bennett and Pryor 2002; Friedman 2002). For example, Intertainer, a pioneer in the VOD business since 1996, filed suit September 23, 2002, in the Los Angeles U.S. District Court, accusing the studios and Movielink of price fixing, conspiracy, reneging on licensing agreements and other anticompetitive attempts at controlling the digital distributed content (Friedman 2002).

The big six studios, including Sony Corp. / MGM, Universal Pictures, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, Walt Disney Co., Warner Bros., and Paramount, account for almost 75% of films distributed (MPAA 2005). With few exceptions, independent productions outside of the studio system must still rely on the financial support

from the big six to offset the risk of large production and marketing budgets and the uncertainty of return on investment, and to guarantee distribution agreements so their films will be seen in theatres. The independent production companies are separate from the large studios but need to affiliate with them for production, marketing and release in the studio controlled distribution system.

### **Production Budgets**

The relatively low upfront sunk costs to produce a film rose dramatically as the longer feature film replaced the shorts and nickelodeon theatres were replaced by much larger, first class and deluxe theaters (Balio 1985; Litman 1998). Film purchasing was replaced by leasing or rental to maintain the rapid turnover of film product necessary to generate repeat business and offset the increased costs of developing more lengthy, high quality stories and production values for more specialized genres (Bakker 2001). A movie made in 1909 ranged in cost between \$550 and \$1,100 (Allen 1980). The average cost of a Fox feature was \$23,000 in 1914 and increased to \$186,000 in 1927, before sound films became widespread. The average production cost of a Warner Brothers film in 1922 was \$90,000 and rose to \$168,000 in 1927 (Hampton 1931).

The cost of new technology adoption such as sound in 1927, the cost of film, or even inflation did not account for this rapid multiplication and increase of production costs as the necessary costs of shooting a film remained relatively stable (Bakker 2001). A Fox sound film in 1929 cost \$308,000 on average. RKO's costs nearly doubled from \$220,000 per talking picture in 1929 to

\$424,000 in 1939 and a Warner Brothers Film average cost was \$539,000 in 1940. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, which specialized in high-budget films, saw its production costs escalate from \$310,000 per picture in 1924 to \$967,000 in 1939 (Hampton 1931). The main causes of the cost explosion occurred when film producers began paying large sums for “creative inputs” (actors, directors, and literary works) and for expensive stages, sets, scenery, and special effects (Bakker 2000).

The average cost of producing a movie in 2003 was \$63.8 million (MPAA 2005). The larger production budgets provide higher quality inputs of talent that have been shown to be predictive of motion picture success in the past. These inputs include such things as big name stars, better directors, better writers, and high-tech special effects, that contribute to greater audience appeal (Wildman 1995). The expense of these production inputs is necessary for domestic and international audience appeal along with the marketing expense necessary to generate awareness and the desire to see a film at the theatre. Positive awareness for a film at the box office is critical to its downstream success through DVD and VOD and requires higher upfront production values to generate awareness and return on investment (Litman 1998).

### **Windowing**

The public-good characteristic of motion pictures allows content to be networked or shared simultaneously by many people across multiple markets. Once completed, the production or “first copy” costs of a motion picture are fixed so large audiences need to be reached to achieve economies of scale by

spreading costs among the most viewers (Litman 1998). These viewers can be accumulated over time and reached with repeated broadcast delivery through sequencing of existing markets or distribution "windows" (Owen and Wildman 1992; Vogel 2001). The broad geographic reach of windowing distribution allows for a form of price discrimination by selling the same public good to different program services such as DVD, pay-per-view, pay TV such as cable and satellite, and network television, at different prices. The staggering of release windows reflects that some buyers are willing to pay more for the "utility of experience" or the satisfaction received from viewing a film earlier in the release sequence and that other buyers will pay less for viewing a film later in the release sequence. The value of a movie declines with age and the strategic time lag between each successive release window allows for a maximizing of profits in order to reach the largest geographic area and the largest audience at the price they are willing to pay (Owen and Wildman 1992).

The sequencing of release windows for motion pictures includes the domestic theatrical first release, foreign theatrical release, pay per view, worldwide home video, pay TV, foreign TV, network TV and syndication (Owen and Wildman 1992). Estimated percentage of film industry sources of revenue in 2000 for the different exhibition windows included 15.2% from domestic theatrical release, 14.2% from foreign theatrical release, 38.2% from home video, 7.8% from pay cable, 1.5% from network TV, 3.9% from syndication, 6.9% from foreign TV and 12.3% for made-for-TV films (Vogel 2001). Windowing release in foreign markets is an important strategy since half of total sales of films and programs for

the major studios are from foreign sales including cinema releases, video rentals, and sales to foreign broadcasters

Although declining, the success of the first theatrical release window remains an important predictor of profitability and downstream revenue in the other exhibition windows. The importance of targeting moviegoers and creating awareness that contributes to the decision process to see a film at the theater is significant. The studios are also reliant on increasingly short-term, intensive marketing strategies to stimulate demand for releases that are anticipated to have a short life cycle and limited market appeal (Sawhney and Eliashberg 1992).

The simultaneous delivery of film to consumers on the big screen at the theatre and at home on pay TV, DVD, and the internet is quickly becoming a technological reality that threatens the traditional distribution model of keeping secondary release windows separate from first release at the theater. The \$34.8 million average cost that studios spend marketing a first-run movie could serve double duty promoting simultaneous delivery to more profitable home entertainment options (Stanley 2005). The Independent Film Channel (IFC) Entertainment is placing films in independent theatres while also making them available over a new video-on-demand (VOD) service that will be carried by all the major cable companies. Director Steven Soderbergh's film "Bubble" opened in internet entrepreneur Mark Cuban's theatre chain, Landmarke Theaters, as well as on his high-definition network (HD Net), with the DVD available the following Tuesday (Waxman 2006). Collapsing the theatrical and home

entertainment release windows is technologically feasible but is currently being resisted by many studio heads and the National Association of Theatre Owners (NATO). NATO represents the majority of exhibitors who fear that the simultaneous release option would cannibalize box office revenue that still accounts for 25-30% of studio revenues (Wang, Blackledge et al. 2005).

As digital distribution of film is fully adopted by industry and consumers, the long term impact of VOD on the industry and the sequencing of existing markets or distribution "windows" is uncertain (Litman 1998; Vogel 2001). As new technologies are introduced, it is likely that the studios will continually adjust and shrink their exhibition window sequence to maximize their present value of profits across the many emerging technologies. The studios successfully shortened their windowing sequence for the introduction of television, video cassette players, pay cable, DVD and VOD and actively acquired the production and delivery means through acquisition and vertical integration into the system (Litman 1998).

With the traditional sequencing of release windows, there are basically three distribution options to consider: 1) an exclusive theatrical run followed by a traditional release time period to other windows; 2) a shortened release run followed by quicker release to other windows; 3) simultaneous release. These options are based on the current assumptions that new technologies will not alter a viewer's willingness to pay to see the film in a theatre, other viewing options that cost less than the price of a movie, and viewers' willingness to view the film in other forms after its theatrical release (Owen and Wildman 1992). Digital

media have the potential to challenge these current assumptions. It is likely that the studios will continue to adjust their windowing sequences as needed for new digital viewing and delivery technologies. Studios will also continue to acquire alternative creative inputs such as video games and the Internet to vertically integrate and adapt to ever-changing viewing patterns and entertainment options. If decreasing ticket sales and attendance are a permanent trend during the first theatrical release window, then understanding the decision process of consumers to see a specific film at the theater and the processing of brand attributes and neutral information sources is of increasing importance. The next chapter will propose a theoretical concept and present a literature review to develop a study to better understand the decision process and motivations of moviegoers.



## **Chapter 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will review the role of the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) of processing to distinguish between the different modes of processing a persuasive communication as well as to characterize the different features that may activate these modes. In this study, the HSM is applied to the entire decision process, considering all of the information a consumer used before a decision was made. Presence or absence of personal relevance, belief strength, and motivation are all ways to initiate systematic or heuristic processing. It is important to understand the factors that determine exactly when consumers might engage in systematic processing and when they might be influenced by heuristic cues (MacKenzie and Spreng 1992). This chapter will also explore the previous research on brand attributes and neutral information sources of a film. The general marketplace knowledge or expertise and influence of 'Market Mavens' and the importance to film will also be examined (Feick and Price 1987). A series of hypotheses will then serve to structure this investigation by connecting film brand attributes and neutral information sources to low- and high-involvement processing, frequency of moviegoer attendance, and the influence of opinion leadership and early adoption of 'market mavens.' These will be tested using the HSM Model of processing as part of the applied theory.

Film consumers face uncertainty because film is a unique “experience” product. Moviegoers must draw on attributes of the film that can be evaluated in advance (genre, star, director, story) or rely on non-commercial information or word-of-mouth from people (friends, colleagues, critics, etc.) who have already experienced the movie beforehand and can pass on their assessments to them for the moviegoer to use in deciding to see a film (Bakker 2001; Henning-Thurau, Walsh et al. 2001). The literature on the HSM Model will be reviewed before exploring the literature on brand attributes and non-commercial information sources and proposing the study and hypotheses.

### **Heuristic-Systematic Model of Persuasive Communication (HSM)**

The specific imagery and information used in advertising is designed to appeal to specific market segments (Saffer 2002). To be effective, promotional efforts must reach their intended target audience and be favorably received by them. The Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) is a dual model of processing that an individual may employ when evaluating a persuasive message and that might help researchers to understand the individual processing of brand attributes and neutral information sources regarding the decision to see a specific film. The HSM posits that people can engage in systematic, in-depth cognitive analysis and/or engage in heuristic, superficial processing of information (Todorov, Chaiken et al. 2002). The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is a similar processing model that also considers the presence or absence of personal relevance. Low or high motivation related to personal relevance has been found to be an indicator of the likelihood that receivers will engage in elaboration or

thinking about the information contained in a persuasive effort (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Similar to heuristic processing, the ELM model posits that low motivation leads to less reliance on content cues, or in-depth processing, and more focus on peripheral cues that act as symbolic triggers creating social influence with little processing (Petty and Cacioppo 1986).

Chaiken (1980) first defined the two modes of processing labeled systematic processing and heuristic processing. Systematic processing takes place when an individual exerts additional cognitive energy when processing a message. Systematically processing a message also emphasizes a greater detail in understanding the arguments in the message as well as the validity of the message's conclusion. On the other hand, heuristic processing relies on simple cues or rules when processing a message. Individuals act as cognitive misers if there is sufficient confidence to form judgments that require little concentration on the details of the arguments, and the basis of the heuristic cues or rules derive from the individual's scripts of previous experience (Nabi 1999). Such heuristic cues include length of message, the source of the message or statistical data (Griffin, Neuwirth et al. 2002).

Situations that can trigger a specific processing mode could include time pressure and distraction or the motivation of the individual (Todorov, Chaiken et al. 2002). Todorov et al. (2002) highlight one type of motivation situation in which sufficient motivation is present, and this refers to an individual engaging in processing due to a discrepancy between their actual confidence and desired confidence for a judgment task. Specifically, individuals have a strong motivation

to process when they want accurate and sufficient information (Griffin, Neuwirth et al. 2002). The discrepancy should lead the individual to systematically process the message. Todorov et al. (2002) discuss how personal relevance, task importance and a need for cognition may induce systematic processing because such variables increase an individual's desired confidence and this might initiate the need to process further in order to match the actual confidence to the desired confidence. Low confidence increases the need for systematic processing to achieve a higher level of confidence. It is also important to note that a sufficiently motivated individual who has limited cognitive resources and the message is personally relevant, will also turn to heuristic cues when reviewing a message.

This dual-process model suggests that both the systematic and heuristic modes can occur simultaneously, but there is debate over the actual interaction between the modes (Todorov, Chaiken et al. 2002). As outlined by Todorov et al. (2002), the modes have been described as mutually exclusive, in competition or in harmony with each other. The mutually exclusive perspective would speculate that when an individual is systematically processing a message then their heuristic mode is shut down, whereas the simultaneous perspective posits that an individual may use both modes at the same time or as long as needed. For example, an individual may use a heuristic cue for one argument in the message, but then move to the systematic processing mode for a different argument.

Booth-Butterfield, Cooke, Pearson and Lang (1994) investigated the simultaneous processing perspective further since the HSM's main assumption is

that the modes do in fact work concurrently. The goal of their research was to determine whether individuals do use both modes in attitude judgments or rather to indicate that individuals exclusively use one processing mode or the other. The researchers hypothesized that individuals would use both modes of processing if the situational conditions had not yet confirmed which mode the participants would use as well as proposing two empirical outcomes (Booth-Butterfield, Cooke et al. 1994). The two outcomes proposed included: (1) attitude change should be influenced by arguments and cues and if these effects are strong then the simultaneous processing should decrease, and (2) a significant relationship between attitudes and argument-relevant thoughts and cue-relevant thoughts should indicate simultaneous processing is taking place (Booth-Butterfield, Cooke et al. 1994). Results showed that although the participants were aware of both arguments and cues, they only used one of these variables to direct their attention. This suggests that the participants, while aware of the variables, selected their own processing mode that mediated persuasion. However, the researchers found that there was no evidence to support that the individuals were involved in simultaneous processing as systematic processing was the mode engaged by the participants.

