Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Theses, Dissertations, and Major Papers

1-1-1997

Inside commercial interaction: Audience research in interactive media.

Kimberly A. Myrick
University of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd

INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

INSIDE COMMERCIAL INTERACTION: AUDIENCE RESEARCH IN INTERACTIVE MEDIA

by

Kimberly A. Myrick

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of Communication Studies
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1997

Canada

854673

APPROVED BY:

_____ Prof. Myles Ruggles
Chairperson

_____ Dr. Irv Goldman

_____ Dr. Andrew Templer
Faculty of Business
Administration

Dream, Believe, Achieve!

INSIDE COMMERCIAL INTERACTION:

AUDIENCE RESEARCH IN INTERACTIVE MEDIA

ABSTRACT

by

Kimberly A. Myrick

This thesis offers a communication-theory approach to audience research for interactive media, specifically the Internet, based on two factors. First, commercial vendors want private information on individual subscribers to the Internet because this medium allows products and services to be marketed on an individual basis. Second, in order to provide this type of information, audience researchers