Griffin et al. (2002) looked at the link between the HSM and depth of processing. The researchers tied systematic processing to more in-depth processing leading to more permanent attitudes whereas heuristic processing is connected to low effort and attitudes that are less stable. Further, they speculated that systematic processing would also be related to strongly held

beliefs, behavioral beliefs and strength of cognitive structure; all considered precursors to attitudes (Griffin, Neuwirth et al. 2002). On the heuristic side, they expected such processing to be negatively related to the above variables. Support was found for their hypotheses indicating that a higher number of strong beliefs held by an individual sets the groundwork for the establishment of their attitudes.

The HSM has not previously been applied to the individual decision to see a film at the theatre and will be used to better understand this process. The literature on 'market mavens' and the diffusion of marketplace information will now be reviewed before proposing the hypotheses to connect this concept with the use of the HSM.

### **The Market Maven and the Diffusion of Marketplace Information**

The 'psychological approach' to researching the motion picture industry focuses on the individual decision to see a particular film but also on audience motivations and behavior regarding why consumers choose to see films among a vast array of entertainment options (Litman 1998). Variables such as opinions, needs, values, attitudes and personality traits are related to consumers' decision making process by researchers adopting this approach (Eliashberg, Elberse et al. 2004).

The importance of interpersonal communication in the transmission of marketplace information has been documented in influencing marketplace choices (Katona and Mueller 1955; Udell 1966; Kiel and Layton 1981; Price and Feick 1984) and in diffusing information on new products (Katz and Lazarsfeld

1955; Arndt 1967; Engel, Kegerreis et al. 1969; Rogers 1983). The most important sources of information are often interpersonal (Katona and Mueller 1955; Robertson 1971; Kiel and Layton 1981; Price and Feick 1984).

Interpersonal information exchange is often widespread and affects preferences and choices and are seen as more credible than non-personal sources (Arndt 1967; King and Summers 1967; Assael, Etgar et al. 1983).

Two types of influencers, the opinion leader and the early purchaser or adopter, are the focus of traditional approaches to interpersonal influence (Feick and Price 1987). Studying the interpersonal information exchanges by opinion leaders and early adopters within product classes can result in a better understanding of the extent and importance of interpersonal influence (Feick and Price 1987). The existence and importance of opinion leaders who act as information brokers between mass media sources and the opinions and choices of the population for a variety of product classes has been documented (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). The opinion leader exhibits a combination of knowledge or expertise and influence (Midgley 1976; Robertson, Zielinski et al. 1984). Opinion leaders are believed to be motivated to talk about a product because of their enduring involvement in a product class and have been viewed as product class specific (Jacoby and Hoyer 1981; Bloch and Richins 1983).

Early purchasers or adopters also diffuse information through product-related conversations (Midgley and Dowling 1978). Early adopters may talk about the product for product-related reasons, to confirm their assessment of the product, to look like a pioneer in having purchased the new product, or the

novelty of the new product (Arndt 1967; Engel, Kegerreis et al. 1969; Feick and Price 1987). A group of influential early adopters has also been identified, however, research suggests that similar to opinion leaders, early adopters are product specific (Robertson and Myers 1969; Robertson 1971; Baumgarten 1975).

Marketplace involvement need not be restricted to a particular product class or product specific situation and certain individuals may be consistently more involved in marketplace activities (Kassarjian 1981). Certain people enjoy browsing and window shopping and are more careful and concerned in making overall purchase decisions (Thorelli, Becker et al. 1975; Thorelli and Thorelli 1977; Hirschman 1980; Raju 1980). These individuals have greater “purchasing involvement” and tend to know where to shop for certain items, where to get a good price on products, and what outlets have sales (Slama and Tashchian 1985). Feick and Price (1987) proposed using this purchasing involvement and general marketplace expertise to describe the individual marketplace influencers or ‘Market Mavens.’ The market maven has general marketplace knowledge or expertise and influence and tends to have information about a lot of different products and shopping venues. They also tend to start discussions about shopping or market-related information with other consumers and are also highly responsive to requests for this information. The market maven concept is distinguished from opinion leaders and early adopters who often have product-specific knowledge and experience (Feick and Price 1987).



The market maven's acquisition of market information may be due to involvement and general interest and these individuals may feel an obligation to be informed about the overall marketplace and not specific products (Kassarjian 1981; Slama and Tashchian 1985). The expected usefulness of information for future interactions with coworkers, family, friends, acquaintances and the anticipation of a future social role or passing on information to other people has been found to be an important predictor of information seeking (Dichter 1966; Atkin 1972; Chaffee and McLeod 1973; Richmond 1977; Levy 1978).

According to Gladwell (2000), the 'market maven' is one of three types of exceptional people that are required to cause a social epidemic or trend to "tip" through word-of-mouth and spread like wildfire. The market maven through their knowledge and expertise has the inside scoop on the marketplace and are active collectors of information who pass on new information to 'Connectors.'

'Connectors' are linked to many people and are able to bring many different worlds and subgroups together through their connections to help spread the word-of-mouth. Finally, the 'Salesman' has the skills to persuade us when we are unconvinced of what we are hearing through word-of-mouth (Gladwell 2000).

It takes this small group of sociable, energetic, knowledgeable and influential Market Mavens, Connectors, and Salesman interacting as individuals to help create a "tipping point" where the spread of "word-of-mouth" and a very "sticky" message that people can't forget are able to spread like an epidemic (Gladwell 2000). The literature on the use of brand attributes of film and neutral

information sources will now be reviewed before proposing the hypotheses to connect them with the use of the HSM.

### **Brand Attributes of Film**

The skills and assets, or creative and production inputs, that go into a film have to be leveraged to generate awareness and to persuade a consumer to see a new film and reduce the uncertainty or risk (Bakker 2001). To identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors, a distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as a logo, trademark, or package design), called a brand, is used (Aaker 1991). The attributes of a film act as a brand trigger of a film to identify the unique creative inputs of the film and differentiate it from other available film products. The industrial mass production and mass distribution that occurred between 1880 and 1930 helped to create national branding and allowed the national distribution of films through the delivery system of the movie theatre with single pricing and national advertising to reach a mass audience (Tedlow 1990; Bakker 2001).

The proprietary attributes of a branded product or film are used to generate awareness and reassurances, familiarity and liking, and differentiation and positioning. The brand attributes add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm or that firm's customer, creating brand equity. This equity included with the awareness and attributes include such aspects as loyalty, perceived quality, and other positive or negative associations. Brand attributes help create consideration and reason to buy, facilitate retrieval of

information and past experiences, and reduce marketing costs and create a competitive advantage (Aaker 1991). Large investments in marketing are required to create brand awareness of a film and to leverage the familiarity of the upfront production investment in acquiring creative inputs such as star, director, or a familiar story or character. Understanding how moviegoers use the attributes of a film to create brand awareness and familiarity is critical with the large upfront investment in film production and marketing.

According to Bakker (2001), film companies are facing increasingly shorter product life-cycles for their films with the collapsing of time from theatre to the home release window. This increasing pressure requires film productions to rely more heavily on an existing brand about which consumers already have reached a high level of awareness, such as famous plays, novels, remakes or musicals, and the extending of a film brand beyond one product into a series of successive products or sequels through the film title, director or star. Increasing the rate of return on their investment in branding to compensate for the shorter life of their products require film productions to use the stars of the films as spokespersons for products and services placed in the film itself and through licensing of merchandise tie-ins and cross promotions with manufacturers. The research literature on different film brand attributes will now be reviewed to determine how important the creative inputs are in the decision to attend a film at the theatre.

## **Genre and Audience Expectations**

The studios' trademarks once performed the function of informing moviegoers of product quality and potential audience appeal but have lost their importance as a branding device for the consumers (Bakker 2001). A 1942 study of trademarks found respondents could match the correct film studio in only 30% of cases (Handel 1950). Trademarks were also used to provide product differentiation by informing consumers about genres, such as a specific production company known for comedies or westerns (Abel 1990). An average of 459 new films are released each year by the studios representing a full range of film genres and stories, so it is not likely moviegoers would be able to associate a specific studio trademark with a quality or type of film today (MPAA 2005). Disney or Pixar studios known for animated family films may be examples of the few recognizable genre-related studio trademarks left. However, Disney also releases a variety of film genres in their product mix to appeal to a range of consumers and compete with the other studios.

The loss of the studio trademark as a branding device makes understanding genre's relationship to the organization of a film's story and audience expectations a better starting point for understanding audience expectations and familiarity with film. Genre's earliest manifestations in literature and evolution to its current application in film will be traced and examples of select genres of film will be used to demonstrate its current use. Once the relationship of genre to a film's story and audience expectations are better

understood we will review how genre is used as part of a film's branding efforts with the current marketing and distribution of film.

Film genre is the division of movies into groups that have similar subjects and themes (Gehring 1988). *Genre* is based on a French word for literary type. Its relationship to film can be understood by reviewing its early meaning with the literary traditions. Aristotle's *Poetics* identified different kinds of literature by breaking down poetry into types or categories such as tragedy, epic, lyric, etc. His purpose was to classify each distinct kind of literature and describe the qualities that identify its techniques and subjects (Cawelti 1976; Buscombe 1986). These early formulaic guidelines or patterns refer to the structure of the narrative or dramatic conventions employed in literature. Formula is also used as a way of understanding patterns of plot or story types that provide universal appeal or archetypes (Cawelti 1976). Genre and formula also act as triggers for creating brand awareness and associations by comparing past experiences to future expectations and interests. If a moviegoer enjoyed a science fiction film in the past he will be more familiar with the sci-fi genre, have more expectations of a positive future experience with the genre, and have more potential interest in seeing a new sci-fi film.

The development of film projection systems at the end of the nineteenth-century opened up commercial filmmaking's ability to reach large audiences or spectators through motion pictures (Hoppenstand 1998). As with popular literary genre, commercially successful film story formulas or genres had to be understood and repeated to respond to the new emerging mass market of

cinema and popular culture (Neale 1995). Applied to film, genre has similar abilities to encourage expectations and experiences based on the repetition and variation of familiar stories, characters and situations. The use of genre has established film as a cultural and economic institution, similar to publishing (Grant 1986). Genre can be used to compare large groups of works in order to identify common characteristics or to define and evaluate qualities of individual works (Cawelti 1976).

In film, a set of conventions in common with certain themes, actions, and characters operate to define the tradition of a particular genre (Tudor 1986). Film genre then provides a formal pattern that is used to direct and discipline other works of that genre (Buscombe 1986). Semantic definitions of genre are used to help describe the common traits, attitudes, characters, shots, locations, etc. that are the building blocks that provide characterizations of large numbers of films of that particular genre. A film of a particular genre is only recognized as part of that group if it is in fact an imitation of other films (Sobchack 1986). Spectator expectations and desires through repeated participation in the genre film experience are reinforced through the audience's ritual relationship to genre film and their continued response (Altman 1986). Audiences respond to and have certain expectations of the genre due to repeated exposure (Tudor 1986). Cawelti (1976) compares this ritual experience of genre to the repeated exposure of sports. The familiar rules and patterns of the game are repeated. The variations of the outcomes, however, continue to hold excitement similar to the

different individual films of a genre. In genre, the goal is not to see the same movie over and over again, but the same form (Warshow 1970).

It is difficult to determine exactly why an individual film becomes successful or what elements or combination of elements the public is responding to with the use of genre. Is the audience responding to formulaic story and expectations, or is the response to the film's other brand attributes of star, director, or the special effects? If genre functions similar to a product category for the consumer, then the individual components of a film, such as star, directors, and story, become more important as attributes in the branding of a specific film. For example, if science fiction indicates a category of film without reference to the studio that produced it, then what distinguishes one studio science fiction film from another?

Two science fiction films released in summer 2005 were both heavily promoted and predicted to be big hits. The "War of the Worlds" was a sci-fi remake released by DreamWorks studio, starring Tom Cruise and directed by Steven Spielberg and had an opening weekend of \$64.8 million and a domestic box office of over \$234 million. "The Island," a new sci-fi story released by Warner Brothers starring Ewan McGregor and Scarlett Johansson and directed by Michael Bay had an opening weekend of \$12.4 and a domestic box office of \$35.8 million (BoxOfficeMoJO 2005). The films are both from the same genre, so is the individual film performance due to the familiarity with the individual story, the star power of the actors or director, or the timing of the release and other competitive film offerings? The combinations of all of these contributing

factors highlight the difficulty in predicting the popularity of an individual genre film. However, the difficulty also explains the economic response to a successful film in the market with investment in other films of the same form and basic elements of the original being produced with some variation in hopes that people go to see the movie (Cawelti 1976).

As audiences respond to reoccurring themes, a genre forms over a period of time as similar forms become successful (Kaminsky 1985). In this manner, Hollywood studios seek guaranteed acceptance through the variation of successful formulas (Grant 1986). The economic imperative of formulaic stories is repeated in most books, magazines, television dramas and films with an inevitable tendency toward standardization and imitation with the possibility of large profits for popular individual versions and guaranteed minimal returns of similar formulaic work (Cawelti 1976). The reciprocal studio-audience relationship in genre films through repeated exposure and familiarity develops reasonably well-defined expectations of narrative, semantic, thematic and iconographic patterns (Schatz 1986). Genre itself is a consequence of market research and the targeting of audiences through responding to consumer demand through familiarity and repetition (Neale 1995). It is important to point out that, although this process is dominated by repetition, each film in a genre must have sufficient variation in order to differentiate itself from previous work and generate the novelty of new experience (Neale 1995).

Genre's appeal to a large audience is an economic imperative of Hollywood and is reinforced through advertising to maximize the brand



awareness and commercial potential of a film (Maland 1988; Neale 2002). The use of advertising that allows specific audiences to be targeted relies heavily on the production companies' and exhibitors' definition of genre to establish a predictable structure to audiences (Sandler 2002). The use of genre images and symbols in advertising through television ads, movie trailers, print ads, and posters all contribute to further define and reinforce the genre (Neale 1995)

Wyatt (1994) uses the term "high concept" to explain how studios use pre-sold elements such as books, music, plays, or star to help give audiences a reference for the new film due to their familiarity with other sources. In this way, high concept films act similarly to genre by using images and symbols to communicate the narrative (Cawelti 1976). Marketing campaigns of successful high-concept films accurately communicate their content by emphasizing the visuals and pre-sold elements to represent the film's narrative and fulfill the audiences' expectations (Wyatt 1994).

An intense publicity campaign and saturation advertising geared toward a successful opening week performance relies on genre symbols and icons more than ever. This process has drastically reduced the possibility of a film finding a larger audience over the slow, lengthy release period of the past (Hall 2002). Stars names and directors have demonstrated ability to turn out audiences and have been also used to represent genres (Everson 1978). The actor John Wayne or director John Ford's association with Westerns or director Steven Spielberg's association with Science Fiction, when combined with other symbolic icons, can quickly communicate genre associations.

The reliance on directors, stars and sequels is a major convention of genre and is fully understood and expected by the audiences (Tudor 1986). The evaluation of new movie projects on their potential to reach a specific segment of the population also results in Hollywood's classification of films and the continued evolution of genre (Balio 2002). As genres continue to evolve with audience expectations, genre elements will continue to be an important part of film marketing. Although genre may allow the audience to associate with the familiarity of a film's story, it is difficult to use as brand differentiation related to a studio trademark or specific film, as genre is nonproprietary and consumers' preferences are distributed across multiple genres (Bakker 2001). Ratings also indicate the content of a film and will be examined next.

## **Ratings**

The rating system introduced in 1968 was designed to alert parents to material in a film that they may find unsuitable for their children to see. The current MPAA ratings are G, PG, PG-13, R and NC-17 and are included with each film ad (MPAA 2005). The various ratings are used to indicate the content of a film's theme and the presence of language, violence, drug abuse, nudity and sex, which in the view of the Rating Board could be unsuitable to some audience members.

Rather than indicating a film's suitability for children as originally intended, audiences tend to prejudge films based on their rating (Kramer 2002). For example, the G-rating "*General Audiences-All Ages Admitted*" is interpreted by some adult and teenage moviegoers as indicating that a film is too childish to

see. A PG-rating stands for *"Parental Guidance Suggested. Some Material May Not Be Suitable For Children."* Percentages fluctuate annually but the majority of films receive the sterner warning of a PG-13 rating, *"Parents Strongly Cautioned. Some Material May Be Inappropriate For Children Under 13."* The top 20 grossing films by rating in 2003 included PG-13 (55%), R (25%), PG (15%) and G(5%) (MPAA 2005). The PG-13 rating does not prevent children from attending without their parents and also indicates more adult themes and content to attract a broader audience of adults and young teens.

A R-rating stands for *"Restricted, Under 17 Requires Accompanying Parent Or Adult Guardian."* In the opinion of the Rating Board, this film definitely contains some adult material. The rating is also important because the rating of the film and the audience being targeted, combined with the genre, may severely limit the content included in the film and the advertisement. For example, a film from the horror genre that does not receive a R-rating may lack credibility as being scary or bloody enough with the teenage and college audiences. Advertisements promoting R-rated films on television shows and in magazines that target an under 17 teenage audience are prohibited. Visual and audio elements such as graphic language, violence, and nudity are also prohibited from being shown or heard in broadcast advertising by the Federal Communications Commission. Other print and outdoor media advertising regulatory boards also limit and regulate the content of advertising targeted towards minors.

Finally, NC-17 stands for *"No One 17 And Under Admitted."* This rating declares that the Rating Board believes that this is a film that most parents will

consider patently too adult for their youngsters under 17. No children will be admitted. NC-17 does not necessarily mean obscene or pornographic. However, most major theaters will not accept a film rated NC-17 for showing and many newspapers and other media such as TV and radio stations will not advertise a film rated NC-17 (MPAA 2003).

Ratings indicate the appropriateness of a film for a particular audience but they are also similar to genre in that ratings are nonproprietary and subject to a variety of interpretations by the consumer. If genre and rating function similar to a product category for the consumer, then the individual brand attributes of a film, such as star, director, and story, become more important in the branding of a specific film.

### **Pre-sold Properties - Stories, Directors and Stars**

As early as 1910, stars were used to brand films and establish connections between the audience and stars and individual films (Abel 1990). Familiarity with a recognized actor in a film can create popularity not necessarily dependent on the quality or genre of a film (Low 1949). Individual filmgoers may be receptive to the appeal of popular directors and stars or personal favorites. The accumulated brand-awareness of existing properties such as short stories, novels, and plays is also used to create instant popularity and familiarity with the film adaptation creating an increased competitive demand for the film rights (Bakker 2001). These pre-sold properties such as stars, directors, Broadway musicals, comic books, television shows, books, remakes, and sequels also have a previous point of reference due to their familiarity and have built-in marketing

hooks that can be used in the advertising of new films (Wyatt 1994). The more successful pre-sold properties have greater awareness and potential brand recognition with the movie audience. The sequel to a successful movie is a predictor of a new film's potential because the audience is already familiar with the story, stars, and director, but it is not a guarantee of success. The current state of moviemaking includes competitive bidding for the rights to successful novels and other pre-sold properties among multimedia conglomerates. The rights to the film adaptation of the first Harry Potter book, for example, went for \$1 million (Anonymous 2001). Film history provides ample examples of highly successful films based on sequels, popular novels, plays, and Broadway musicals. The marketable properties of some films already have a certain pre-sold identity with the public that must be communicated through advertising through simple and striking images by the time of opening (Wyatt 1994).

Consumers are able to judge the merits of the films for themselves to some degree based on the content of the film and information about its production qualities. They presumably rely on other attributes of the film made known to them either through the producers' promotional efforts or through word of mouth. Litman (1983) used a multiple regression model to study the impact of production costs, critics' ratings, story type, presences of a major distributor, Christmas release, presence of an Academy Award nominee, and the presence of an Academy Award winner. His data set consisted of movies released theatrically from 1972-1978 and his dependent variable was distributor revenue. The involvement of a major distributor, a Christmas release date, and critics'

ratings were the three most important predictors of cumulative market performance.

Using individual-level data, DeSilva (1998) found that the film's director, its advertising, critical reviews, as well as the age and marital status of the individual were the main predictors of film attendance in a multiple regression analysis that explained approximately 20 percent of the variance in determinants of theatre attendance. However, DeSilva's analysis focused on the issue of film attendance generally rather than specific films. That is, his operational definitions were phrased to ask respondents "to rate how important each of these factors was to them when they decide which movie to see", instead of the attributes of particular films.

A study examined the importance of 14 brand attributes and word of mouth and critical reviews for the films "The Fellowship of the Ring" and "Harry Potter." The importance of special effects and being based on a book were the two attributes that were the most significant predictors of intentions to see both films after multiple regression analysis. The director of "The Fellowship of the Ring" and the plot and budget of "Harry Potter" were also significant positive predictors of attendance intentions (Williamson, LaRose et al. 2003). The large investment in creative inputs are not guarantees at the box office. However, big budgets can increase the likelihood of brand awareness and recognition and the potential for success and return on investment. Moviegoers can draw on the brand attributes of a film that can be evaluated in advance but also rely on

neutral information sources. The literature on neutral information sources will now be reviewed.

### **Neutral Information Sources of Film - Critical Endorsement of Films**

Consumers also rely on non-commercial information in addition to film attributes, such as word-of-mouth from people (friends, colleagues, critics,) who have already experienced the service and pass on their assessments to them (Neelamiegham and Jain 1999). Critics are employed by newspapers, television stations or other media to attend studio-arranged advanced screenings of films and provide their opinions for the public (Litwik 1986; Cones 1992). The role of the critics to single out a film for praise or disapproval helps audiences to understand the interpretations of the film and to help maximize or minimize the chance of a film being accepted. This role is legitimized by the professional status of the critic in society and by being publicized in movie advertisements and consulted extensively before attending movies (Travis 1990; Eliashberg and Shugan 1997).

An early study on the relationship between the film critics and their advisees found that younger and older women tended to seek out experts in determining which movie to see (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). Critics have their greatest potential to influence box office prior to the general release of a film before word-of-mouth can outweigh the critics' effect (Burzynski and Bayer 1977). A study employing quasi-experimental design found that audience opinions and appreciation of a film were affected by prior positive and negative information from critics about the film and were altered by these prior information

cues (Burzynski and Bayer 1977). In a controlled experiment, researchers found critics' positive or negative review direction affected film-viewing interest.

Subjects read and correctly identified negative or positive reviews before viewing a film and their post-evaluations of the film were affected by the positive or negative review direction of the critics (Wyatt and Badger 1984). Neutral reviews and positive reviews were found to be considered significantly more interesting than negative reviews. However, negative reviews were not seen as being any less credible than positive reviews (Wyatt and Badger 1987). Another study found that high information content in a review raises interest in a film more than a positive review (Wyatt and Badger 1990).

Critics may be less prominent than other attributes such as genre, stars, awards, etc., in motivating moviegoers to attend a movie on opening weekend but may provide a useful forecast in estimating movie success over time. No statistically significant relationship between critical reviews influencing early box office revenues was found in a study of critical reviews, however positive or negative directions of the reviews correlated well as a predictor of overall cumulative box office and staying power of the motion picture. A critic review was more likely to be a predictor of total box office revenues versus an influencer or opinion leader able to make or break a motion picture opening (Eliashberg and Shugan 1997).

Other research on movie rentals found a "u-shaped" relationship between critics' ratings and rental income since the worst rated movies actually have an increase in rental activity (Wallace, Seigerman et al. 1993). The use of critics in



publicizing a film is an important area of study since reviews have the ability to motivate moviegoers to attend a particular film and the potential to influence box office success.

### **Academy Award Endorsement of Films**

The impact of the presence of an Academy Award nominee or presence of an Academy Award winner has also been studied. The Academy Awards (Oscars) were introduced in 1927 with the first ceremony held in 1929. The award show was first televised in 1953 and has become a value judgment of prestige and part of the American culture as a symbol of achievement and success (Levy 1987). Oscar nominees and winners of the Oscar act as a symbol of an award-winning worthy movie or actor / actress and translate into an increase in box office revenues and rental revenues (Levy 1987; Litman and Kohl 1989; Sochay 1994). In a study of the Oscar awards during the 1927-1985 period, the cash value of the Best Picture Oscar has been estimated between \$5 to \$30 million (Levy 1987.). A newspaper ad that includes the endorsement for past Academy Award nominated or winning actors, actresses or directors may indicate to the audience that the newly advertised movie is also at the "Oscar-caliber" level and worth their time and money. A study of moviegoers found director, story type, and Oscar Award were significantly correlated with intention to see a movie. However, they were not found to be ranked as significant as paid advertising and critical reviews (DeSilva 1998).

## **Film Marketing**

Films do not succeed entirely on the basis of critical acclaim, or the merits of their component parts. Studio marketing efforts play a critical role, particularly when it comes to generating the “buzz” that brings audiences to opening weekends. Many films are introduced in a given year, but very few become blockbusters. Because of this, studios often rely on short-term, intensive marketing strategies to stimulate demand for releases that are anticipated to have a short life cycle and limited market appeal (Sawhney and Eliashberg 1992).

Zufryden (1996) developed a new model to evaluate the market performance of new film releases as a function of advertising that was intended to assist this new-product planning process. The study found that the lifecycle of films is quite short, sometimes only a few weeks (Zufryden 1996). Film diffusion patterns were found to be characterized by a peak in box-office success at the time of initial theatrical release, followed by a pattern of exponential decay over time. A weakness of this study, however, is that Zufryden used a pooled awareness model to estimate pre-launch awareness of films. Therefore, the data are not specific to particular films. Evaluation of advertising response, word of mouth response, and distribution response were all measured in this study. However, specific advertising campaigns, specific film distribution decisions, and the nature of a film’s advertising media plan were not taken into consideration.

## **Movie Marketing in the Information Age**

In the past, film studios relied mainly on television commercials, newspaper advertising and publicity efforts to promote films. Since the success of the low-budget film The Blair Witch Project, however, studios have embraced web marketing as their fourth pillar (Fattah 2001). At the aggregate level, Website use as measured by website log file data and ticket sales were directly related (Zufryden 2000). However, this study found that spikes in website usage for particular films correlated with spikes in the box office figures for the same films. Thus, whether exposure to the website caused the increase in the film's attendance or if film attendance inspired movie-goers to visit the website was undetermined.

In terms of film promotion, Internet sites highlight the film's "hook," the core concept that encourages film attendance and participation in other aspects of the movie's overall marketing program (Sharrett 2000). In a sense, Web sites are often used as an extension of word of mouth marketing (Grover 2000). This type of "viral marketing" is growing in popularity due to its ability to spread buzz. Viral marketing is really just a way to use word of mouth promotion via a digital platform, which creates the potential for instant and exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence (Hanson 2002). In fact, it is now seen as a necessity for most studios when they implement their marketing plan (McCarthy 1999). In the year 2000 the average Internet marketing costs accounted for 0.7% of the average \$27 million spent marketing each movie that year (Fattah

2001). Fattah (2001) noted that although that figure was up 40% from 1999, it is still a nominal cost.

Using the Internet for film marketing is a natural fit as Internet users are the dream moviegoer. They tend to be loyal and have enough expendable income to see a movie several times (Donahue 2000). Furthermore, the demographics for web usage match up nicely with the target audience for film going. Ninety percent of America's children and teenagers use the Internet, which is more than any other age group (NTIA. 2002).

As stated earlier, the move to expanded Internet marketing for films began to sweep the industry after the enormous success of The Blair Witch Project, a low-budget independent film shot by film school students for a mere \$50,000. Despite a miniscule advertising budget, Artisan Entertainment was able to utilize Internet marketing and promotion, resulting in great success for the film at the box office. The Blair Witch Project grossed more than \$140 million at the box office and had one of the highest cost-to-earnings ratios in the history of cinema (Douglas 1999).

Today, nearly every theatrical trailer and movie poster features website addresses for the film they are promoting (Morton 2000). As a case in point, consider The Lord of the Rings, produced and distributed by New Line Cinema. Vice President of New Line's worldwide interactive marketing and development division, Gordon Paddison, worked with Tolkien fan sites and other content portals to generate buzz about the film, even before production began (Ward, 2000). The studio set up the film's website in May, 1999, even though the first

film in the trilogy was not released until late 2001. The first trailers were released on the official website in April of 2000. The 90-second trailer was downloaded by 1.7 million people in the first twenty-four hours it was available (Ward 2000). Approximately 6.6 million downloads were recorded within the first week, and approximately 10 million after three weeks (Donahue 2000). In addition, Paddison contacted 35 fan sites, sending out electronic greeting cards hyping the preview trailer. Plus, New Line struck deals early on with E! Online and web browser designer NeoPlanet as part of their Internet initiatives for The Lord of the Rings (Donahue 2000). The “Middle Earth” browser NeoPlanet created was included on DVDs for other New Line releases that could be found on sale copies and DVD rentals (Donahue 2000). Early consumer awareness was believed to have impacted licensing deals involving the film, extended the life of the film in theatres, and boosted sales for the DVD and VHS versions of the film (Ward 2000).

The types of content available on film websites varies widely throughout the industry. Most movie websites contain “flash” graphics and hi-tech sound effects that grab the viewer, most often keeping with the current style of movie editing and sound effects employed in the film (Sharrett 2000). Almost every big budget movie features an elaborate website that includes “behind the scenes” trivia, clips from the film, and even bloopers, along with contests (Morton 2000). Sometimes websites will also contain information about the film’s subject matter. For example, the website for the Lord of the Rings contained downloadable video clips, information about the story, cast, and the production itself. It also gave

visitors to the site an in-depth look into the special effects used in the film, photo galleries, downloads (besides video clips there were also screen savers and wallpaper) and more. It was also possible to join “the ring”, an on-line community of Lord of the Rings aficionados.

The Harry Potter Web site had a slightly different focus. Visitors were encouraged to enroll in the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft, which allows access to “Quiddich training and wand shopping” to fans. It also allows Warner Bros. studios to increase their marketing efforts with a pinpointed list of Harry Potter enthusiasts. This website also focused heavily on games and trivia, but also features an on-line community for fans. Overall, the Harry Potter website seemed to target a much younger demographic than did the Lord of the Rings site. Interactive websites and video clip downloads have become standard with the release of a new film and one of the most recent trends in Internet usage by movie marketers comes from the consumer’s usage of web logs (blogs).

## **Blogs**

Web logs (blogs) are a web site form of on-line journal or report that contains opinions, thoughts or random comments similar to what is found in a diary, newsletter or op-ed piece (Oldenburg 2006) They are usually written by a blog keeper and are interactive with the ability to function as a message board. Blogs can be beneficial to movie marketers because fans tend to spread the marketing message with praise of certain films. In the same sense they can be detrimental towards a film by allowing negative word of mouth to spread easily through the Internet. The entertainment industry experiences blogs created by

what are called the “bloggerazzi,” and “bloggies,” which try to capture celebrity sightings (Wagstaff 2004). Blogs can at times be essentially reviews for movies from ordinary people with some time and a website. Feedback on particular films can of course be negative or positive. Marketers attempt to highlight positive blogs and get them into the mainstream, creating an “ordinary person’s” critical review (Walker 2006).

Advertisers are taking notice of the potential influence of blogs. “The Movie Blog,” a Web log started for amateur movie critics by John Campea, now receives \$400 a month in advertising (Hughlett 2005). Another blog created by a fan of “Brokeback Mountain,” Dave Cullen, collected \$26,000 dollars from at least 600 people for an ad he ran in Daily Variety to create the perception that “Brokeback Mountain” should have won the Oscar for best picture (Setoodah 2006).

Marketers are finding that the word of mouth generated by blogs can carry more weight than traditional marketing methods with their ability to form personal connections with readers and fans. Blogs can be a key way to reach the powerful group of consumers called the “influencers” who are early adopters of new technologies and trends like the latest film release (Hughlett 2005). The Pew Internet & American Life Project recently estimated that roughly 32 million Americans read blogs (Walker 2006). Blogs related to new films at the theatre have not been studied and little is known about their actual influence on moviegoers. The continued increase of blogs is expected to make it a growing part of the movie marketing mix and an area also worth further study.

Now that the literature on HSM, market mavens and brand attributes and neutral information sources has been reviewed the theoretical concepts and hypotheses will be proposed next.

### **Theoretical Concepts and Hypotheses**

The purpose of this study is to extend research on the influence of brand attributes and neutral information sources in the decision to see a film at the theatre by applying the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM). Brand attributes include pre-sold elements such as a film's genre, star, director, and story. Non-brand attributes include neutral sources such as word-of-mouth, critics' comments and awards. Previous research has examined the elements or attributes of film at the aggregate level but has not been used to help understand the individual decision process. The HSM is typically used as a way to distinguish between the different modes of processing a persuasive communication as well as to characterize the different features that may activate these modes. In this study, the HSM is applied to the entire decision process, considering all of the information a consumer used before a decision was made. Presence or absence of personal relevance, belief strength, and motivation are all ways to initiate systematic or heuristic processing. It is important to understand the factors that determine exactly when consumers might engage in systematic process and when they might be influence by heuristic cues (MacKenzie and Spreng 1992).

The film industry recognizes the economic importance of movie frequency and that some moviegoers are more motivated to attend more films than other



moviegoers (MPAA 2005). People who are motivated to attend more movies are also likely to be more involved in spending their time pursuing information related to films and actually seeing them at the theatre. Individuals who see more movies may be more sociable , energetic or knowledgeable among their peers (Gladwell 2000). These people connect us with new information through word of mouth A market maven is a person who has the inside scoop on the marketplace and has information on a lot of different products or prices or places and who likes to initiate discussion with consumers and respond to requests. They read more magazines than the rest of us, more newspapers, and even junk mail and like to pass along the information to help others (Feick and Price 1987) The positive word of mouth by being associated with a Market Maven regarding a new movie can become highly contagious and create a “tipping point (Gladwell 2000).” It is expected that certain individuals who attend films also act as ‘market maven’ influencers and have general movie industry knowledge or expertise. These individuals are defined in this study as ‘movie mavens’ who have information about many films, where to see a film, film related marketing knowledge, and initiate discussions about film and respond to requests about film market information.

The HSM posits that individuals can engage in systematic, in-depth cognitive analysis or heuristic, superficial processing based upon simple decision rules that have been stored in memory. The HSM also posits that highly motivated or involved people will engage in more systematic analysis while people who are less motivated will engage in superficial processing of

information (Todorov, Chaiken et al. 2002). Involvement is defined as a “person’s perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values and interests and consumers’ relationship with products (Zaichkowsky 1985, p. 342).” Involvement significantly affects the processing of information and serves as a measure of motivation to process, perception of attribute difference, and product importance (Zaichkowsky 1985; Celsi and Olson 1988). Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1A: The level of involvement with seeing a film at the theatre will be positively related to the number of movies an individual has seen in a theatre.

H1B: Movie Maven influence is positively related to the number of movies an individual has seen in a theatre.

H1C: Level of involvement with seeing a film at the theatre will be positively related to Movie Maven influence.

Attention and comprehension processes are activated when consumers experience something personally relevant in memory and create higher levels of involvement (Celsi and Olson 1988). The use of critics’ endorsement and awards may act as a systematic trigger for moviegoers based on the involvement level of the moviegoer. Individuals will be motivated to evaluate the claims and arguments in a review and/or evaluate the winners and nominees of Awards based on previous knowledge and past experience. Endorsements and awards may also act as heuristic cues when included in the advertising of a film but the ability to evaluate the claims and arguments require past experience and involvement and the actual reading of a review, discussion of a film, or analysis of awards are representative of systematic processing.

Film consumers face uncertainty because seeing a film is an “experience” product and moviegoers cannot know beforehand if the experience will be satisfactory (Bakker 2001). One way to overcome this is to rely on non-commercial information such as award nominations and winners and word-of-mouth from people (friends, colleagues, critics) who have already experienced the service and pass on their assessments to the moviegoer (Neelamiegham and Jain 1999). Critics may be less prominent than other attributes such as genre, stars, awards, etc. in motivating moviegoers to attend but may provide a useful forecast in estimating movie success (Eliashberg and Shugan 1997). Consumers tend to place a high level of trust and credibility on neutral information sources as well as articulations of critics passed on through word-of-mouth (Westbrook 1987).

Nominations and winners of the Oscar are also a symbol of an Academy Award-winning movie or actor/actress. The award translates into an increase in box office revenues and rental revenues (Levy 1987; Litman and Kohl 1989; Sochay 1994). The use of endorsements in movie promotions may act as a heuristic symbol but may also be used to trigger more in-depth analysis. Reading magazines, watching television shows or visiting websites that discuss the results of award shows, such as the Golden Globe and Academy Award winners, are examples of more systematic and in-depth analysis.

A newspaper ad that includes the endorsement for past Academy Award nominated or winning actors, actresses or directors may indicate to the audience that the newly advertised movie is also at the “Oscar-caliber” level and worth

their time and money. In a study of moviegoers, director, story type, and Oscar Award were significantly correlated with intention to see a movie. However, they were not found to be ranked as significant as paid advertising and critical reviews (DeSilva 1998). Booth-Butterfield et. al (1994) showed that participants selected their own processing mode that mediated persuasion and found that there was no evidence to support that the individuals were involved in simultaneous processing. Systematic processing was found to be the mode engaged in most by the participants. Griffin et al. (2002) found more in-depth systematic processing leading to more permanent attitudes than heuristic processing and they speculated that systematic processing would also be related to strongly held beliefs, behavioral beliefs and strength of cognitive structure. Neutral information sources may also act as a heuristic cue in both advertising and noncommercial communication, however, making an effort to gather information regarding a movie implies more systematic processing.

Systematic processing takes place when an individual exerts additional cognitive energy when processing a message. Consumers with lower levels of involvement will focus less attention on information and less effort in processing as they heuristically process the message (Chaiken 1980). Systematically processing a message also emphasizes a greater detail in understanding the arguments in the message as well as the validity of the message's conclusion (Chaiken 1980). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2A: The level of involvement with seeing films at the theatre will be positively related to the number of attributes and information sources considered before a decision was made.

**H2B:** The level of involvement with seeing films at the theatre will be positively related to the amount of systematic processing of film related material.

**H2C:** The level of involvement with seeing films at the theatre will be inversely related to the amount of heuristic processing of film-related material.

As noted previously, genre is difficult to use as brand differentiation related to specific film as genre is nonproprietary and consumers preferences are distributed across multiple genres (Bakker 2001). However, it is believed that genre is important to moviegoer and genre engages heuristic and systematic processing in the decision to see a film. It is likely that certain genres generate more involvement than other genres and personal relevance has been found to be an indicator of the likelihood that receivers will engage in elaboration or thinking about the information contained in a persuasive effort (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Systematically processing a message also emphasizes a greater detail in understanding the arguments in the message as well as the validity of the message's conclusion (Chaiken 1980). Individuals have a strong motivation to process when they want accurate and sufficient information (Griffin, Neuwirth et al. 2002). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed in order to understand genre with involvement and systematic processing

**H3A:** Individuals with high levels of involvement will report seeing a different set of film genres than individuals with lower levels of involvement.

**H3B:** Systematic processors will report seeing a different set of film genres than heuristic processors.

Another variable that has long been implicitly recognized as a key ingredient of successful movies is their relationship to pre-sold brand attributes of the story, director, and star. Pre-sold attributes can inform consumers of brand attributes that can be evaluated in advance (Henning-Thurau, Walsh et al. 2001). Movies based on these pre-sold attributes would seem to enjoy two advantages: they bring a built-in base of fans to the theater and the pre-sold elements are familiar to audiences who have been exposed to publicity for it. Individuals act as cognitive misers if there is sufficient confidence to form judgments that require little concentration on the details of the arguments and the basis of the heuristic cues or rules derive from the individual's scripts of previous experience (Nabi 1999). It is expected that due to their previous familiarity with the pre-sold attribute of the story the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4A: Level of involvement is positively related to familiarity with the film.

H4B: Heuristic processors with high involvement will report a different level of familiarity with the film than heuristic processors with low involvement.

## **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the role of the literature on the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) of processing to distinguish between the different modes of processing a persuasive communication, the different features that may activate these modes and the information a consumer uses before a decision is made to understand the factors that determine exactly when consumers might engage in systematic process and when they might be influenced by heuristic cues (MacKenzie and Spreng 1992). This chapter also

explored the previous research on brand attributes and neutral information sources of a film. The general marketplace knowledge or expertise and influence of 'Market Mavens' and the importance to film were also examined (Feick and Price 1987).

A series of hypotheses were then proposed to investigation the connection of film brand attributes and neutral information sources to low- and high-involvement processing, frequency of moviegoer attendance, and the influence of opinion leadership and early adoption of 'market mavens.' It is expected that higher levels of movie attendance and involvement will engage different levels of heuristic and systematic processing of brand attributes and neutral information sources. These hypotheses will be tested using the HSM Model of processing as part of the applied theory to test how increased involvement impacts the frequency of attendance and the type of processing used.

The next chapter will describe the methods of the proposed study and will identify the relationships between the variable measures, the hypotheses testing, and the survey questionnaire.

## **Chapter 3**

### **METHOD**

#### **Introduction**

A questionnaire regarding moviegoers' involvement with seeing films at the theatre, movie frequency, film selection, familiarity with the film, opinion leadership, and reporting of systematic and heuristic processing of brand attribute and neutral information sources was administered at a Midwest cinema in June 2006 (Appendix A for the questionnaire).

#### **Pilot Test**

A pilot test was conducted before the main study to test the proposed questionnaire to make sure respondents exhibited no difficulties in responding to the questionnaire items. 24 female (68.5%) and 11 male (31.5%) undergraduate students enrolled in advertising courses at a large Midwestern university were asked to take the questionnaire and respondents exhibited no difficulties in responding to the questionnaire items.

#### **Participants and Procedures**

A systematic sampling procedure was employed to select study participants. Every seventh moviegoer entering the theatre was intercepted and asked to complete a survey. Surveys were conducted between the 6 – 10 PM show times on Thursday, June 22, Friday, June 23, and Saturday, June 24 and also during the Saturday matinee show times between 1 – 4 PM on June 24. A total of 220 female (59%) and 153 male (41%) moviegoers were interviewed. Their ages ranged from 12 to 60 plus years. The age group of respondents was



12 to 17 (16.1%), 18 to 24 (19%), 25 to 39 (23.9%), 40 to 59 (32.4%), and 60 plus years (7.2%). A total of 5 respondents declined to give their age. The age group percentages from this study are compared to the most recent 2005 US Movie Attendance Study conducted by the MPA Worldwide Research and Analysis in Table 1 (MPAA 2005). The 18 to 24 age group from the current study was 19% compared to 9% for this same age group from the 2005 study. The larger amount of 18 to 24 olds may be a result of the theatre being located near a large college campus and the fact that the study was conducted on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings at the theatre. The age group of 12 to 39 year-olds accounted for 59% of total moviegoers in the 2006 study compared to 57% of total moviegoers in the 2005 study. It is expected that the sample of this study is representative of filmgoers across the United States.

**Table 1. Moviegoers by Age Group Comparison**

Age Group of Respondents	2006 Study Percentage	2006 Cumulative Percentage	2005 MPA Study Percentage	2005 Cumulative Percentage
12-17	16.1%	16.1%	20.0%	20.0%
18-24	19.0%	35.1%	9.0%	29.0%
25-39	23.9%	59.0%	28.0%	57.0%
40-59	32.4%	91.4%	32.0%	89.0%
60 +	7.2%	98.7%	11.0%	100.0%
No Answer	1.3%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100%	100.0

Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings and the Saturday matinee were selected to conduct the personal intercept surveys as these days and times have the most number of moviegoers during the week according to the vice president of film bookings for the Midwest movie theatre circuit. Friday and Saturday are

also when new films are released for the opening weekend with new films being the most heavily advertised because of the industry importance placed on the Friday through Sunday weekend box office tallies. The 18-screen, 4,000 seat Midwest suburban multi-plex plus IMAX theatre, attracts thousands of moviegoers during these three days according the theatre management.

The 17 different film titles being shown at the theatre during this study represented a variety of film ratings and genres (See Table 2). Ratings are set by the MPAA, however there is no set industry or academic standards for genre. Genre is complex and most films have multiple interpretations across multiple genres by consumers and academics (Bakker 2001). For this reason, the film genres used in this study were provided directly from the studios' marketing and distribution materials for each film.

June was also a good time frame for the study because it coincided with the beginning of summer blockbuster releases. June represents a month within which a variety of genres are shown and is not unduly influenced by the seasonality of genre films such as Halloween Horror films or Christmas films. Peak periods for motion picture attendance are Christmas (November and December), summer (May through August) and the Easter Season (March and April) (DeSilva 1998). Films released during the Christmas Season (Litman 1983; Sochay 1994) and summer season (Litman and Kohl 1989; Goldberg 1991) were found to have larger box office revenues. Films released during these peak periods may be advertised differently than films released during

**Table 2. Film Titles, Genre, Rating, Release Date and Frequency of Response Between June 22 - 24, 2006**

FILM TITLE	GENRE	RATING	RELEASE DATE	FREQ.	PERCENT
1. A Prairie Home Companion	Comedy / Music	PG-13	6 / 9	14	3.8%
2. The Break Up	Comedy / Drama / Romance	PG-13	6 / 2	9	2.4%
3. Cars	Action / Animation / Comedy / Family / Fantasy / Sport	G	6 / 9	53	14.2%
4. Click	Comedy / Drama / Fantasy	PG-13	6 / 23	103	27.6%
5. The Da Vinci Code	Drama / Mystery / Thriller	PG-13	5 / 19	22	5.9%
6. The Fast / Furious 3	Action / Crime / Thriller	PG-13	6 / 16	21	5.6%
7. Garfield: Tale 2 Kitties	Animation / Comedy / Family	PG	6 / 16	13	3.5%
8. The Lake House	Drama / Fantasy / Mystery / Romance	PG	6 / 16	26	7%
9. Nacho Libre	Comedy / Sport	PG	6 / 16	38	10.2%
10. The Omen	Drama / Horror / Thriller	R	6 / 6	13	3.5%
11. Over The Hedge	Animation / Comedy / Family	PG	5 / 19	8	2.1%
12. RV	Adventure / Comedy / Family	PG	4 / 28	0	0%
13. Waist Deep	Action / Crime / Drama / Thriller	R	6 / 23	31	8.3%
14. XMen: Last Stand	Action / Fantasy / Sci-Fi / Thriller	PG-13	5 / 26	11	2.9%
15. IMAX Deep Sea 3D Documentary / 3D		Unrated	3 / 3	1	.3%
16. IMAX Poseidon	Action / Adventure / Drama / Thrill	PG-13	5 / 12	9	2.4%
17. IMAX Wild Safari 3D Documentary / 3D		Unrated		0	0%
18. Don' Know / No Answer				1	.3%
TOTAL				373	100.0%

**Rating System**

G: "General Audiences-All Ages Admitted"

PG: "Parental Guidance Suggested. Some Material May Not Be Suitable For Children."

PG-13: "Parents Strongly Cautioned. Some Material May Be Inappropriate For Children Under 13."

R: "Restricted, Under 17 Requires Accompanying Parent Or Adult Guardian."

non-peak times. The larger box office success may be explained by economic theory and the larger audiences during the peak periods.

All motion pictures at the theatre had a chance of being selected.

The advertising strategy varies greatly for films after the opening weekend and each of the 17 films has a unique life cycle with some films being shown in up to two of the twenty screens. The scope of this study recognizes this limitation but each film has a potential of being selected by the moviegoer.

After respondents were selected, trained researchers administered an intercept questionnaire. Respondents filled out the thought listing and then answered questions administered by the trained researchers related to the moviegoers' involvement with seeing films at the theatre, movie attendance frequency, film selection, familiarity with the film, opinion leadership or market maven influence, and reporting of systematic and heuristic processing of brand attribute and neutral information sources (see Appendix A for the questionnaire). Anonymity, privacy and confidentiality were guaranteed verbally and in writing upon request (Appendix C). Respondents received a coupon for one free medium size popcorn as an incentive for their participation.

### **Content Variables, Measures and Statistical Analyses**

The main independent variables were the level of involvement with seeing movies at the theatre and the level of opinion leadership or "market maven" influence. The main dependent variables were the number of movies an individual has seen in the theatre in the past six months, the genre of the film title

selected, the familiarity with the film, and the reports of systematic and heuristic processing of film-related brand attributes and neutral information sources through thought listings. Demographic data and back up dependent variables for systematic and heuristic processing were also compiled.

Zaichkowsky's (1987) Revised Personal Involvement Inventory (PII) scale was utilized to measure the independent variable of involvement. The PII is a 10-item 7-point semantic differential scale containing bi-polar adjective pairs which are summed to form a unidimensional measure of product involvement. Some scale items were reversed coded to detect if subjects gave all the same answer and eliminate bad cases. The scale items are: important / unimportant, irrelevant / relevant, means a lot to me / means nothing to me, valuable / worthless, boring / interesting, unexciting / exciting, appealing / unappealing, mundane / fascinating, not needed / needed and involving / not involving. Since the first publication (Zaichkowsky, 1985) of the PII, it has become one of the more widely used self-report measures. Managerial studies have used Zaichkowsky's (1987) revised, 10-item PII to identify product enthusiasts and give direction to marketing strategy aimed at more involved customers (Flynn and Goldsmith 1993). The independent variable of Personal involvement was correlated with the dependent variables of the number of movies seen in a theatre in the past six months, the level of opinion leadership through market maven influence, the familiarity with the film, and the quantity of thought listings of systematic and heuristic processing of brand attributes and neutral information sources.

Involvement was divided into two groups of high and low and involvement to test the significance with the dependent variable of genre of the film selected. Thought listing was also used to identify levels of systematic and heuristic processing and correlations were used to test the significance with the genre of the film being seen.

Questions regarding the number of films being seen in the past six months and the specific film being seen that day were followed immediately by “Thought Listings” regarding the film selection that day. Thought listing has been used as a means of measuring central route or more in-depth systematic processing (Petty and Cacioppo 1986; MacKenzie and Spreng 1992). Someone who is engaging in systematic processing will be more actively thinking about the neutral information sources or brand attributes. Consumers generating fewer message-related thoughts are able to produce fewer cognitions and are operating under a more heuristic mode of processing (Mitra 1995). On the other hand, heuristic processing relies on simple cues or rules when processing a message require little concentration on the (Nabi 1999).

Cognitions were obtained following standard procedures in which subjects were asked to immediately write down all of the thoughts for their reason for seeing the specific film they selected and no time constraints were imposed (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989; Miniard, Bhatla et al. 1991). Two trained judges coded the responses into four categories (with each thought classified as the unit of analysis): systematic thoughts, heuristic thoughts, thoughts not specific to the film content, and non-related thoughts (See Appendix B for coding). In

studies using content analysis as a methodological approach, coding reliability is an important issue (Riffe, Lacey et al. 1998). Twenty-seven percent, or 100 respondent surveys were selected from the full sample of 373 coded surveys and used to establish coding reliability between coders.

The appropriate size of the sample depends on many factors but it should not be less than 50 units or 10% of the full sample, and it rarely will need to be greater than 300 units. Larger reliability samples are only required when the full sample is large and / or when the expected reliability level is low (Lacy and Riffe, 1996; Neuendorf, 2002). The inter-coder reliability using Scott's Pi to correct for chance agreement was .91 (Scott 1955).

Examples of the coding scheme are: systematic thoughts related to the film (i.e. reading critical reviews, discussion with others and visiting websites and downloading trailers), heuristic thoughts related to the film (i.e., "Tom Cruise is in the movie"), thoughts not specific to the film content but related to going to the movies (i.e., "My date wanted to see the film, popcorn tastes good) and unrelated thoughts (i.e., "My foot hurts.")

The genre of the individual film title being seen as defined by movie studio marketing was utilized (See Table 2). Multiple genre categories are listed for each individual film by the studios to promote the films to moviegoers through their advertising and marketing. Individual definitions of genre are problematic and vary in interpretation too greatly to be useful. Primary and combined genre categories were used to resolve this in the final analysis. The use of advertising that allows specific audiences to be targeted relies heavily on the production

companies' and exhibitors' definition of genre to establish a predictable structure to audiences (Sandler 2002). Multiple genre categories acts as a trigger for creating brand awareness and associations by comparing past experiences to future expectations and interests (Cawelti 1976). For example; the multiple genre categories listed for "Titanic" including "Action," "Drama," "History," and "Romance," were reinforced through advertising to maximize the brand awareness and commercial potential of the film.

Respondents were also asked how familiar they are with the film they are seeing today. Responses were provided on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = "Very unfamiliar," 2 = "Somewhat unfamiliar," 3 = "Neutral," 4 = "Somewhat Familiar," and 5 = "Very Familiar."

The variable of opinion leadership influence was measured using the six "Market Maven" scale items adapted to moviegoing attitudes (Feick and Price 1987). This measure is used as an independent variable when compared to the number of movies an individual has seen at the theatre and as an dependent variable when compared to the level of involvement with seeing a film at the theatre. Respondents were asked to rank their agreement level with the following; "I like introducing new films to my friends and family," "I like helping people by providing them with information about many kinds of films," "People ask me for information about films," "If someone asked me about several films, I could tell them which one to see," "My friends think of me as a good source of information when it comes to new films," and "Think about a person who has information about a variety of films and like to share this information with others."



This person knows about new films but does not necessarily feel he or she is an expert on one particular type of film. How well would you say this description fits you? Responses were provided on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = "Strongly disagree," 2 = "Moderately disagree," 3 = "Slightly disagree," 4 = "Unsure," 5 = "Slightly agree," 6 = "Moderately agree," and 7 = "Strongly agree."

Alternative dependent variables were used as questions regarding aided systematic and heuristic measures in case the responses for the unaided thought listing did not generate useful or expected results. To measure systematic processing responses subjects were asked the following questions for yes or no nominal responses regarding their activities before deciding to see the film selected, "I read a critic's review of today's movie before deciding to see the film," "I read a magazine article or watched a television show about the film," "I discussed the film with a friend, colleague or family," "I visited the website for this film," "I downloaded a trailer for this film," and "I visited a blog discussing this film."

To measure heuristic processing responses subjects were asked the following questions for yes or no nominal responses regarding their reasons for seeing the film selected and include "I am seeing this film because of "the star," "the director," "it is a sequel or prequel," "the type (genre) of this film," "the special effects," "the print ads, television ads or movie trailer," "it is based on a previous work," "the MPAA rating of the film (G, PG, R, NC-17)," and "It is a winner or nominee of an award."

## **Summary**

The hypotheses presented in Chapter 2 were investigated by means of customer intercepts at the theatre that measured moviegoers' involvement with seeing films at the theatre, movie frequency, film selection, familiarity with the film, "market maven" influence, and reporting of systematic and heuristic processing of brand attribute and neutral information sources. Prior research in this area has not included the HSM model tested with an actual sample of moviegoers at the time of movie selection.

## **Chapter 4**

### **RESULTS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter reports the results of the data analysis based on the reporting of involvement and systematic and heuristic processing of brand attribute and neutral information sources discussed in the previous chapter. The data for multiple item measures of involvement and market maven were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha for reliability. The relationship with the number of films seen, and the heuristic and systematic thoughts generated were analyzed using Pearson product-moment correlations.

#### **Findings**

Zaichkowsky's (1987) Revised Personal Involvement Inventory (PII) scale was utilized to measure the independent variable of involvement. The PII is a 10-item 7-point semantic differential scale containing bi-polar adjective pairs which are summed to form a unidimensional measure of product involvement. The univariate measures for involvement range from a minimum score of 10 to a maximum score of 70. The involvement findings from this study had a mean of 53.33 with a standard deviation of 9.63. The involvement mean score of 53.33 may indicated that moviegoers in general are very involved.

The variable of opinion leadership influence was measured using the six "Market Maven" scale items using a 7-point scale adapted to moviegoing attitudes (Feick and Price 1987). The univariate measures for "Market Maven" range from a minimum score of 6 to a maximum score of 42. The "Market Maven" findings

from this study had a mean of 31.50 with a standard deviation of 7.09. The “Market Maven” mean may indicate that moviegoers in general like to share movie information with others.

The variable of the number of movies an individual has seen in the theatre in the past six months range from one to forty eight with a mean of 8.92 and a standard deviation of 7.58. In a few cases, some frequent moviegoers see as many two to three movies at the theatre in one weekend.

The total systematic thoughts when unaided ranged from zero to two with a mean of .088 and a standard deviation of .302. The total heuristic thoughts when unaided ranged from zero to four with a mean of .973 and a standard deviation of .848. Total systematic and heuristic thoughts combined when unaided ranged from zero to five with a mean of 1.06 and a standard deviation of .88.

When prompted by the interviewer, total systematic thoughts ranged from zero to six with a mean of 1.57 and a standard deviation of 1.16. Total heuristic thoughts when prompted ranged from zero to fourteen with a mean of 2.89 and a standard deviation of 1.53. Finally, total systematic and heuristic thoughts combined when prompted ranged from zero to sixteen with a mean of 4.47 and a standard deviation of 2.15.

The difference between the means and standard deviations for unaided thought listings of systematic and heuristic thoughts compared to when moviegoers are prompted during intercepts could indicate a limitation with the results. The reliance on self-report for the thought listing measurement may

produce an undesirable relationship between memory of the reported levels of processing compared to the actual processing that occurs. The means and standard deviations for each of the independent and dependent variables are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Independent and Dependent Variables**

	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Range</b>
Involvement	53.33	9.63	10 - 70
Market Maven	31.50	7.09	6 - 42
Number of Films Seen	8.92	7.58	1 - 48
<b>Recall</b>			
Total Systematic Thoughts (Unaided)	.088	.302	0 - 2
Total Heuristic Thoughts (Unaided)	.973	.848	0 - 4
Total Thoughts (Unaided)	1.06	.88	0 - 5
Total Systematic (Aided)	1.57	1.16	0 - 6
Total Heuristic (Aided)	2.89	1.53	0 - 14
Total Thought (Aided)	4.47	2.15	0 - 16

### **Hypothesis Testing**

Hypothesis H1A proposed that as the level of involvement with seeing a film at the theatre increases the number of movies an individual sees will also increase. Scale reliability for the 10-item involvement measure was analyzed resulting in a good Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha = .87$ ), considering .70 is the cutoff value for being acceptable (Nunnally 1978). Table 4 shows the Pearson product-moment correlation between the measure of involvement and the number of films seen at the theatre was significant at the .01 level ( $r = .343$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Therefore, H1A was supported in this study.

Hypothesis H1B proposed that as the "market maven" measure increases the number of movies an individual sees also increases. Scale reliability for the The 6-item market maven measure was found to be a reliable measure with an

.863 Cronbach' Alpha ( $\alpha = .83$ ). Table 4 shows the Pearson product-moment correlation between the movie maven measure and the number of films at the theatre was significant at the .01 level ( $r = .312, p < .01$ ). Thus, H1B was supported in this study.

Hypothesis H1C proposed that as the level of involvement increases the movie maven measure for opinion leadership will also increase. Table 4 shows the Pearson product-moment correlation between involvement and the movie maven measure and the number of films at the theatre was significant at .01 level ( $r = .521, p < .01$ ). Therefore, H1C was also supported in this study. A factor analysis was also run explaining 76% of the variance between the separate constructs of movie maven and involvement at the .01 level ( $\chi^2 = 117.111, df=1, N=373$ ).

**Table 4. Pearson Correlation for Involvement, Number of Movies**

<b>Seen and Market Maven Measure</b>		
	<b>Number of Movies Seen</b>	<b>Movie Maven</b>
Involvement	.343 **	.521**
Number of Movies Seen		.312 **

\*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed  $N=373$

Hypothesis H2A proposed that as the level of involvement with seeing films at the theatre increases the number of attributes and information sources considered before a decision was made will also increase.

Table 5 shows the Pearson product-moment correlation between the level of involvement and the number of attributes and information sources considered was significant at .01 level ( $r = .187$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Thus, H2A was supported in this study.

Hypothesis H2B proposed that as the level of involvement with seeing films at the theatre increases the amount of systematic processing of film related material reported through thought listing will also increase. Table 5 shows the Pearson product-moment correlation between involvement and reported systematic processing through thought listing was not significant at .01 level ( $r = .047$ ,  $p < .01$ ) therefore H2B was not supported.

Hypothesis H2C proposed that as the level of involvement with seeing films at the theatre increased the amount of heuristic processing of film-related material would decrease. Table 5 shows the Pearson product-moment correlation between the level of involvement and the number of heuristic thoughts was positively correlated and significant at the .01 level ( $r = .213$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Therefore, the inverse relationship proposed in H2C was not supported in this study. There was significant and positive correlation between involvement and heuristic processing which is supported by the literature on HSM and will be discussed in the following chapter.

**Table 5. Person Correlation for Involvement, Total Heuristic and Systematic Thoughts, Total Systematic and Total Heuristic Thoughts**

	Total Systematic & Heuristic Thoughts (Unaided)	Systematic Thoughts (Unaided)	Heuristic Thoughts (Unaided)
Involvement	.187**	-.047**	.213**

\*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed  $N=373$

Before running the analyses for the remaining hypotheses a median split was utilized to create two subsamples of moviegoers with high and low involvement (Neelamiegham and Jain 1999). Half of the respondents had involvement totals ranging from 10 to 52 and were designated as low involvement, while the other half had involvement totals ranging from 53 to 70 and were designated as high involvement. To enrich the data a z-test was run for the differences between proportions for low and high involvement and the thought listing reporting of systematic and heuristic processing. 95% of the area under the normal curve lies between -1.96 and +1.96 for the standard normal variate of the z-score. The probability that the z-score of -3.85 for the difference between high and low involvement for ads is the only significant difference for involvement among moviegoers for all of the items. Of the 46 moviegoers who reported heuristic thought processing of ads in the decision to see a film at the theatre 70% were high involvement and 30% were low involvement. Zero systematic or heuristic thought related to the film being seen



were reported by 27.6% of the moviegoers, 45.3% had only one systematic or heuristic thought, and 27% reported two or more total systematic or heuristic thoughts. Overall, there were no significant differences between proportions for low and high involvement moviegoers and their reporting of systematic and heuristic thoughts.

Table 6 shows the frequency and percentages of low and high involvement moviegoers for thought listings for systematic and heuristic thoughts and thoughts not related to the film such as seeing the film because someone else wanted to.

**Table 6. z-test for Differences Between Proportions for Low and High Involvement of Unaided Thought Listings**

	<b>Low Involvement Freq. (%)</b>	<b>High Involvement Freq.(%)</b>	<b>n (%)</b>	<b>z-score</b>
<hr/>				
<b>Systematic Thoughts</b>				
Discussing Film w/others	12 (55 %)	10 (45 %)	22 (6 %)	.71
<b>Heuristic Thoughts</b>				
Star	45 (44 %)	57 (56 %)	102 (27 %)	-1.69
Type (Genre)	53 (44 %)	67 (56 %)	120 (32 %)	-1.93
Ads	14 (30 %)	32 (70 %)	46 (12 %)	-3.85 **
Previous work	14 (56 %)	11 (44 %)	25 ( 7 %)	.85
Others	18 (40 %)	27 (60 %)	45 (12 %)	-1.90
<b>Thoughts Not Related to Film</b>				
Others	60 (50 %)	60 (50 %)	120 (32 %)	
<hr/>				

\*\* p < .05, N = 373

A median split was also utilized to create two subsamples of moviegoers with high and low movie maven measures. Half of the respondents had

movie maven totals ranging from 6 to 32 and were designated as low movie mavens while the other half had movie maven measures totals ranging from 33 to 42 and were designated as high movie mavens. Table 7 shows the frequency and percentages of the thought listings for systematic and heuristic thoughts not related to the film and the difference between proportions for low and high movie maven measures. There was no significant difference between low and high movie maven measures for moviegoers for any of these items.

**Table 7. z-test for Differences Between Proportions for Low and High Movie Maven Measures of Unaided Thought Listings**

	<b>Low Involvement Freq. (%)</b>	<b>High Involvement Freq.(%)</b>	<b>n (%)</b>	<b>z-score</b>
<hr/>				
<b>Systematic Thoughts</b>				
Discussing Film w/others	9 (41 %)	13 (59 %)	22 (6 %)	-1.2
<b>Heuristic Thoughts</b>				
Star	50 (49 %)	52 (51 %)	102 (27 %)	- .29
Sequel / Prequel	5 (36 %)	9 (64 %)	14 ( 4 %)	-1.48
Type (Genre)	57 (48 %)	63 (52 %)	120 (32 %)	- .63
Ads	22 (48 %)	24 (52 %)	46 (12 %)	- .38
Previous work	14 (56 %)	11 (44 %)	25 ( 7 %)	.85
Others	20 (44 %)	25 (56 %)	45 (12 %)	-1.14
<b>Thoughts Not Related to Film</b>				
Others	67 (56 %)	53 (44 %)	120 (32 %)	1.85
<hr/>				

\*\* p < .05, N = 373

H3A proposed that individuals with high levels of involvement will report seeing a different set of film genres than individuals with lower levels of

involvement. Unless otherwise stated, all further analyses with involvement as a variable were computed using this median split (See Table 8 for Selected Genre / MedianSplit Crosstabulations). The Chi-square analysis had a .088 level of significance that the distribution relationship between genre and high and low involvement is different than what would be expected by chance alone. Thus H3A was not supported ( $\chi^2 = 22.078$ ,  $df=15$ ,  $N=373$ ). The measure of association for Cramer's V had a value of .234 supported at .088. Two cases for genre were deleted because of missing information and six genre categories had a count less than 5 per cell which had an impact on the lack of significance of the Chi-square tests. Genre categories could not be combined to address this problem with the small cell counts due to the complexity of multiple genre categories listed by the motion picture association and multiple genre interpretations by moviegoers. The overall level of significance for involvement and genre was not high enough that the distribution relationship between them would be different than what would be expected by chance alone. However, the genres of "Drama / Mystery / Thriller," "Drama / Fantasy / Mystery / Romance" and "Drama / Horror / Thriller" had over 72% of the moviegoers indicated as low involvement moviegoers. The genres of "Comedy / Drama / Fantasy" had over 61% of the moviegoers indicated as high involvement and "Action / Fantasy / Sci-Fi / Thriller" had over 72% of the moviegoers indicated as high involvement.

**Table 8. Selected Genre / MedianSplit Crosstabulations**

GENRE / TITLE	MEDIAN SPLIT		TOTAL
	LOW INVOLVE	HIGH INVOLVE	
Drama / Mystery / Thriller – “The Da Vinci Code”			
Count	16	6	22
Expected Count	10.3	11.7	22
% within Genre	72.7%	27.3%	100.0%
% of Total	4.3%	1.6%	5.9%
Drama / Fantasy / Mystery / Romance – “The Lake House”			
Count	16	10	26
Expected Count	12.2	13.8	26
% within Genre	61.5%	38.5%	100.0%
% of Total	4.3%	2.7%	7.0%
Drama / Horror / Thriller – “The Omen”			
Count	8	4	12
Expected Count	5.6	6.4	12
% within Genre	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
% of Total	2.2%	1.1%	3.2%
Action / Fantasy / Sci-Fi / Thriller – “X-Men: The Last Stand”			
Count	3	8	11
Expected Count	5.2	5.8	11
% within Genre	27.3%	72.7%	100.0%
% of Total	.8%	2.2%	3.0%
Comedy / Drama / Fantasy - “Click”			
Count	40	63	103
Expected Count	48.3	54.7	103
% within Genre	38.8%	61.2%	100.0%
% of Total	10.8%	17.0%	27.8%

Hypothesis H3B proposed that as the level of processing increased the higher level processors will report seeing a different set of film genres than the lower level of processing. Before running the analyses for the remaining hypotheses a three-way split was utilized to create three subsamples of

moviegoers. The median, mean and mode for the total number of heuristic and systematic thoughts combined from the thought listing was one. The tri-split divided moviegoers into three groups, those with zero thoughts, those with one thought and those with two or more thoughts. A chi-square test was run and no significance was found so H3B was not supported ( $\chi^2 = 55.836$ ,  $df=30$ ,  $N=373$ ). Possible reasons for the lack of correlation will be discussed in the following chapter.

Hypothesis H4A proposed that as the level of involvement increased the familiarity with the film would also increase. The Pearson product-moment correlation between involvement and familiarity was not significant at the .01 level ( $r = .000$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and H4A was not supported. Possible reasons for the lack of correlation will be discussed in the following chapter.

Hypothesis H4B proposed that as the number of systematic and heuristic thoughts increased the level of familiarity would also increase but no significant correlation between reported heuristic and systematic thoughts and level of familiarity with seeing the film was found at the .01 level ( $r = .080$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Therefore H4B was not supported. Possible reasons for the lack of effect will be discussed in the following chapter.

## **Summary of Results**

This chapter presented the results of the research design for this investigation. The first set of hypotheses tested the reliability of involvement (Zaichkowsky's 1987) and "Market Maven" measures (Feick and Price 1987) and found both measures to be reliable measures of the constructs. Involvement

significantly is correlated with the processing of information and serves as a measure of motivation to process, perception of attribute difference, and product importance (Zaichkowsky 1985; Celsi and Olson 1988). Market Mavens are people who are motivated to attend more movies are also likely to be more involved in spending their time pursuing information related to films and actually seeing them at the theatre. Individuals who see more movies may be more sociable , energetic or knowledgeable among their peers (Gladwell 2000). These individuals are defined in this study as 'movie mavens' who have information about many films, where to see a film, film related marketing knowledge, and initiate discussions about film and respond to requests about film market information.

The film industry also recognizes the economic importance of movie frequency and that some moviegoers are more motivated to attend more films than other moviegoers (MPAA 2005). The first set of hypothesis found support that level of involvement and movie mavens are both positively related to the number of movies an individual sees and that the level of involvement is also is positively related to opinion leadership.

The second set of hypotheses described the role of involvement with systematic, in-depth cognitive analysis or heuristic, superficial processing based upon simple decision rules that have been stored in memory. The HSM posits that highly motivated or involved people will engage in more systematic analysis while people who are less motivated will engage in superficial processing of information (Todorov, Chaiken et al. 2002). There was support for the role of

involvement with the number of total thoughts and the number of heuristic thoughts but there was little support for the role of involvement with the number of unaided systematic thoughts. There was support for the role of aided systematic thoughts for involvement and discussing the movie with a friend, colleague or family member and the downloading of a trailer. Pearson product-moment correlation between involvement and discussing the movie with a friend, colleague or family member when aided was significant at the .01 level ( $r = .140$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $N=373$ ). Possible reasons for the lack of correlation for unaided systematic thoughts versus aided systematic thoughts will be discussed in the following chapter.

There was no support for the third set of hypotheses that described the role of involvement and different levels or types of processing with the genre or type of film. No support was found for the fourth set of hypotheses that described the role of involvement and processing with the moviegoers familiarity with a film. Possible reasons for the lack of correlation will be discussed in the following chapter.

In sum, the results of this research have provided additional validation to involvement and movie mavens with the frequency of movie attendance and with the HSM Model for total thoughts and heuristic thoughts. The following chapter will discuss these findings in a broader context.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

#### **Significance of Findings**

Low or high motivation related to personal relevance has been important indicator of the likelihood that receivers will engage in elaboration or thinking about the information contained in a persuasive effort (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). However, the concept of systematic, in-depth cognitive analysis and / or heuristic, superficial processing of information has not been applied to moviegoers (Todorov, Chaiken et al. 2002). The significance of this research is that it has attempted to establish involvement and heuristic and systematic processing constructs into theories of moviegoing behavior.

In this chapter, the assertion of involvement and systematic and heuristic processing as it relates to moviegoers will be examined. This chapter will discuss these issues in more detail, outline the limitations of this research, and suggest potential avenues for future research.

#### **The Relationship of Involvement with Movie Mavens and Frequency**

The previous chapter presented the results of the research design for this investigation. Involvement (Zaichkowsky's 1987) and "Market Maven" measures (Feick and Price 1987) were both found to be reliable measures of the constructs. Involvement is significantly associated with the processing of information and serves as a measure of motivation to process, perception of attribute difference, and product importance (Zaichkowsky 1985; Celsi and Olson 1988). The findings for the first set of hypotheses support and extend the



general research and knowledge on involvement and product importance.

Moviegoers who are more highly involved with seeing movies at the theatre see more films than moviegoers with lower involvement.

Movie mavens are a subset of people who are more highly involved and motivated to attend more films at the theatre and are also likely to be more involved in spending their time pursuing information related to films. Individuals who see more movies may be more sociable, energetic or knowledgeable among their peers (Gladwell 2000). Movie mavens have more information about many films, more film related marketing knowledge, and like to initiate discussions about film and respond to others requests about film market information.

The film industry recognizes the economic importance of movie frequency and that some moviegoers attend more films than other moviegoers (MPAA 2005). According to the 2005 Motion Picture Association of America Movie Attendance Study, 24% of Americans who go to the movies attend a film at least once a month and account for 80% of all tickets sold. Those who attend the movies 2-11 times per year are categorized as “occasional moviegoers” and account for 34% of all tickets sold and those who attend 1 movie per year are categorized as “infrequent moviegoers” and account for 13% of all tickets sold. 29% report that they never go to the movies (MPAA 2005). However, frequency of movie attendance has not been previously connected to involvement and market maven measures.

## **The Role of Systematic and Heuristic Processing with Moviegoers**

The second set of hypotheses predicted the relationship of involvement with systematic, in-depth cognitive analysis or heuristic, superficial processing based upon simple decision rules that have been stored in memory. The HSM posits that highly motivated or involved people will engage in more systematic analysis while people who are less motivated will engage in superficial processing of information (Todorov, Chaiken et al. 2002). There was support for the role of involvement with the combined number of systematic and heuristic thoughts and the number of heuristic thoughts but there was little support for the role of involvement with the number of unaided systematic thoughts. When aided with direct response questions there was support for the role of involvement with systematic processing. One of the reasons for the lack of effect on unaided responses to systematic processing may be that the thought listing method is problematic and triggers more heuristic responses.

Chaiken (1980) first defined the two modes of processing labeled systematic processing and heuristic processing. Systematic processing takes place when an individual exerts additional cognitive energy when processing a message. Systematically processing a message also emphasizes a greater detail in understanding the arguments in the message as well as the validity of the message's conclusion. On the other hand, heuristic processing relies on simple cues or rules when processing a message. Individuals act as cognitive misers if there is sufficient confidence to form judgments that require little concentration on the details of the arguments and the basis of the heuristic cues

or rules derive from the individual's scripts of previous experience (Nabi 1999). It is likely that movie going is an activity that triggers more heuristic processing as more highly involved moviegoers will have more previous experience with films to trigger heuristic cues. In this study, 68% of moviegoers reported heuristic thought listings related to the film being seen and only 8% of respondents reported systematic thoughts related to the film being seen. Forty two percent of moviegoers reported thoughts not specific to the film content but related to going to the movies in general for mostly social reasons.

Situations that can trigger a specific processing mode could include time pressure and distraction or the motivation of the individual (Todorov, Chaiken et al. 2002). One type of situation in which sufficient motivation is present refers to an individual engaging in processing due to a discrepancy between their actual confidence and desired confidence for a judgment task. Specifically, individuals have a strong motivation to process when they want accurate and sufficient information (Griffin, Neuwirth et al. 2002). The discrepancy should lead the individual to systematically process the message. Highly involved moviegoers who see more films than low involvement moviegoers also have a higher level of confidence and turn to heuristic cues when reviewing a message.

The HSM is a dual process model that proposes that systematic and heuristic processing can occur simultaneously, but there is debate over the actual interaction between the modes (Todorov, Chaiken et al. 2002). The modes have been described as mutually exclusive, in competition or in harmony with each other. The mutually exclusive perspective would speculate that when

an individual is systematically processing a message then their heuristic mode is shut down, whereas the simultaneous perspective posits that an individual may use both modes at the same time or as long as needed. For example, an individual may use a heuristic cue for one argument in the message, but then move to the systematic processing mode for a different argument.

The findings for the second set of hypotheses found that when individuals reported engaging in systematic processing they also reported engaging simultaneously with heuristic processing cues 45% of the time. The other 65% of the time they reported systematic processing exclusively. This finding contradicts an earlier study by Booth-Butterfield, Cooke et al, (1994) that found that there was no evidence to support that the individuals were involved in simultaneous processing with systematic processing, and continues the debate about the actual interaction between the two modes of processing.

### **The Relationship of Genre to Involvement and Processing**

There was no support for the third set of hypotheses that described the role of involvement and different levels or types of processing with the genre or type of film. It was expected that more highly involved moviegoers would enjoy different types of movies such as drama more than low involvement moviegoers and people who processed more systematically or heuristically would prefer different types of films such as science fiction. Advertising allows specific audiences to be targeted by relying heavily on the production companies' and exhibitors' definition of genre to establish a predictable structure to audiences (Sandler 2002). The use of genre images and symbols in advertising through

television ads, movie trailers, print ads, and posters all contribute to further define and reinforce the genre and communicate the narrative (Neale 1995; Cawelti 1976). The evaluation of new movie projects on their potential to reach a specific segment of the population also results in Hollywood's classification of films and the continued evolution of genre (Balio 2002). However, the overall level of significance for genre and involvement was not high enough that the distribution relationship between genre and high and low involvement would be different than what would be expected by chance alone. Two cases for genre were deleted because of missing information and six genre categories had a count less than 5 per cell. A cell size less than 5 is too small for the Chi-square test of significance and genre categories could not be combined to address this problem.

Further examination of the genres of "Drama," "Mystery," "Thriller," "Horror" and "Romance" showed that over 60% of the moviegoers were indicated as low involvement moviegoers. The genre of "Comedy" and "Fantasy" had over 60% of the moviegoers indicated as high involvement. These findings on genre have to be interpreted with caution as they are confounded by the release dates of the film. The comedy film was opening the weekend of the study and the dramatic films had been in the theatre from seven to over thirty days. These results may have more to do with "early adoption" than any indications of a preference for a specific genre. The findings on genre seem to support Bakker's (2001) assertion that although genre may allow the audience to associate with

the familiarity of a film's story consumers' preferences are distributed across multiple genres.

### **The Role of Involvement and Processing with Familiarity**

There was no support for the fourth set of hypotheses that described the role of involvement and processing with the moviegoers familiarity with a film. Familiarity was proposed to be an important measure because one type of situation in which sufficient motivation is present refers to an individual engaging in processing due to a discrepancy between their actual confidence and desired confidence for a judgment task. Individuals have a strong motivation to process when they want accurate and sufficient information (Griffin, Neuwirth et al. 2002). It was expected that moviegoers with low involvement who see fewer films would be motivated to systematically process information to become more familiar with a film. The HSM posits that highly motivated or involved people will engage in more systematic analysis while people who are less motivated will engage in superficial processing of information (Todorov, Chaiken et al. 2002). Chaiken (1980) first defined the two modes of processing labeled systematic processing and heuristic processing. Systematic processing takes place when an individual exerts additional cognitive energy when processing a message. It appears that moviegoers' level of familiarity with seeing a film does not impact their level of involvement or cognitive processing to see a film. Seeing a film that one is not familiar with does not appear to be sufficient motivation to trigger a specific type of cognitive processing and it appears that little risk is associated with seeing a film that one is not familiar with.

In sum, the results of this research have provided additional validation to involvement and movie mavens with the frequency of movie attendance and with the HSM Model for heuristic and systematic processing.

### **Limitations of Current Research**

This research has several limitations that may have an undesired impact on the empirical and theoretical findings. Although the demographics of the random sample of moviegoers can be generalized to the general population it is possible that moviegoers from different regions of the country have different levels of involvement and different types of processing. Intercepts of moviegoers at the theatre at the time of their movie selection may help to eliminate issues of intention and recency but the reliance on self-report for the measurement of systematic and heuristic processing forces the individual to recount his / her cognitive processing before deciding to see a film instead of their actual processing. This could produce an undesirable relationship between memory of the reported levels of processing and actual processing. For example, in post hoc analysis of a paired t-test of the difference of means a significant difference of moderate strength was found in the unaided versus aided response for stars and directors at the .01 level as shown in Table 9.

In addition, when aided with direct response questions there was higher support for the role of involvement with cognitive processing. Post hoc analysis found support for the role of aided systematic thoughts for involvement and discussing the movie with a friend, colleague or family member at the .01 level ( $r = .140$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $N=373$ ).

**Table 9. Mean Scores, Stand Deviations, Paired t-test and Correlation for Unaided / Aided Recall of Stars and Directors**

	M	SD	t	Correlation
<b>Recall</b>				
Star (Unaided)	0.27	0.45		
Star (Aided)	0.48	0.50	-8.83	.539
Director (Unaided)	0.01	0.12		
Director (Aided)	0.11	0.63	-3.46	.534

$p < .01$ , two-tailed  $N=373$

One of the reasons for the lower level of effect on unaided responses compared to aided responses regarding processing may be that the thought listing method is problematic. Moviegoers on their way into the theatre may be in a hurry and not take the time to fully explore their thoughts related to their decision to see a specific film.

As mentioned earlier, one final limitation of this research was a result of the attempt to use a self-reported recall of thought listings related to the HSM model. Although advertisements, media, word-of-mouth, etc. and other multiple heuristic and systematic triggers related to a specific film were possible, the results of cognitive listings with this study are based on self-report rather than thought listing reactions after viewing a specific advertisement or cognitive cue manipulation.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Thought listing has been used as a means of measuring central route or more in-depth systematic processing (Petty and Cacioppo 1986; MacKenzie and Preng 1992). The self-reported thought listings related to the decision to see a



film at the theatre in this study generated some interesting results that supported general theory about involvement and processing with moviegoers and attendance. The Motion Picture Industry would be well served to better understand the involvement and motivations of frequent moviegoers and identify their motivations for attending a specific film. Thought listing is a useful way to measure what people perceive to have been their thoughts while viewing advertisements but previous research has been limited based on general student populations, poor quality mock-up ad manipulations in experimental settings, and intention as a predictor of actual behavior. The combination of testing moviegoers response to professional quality movie communications and measuring their reaction after viewing these ads by tracking their actual attendance at the theatre would be a needed next step.

The movie maven concept is distinguished from opinion leaders and early adopters who often have product-specific knowledge and experience (Feick and Price 1987). The Diffusion of Innovation theory is used to explain how a new idea is first introduced to societies and individuals (Rogers 1983). Two types of influencers, the opinion leader and the early purchaser or adopter, are the focus of traditional approaches to interpersonal influence (Feick and Price 1987).

Studying the movie maven measures against interpersonal information exchanges by opinion leaders and early adopters would provide a better understanding related to moviegoers. Understanding how movie mavens exchange information with others and how quickly they see new films would be important in better understanding and tracking the extent and the importance of

movie maven influence. The importance of word-of-mouth to the movie industry and the impact of the movie maven on the marketplace is an area worthy further study.

As reported earlier, only 8% of respondents reported any unaided systematic processing of film related material in the thought listing. When aided, systematic processing mentions increased to 83%, however, many of the individual items related to newer technologies such as websites, blogs, and download internet sites were still quite low. Only 3.8% of respondents reported visiting a blog, only 4.6% had reported downloading a movie trailer and only 8.3% had visited the web. Websites, downloads and blogs are now seen as a necessity for most studios when they implement their marketing plan (McCarthy 1999). However, with the low reported use of new technologies in the decision to see a film at the theatre this area needs further exploration to determine if only certain films benefit from this type of marketing. Twenty two percent had read a critics review, 28% had discussed the movie with someone else and 47% had read a magazine or watched a television show about the film. Finally, filmgoing is a social activity that is demonstrated by the fact that 42% of the respondents reported no systematic or heuristic thoughts related to the specific film they were seeing but reported thoughts related to going to the movies. Most of these respondents reported that they only were seeing the film because they were accompanying someone else. Social influence related to attendance is clearly an important area and needs further study to fully explain movie attendance (Austin, 1989).

## **Conclusion**

In sum, the results of this research have provided additional validation to involvement and market maven measures and with the HSM Model for cognitive processing. The significance of this research is that it has attempted to establish involvement and heuristic and systematic processing constructs into theories of moviegoing behavior and the identification of movie maven influencers.

## Appendix A

### CODING SHEET FOR FILM GOING

Welcome. Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire. We are conducting a study of moviegoers. Your answers will be kept completely confidential and anonymous.

Your participation is voluntary. If you are willing to take five minutes to answer a few questions you'll receive a coupon for a free medium popcorn. We are not selling anything.

#### Involvement

The purpose of these questions is to measure a person's involvement or interest in seeing movies at the theatre. To take this measure we need you to judge seeing movies at the theatre against a series of descriptive scales according to how YOU perceive seeing movies at the theatre. Below is a set of word pairs. Please mark an 'X' in space closest to the word that best reflects your feelings about seeing movies at the theatre.

#### SEEING MOVIES AT THE THEATRE IN GENERAL

- |                         |                                                       |                           |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Important            | _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ | Unimportant               |
| b. Boring               | _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ | Interesting               |
| c. Irrelevant           | _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ | Relevant                  |
| d. Unexciting           | _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ | Exciting                  |
| e. Appealing            | _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ | Unappealing               |
| f. Mundane              | _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ | Fascinating               |
| g. Worthless            | _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ | Valuable                  |
| h. Not needed           | _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ | Needed                    |
| i. Involving            | _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ | Not<br>Involving          |
| j. Means a lot<br>to me | _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ | Means<br>nothing<br>to me |

**Number of Movies Seen**

In the past six months, how many movies have you seen in a theatre, including this one? \_\_\_\_\_

What film are you seeing today? \_\_\_\_\_

**Thought Listing**

We would like to know your reasons for deciding to see this particular film. In the space provided below, please list what it is about this film that made you decide to see it. Please write down any thoughts, no matter how simple, complex, relevant, or irrelevant they may seem to you. There are no right and wrong answers. Do not worry about grammar, spelling or punctuation, but please write legibly. Remember, list all thoughts that concerned you in choosing this film.

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How familiar are you with the film you are seeing today? **Please circle one.**

<b>Very Unfamiliar</b>	<b>Somewhat Unfamiliar</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Somewhat Familiar</b>	<b>Very Familiar</b>
1	2	3	4	5

**Please circle the appropriate answer to each question that best reflects your feelings.**

I like introducing new films to my friends and family.

<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Moderately Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly Disagree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Slightly Agree</b>	<b>Moderately Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

I like helping people by providing them with information about many kinds of films.

<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Moderately Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly Disagree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Slightly Agree</b>	<b>Moderately Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

People ask me for information about films.

<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Moderately Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly Disagree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Slightly Agree</b>	<b>Moderately Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

If someone asked me about several films, I could tell them which one to see.

<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Moderately Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly Disagree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Slightly Agree</b>	<b>Moderately Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

My friends think of me as a good source of information when it comes to new films.

<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Moderately Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly Disagree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Slightly Agree</b>	<b>Moderately Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Think about a person who has information about a variety of films and likes to share this information with others. This person knows about new films but does not necessarily feel he or she is an expert on one particular type of film. How well would you say this description fits you?

<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Moderately Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly Disagree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Slightly Agree</b>	<b>Moderately Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Before Deciding to see this film today – Please circle one**

I read a critic's review of today's movie before deciding to see the film. **Yes / No**

I am seeing this film because of the star. **Yes / No**

I am seeing this film because of the director. **Yes / No**

I read a magazine article or watched a television show about the film. **Yes / No**

I am seeing this film because it is a sequel or prequel. **Yes / No**

I visited a blog discussing this film. **Yes / No**

I am seeing this film because of the type (genre) of this film. **Yes / No**

I am seeing this film because of the special effects. **Yes / No**

I am seeing this film because of the print ads, television ads or movie trailer.  
**Yes / No**

I discussed the film with a friend, colleague or family. **Yes / No**

I am seeing this film because of the MPAA rating of the film (G, PG, R, NC-17)  
**Yes / No**

I am seeing this film because it is a winner or nominee of an award. **Yes / No**

I visited the website for this film. **Yes / No**

I am seeing this film because it is based on a previous work (book, play, video game, etc. . **Yes / No**

I downloaded a trailer for this film. **Yes / No**

## JUST A FEW MORE QUESTIONS TO GO

How did you find out what movie was playing today and the time it was playing?

**(DO NOT READ LIST / MULTIPLE RESPONSES ACCEPTED)**

- a) Newspaper **(IF NEWSPAPER INDICATED GO TO QUESTION 3)**
- b) Telephone Number
- c) Inside Marquee
- d) Website
- e) Friend / Family Member
- f) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

What newspaper did you find the listing in? \_\_\_\_\_

What factors determine which theatre you go to? Please rank the factors in order of importance 1 being Not at All Important. 5 being Most Important **(SHOW PRINTED LIST TO RESPONDENTS)**

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Neither	Important	Very Important
Geographic Location	1	2	3	4	5
Showing Times	1	2	3	4	5
Prices	1	2	3	4	5
Selection of Movie Showing	1	2	3	4	5
Appearance of Theatre	1	2	3	4	5
Type of Seating (Stadium, traditional)	1	2	3	4	5
Other (specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5

Just a few questions to help us classify your responses. Please circle one.

1.) Are you... 1) Female 2) Male

2.) What is your marital status? 1) Single 2) Married

3.) How many children under the age of 18 live in your household?

a) 0 b) 1 c) 2 d) 3 e) 4 f) 5 or more g) no answer

4.) What is your year of birth? 19\_\_\_\_\_

5.) What is your zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**INITIALS:** \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix B

### Coding Sheet – Thought Listing Report for Seeing a Specific Film

Survey Number \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Reports of Systematic Thought / Processing** (place a mark by each category & then total at the end)

NOTE: Thoughts mentioning ANY words regarding in-depth processing or analysis are relevant

Thoughts referencing reading a critic's review of a film \_\_\_\_\_  
Thoughts referencing reading a magazine article about the film \_\_\_\_\_  
Thoughts referencing watching a television show about the film \_\_\_\_\_  
Thoughts referencing discussing the film with a friend, colleague or family \_\_\_\_\_  
Thoughts referencing visiting the website for the film \_\_\_\_\_  
Thoughts referencing downloading a trailer for the film \_\_\_\_\_  
Thoughts referencing visiting a blog discussing the film \_\_\_\_\_  
Others (please write in) \_\_\_\_\_

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TOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Reports of Heuristic Thought / Processing**

NOTE: Thoughts mentioning these words in general without in-depth processing or analysis is considered a heuristic thought.

Thoughts referencing the star \_\_\_\_\_  
Thoughts referencing the director \_\_\_\_\_  
Thoughts referencing a sequel or prequel \_\_\_\_\_  
Thoughts referencing the type (genre) \_\_\_\_\_  
Thoughts referencing the special effects \_\_\_\_\_  
Thoughts referencing the print ads, television ads or movie trailer \_\_\_\_\_  
Thoughts referencing a previous work (book, play, video game, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_  
Thoughts referencing the MPAA rating of the film (G, PG, R, NC-17) \_\_\_\_\_  
Thoughts referencing a winner or nominee of an award \_\_\_\_\_  
Others (please write in) \_\_\_\_\_

---

TOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Thoughts Not Specific to the Film Content**

Thoughts referencing the show time \_\_\_\_\_  
Thoughts referencing the theatre location \_\_\_\_\_  
Thoughts referencing the sound or projection \_\_\_\_\_  
Thoughts referencing the seating \_\_\_\_\_  
Thoughts referencing the popcorn or refreshments \_\_\_\_\_  
Others (please write in) \_\_\_\_\_

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TOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Nonrelated Thoughts** Others (please write in)

---

TOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL NUMBER OF THOUGHTS** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C – Consent Form**

### **CONSENT FORM**

This is a research survey of Moviegoers to find out how people like you decide to see a particular film. Your participation in this research is very important and much appreciated. The benefit of this study is to extend research on the decision process to see a film at the theatre. You should be able to complete the survey within 5 minutes. Before starting the study, please read the following statement.

### **STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONSENT**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate at all, or you may refuse to participate in certain procedures or end your participation at any time, and you may refuse to answer any particular question within the survey.

All information that you provide will be held in strict confidence. The information that you provide will be tabulated so that it cannot be attributed to you in any report of the research's findings. Only the researchers involved in this study will have access to the raw information. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

If you would like to receive a copy of the study's general results, please provide your name and e-mail address at the end of this questionnaire. Please be assured that your name and contact information will be separated from all other information provided and placed in a separate file, so none of your opinions and information can be attributed to you.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this study, please contact Bill Ward, the student researcher on this project, at Michigan State University, 616-915-8138, [wardb@msu.edu](mailto:wardb@msu.edu) or Dr. Bruce Vanden Bergh, Department of Advertising, 309 Communication Arts Building, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, 48824, 517-355-2314.

Further, if you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact (anonymously if you wish) Peter Vasilenko, director, Human Research Protection Program, by phone (517-355-2180), fax (517-432-4503), e-mail ([irb@msu.edu](mailto:irb@msu.edu)), or regular mail (202 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824).

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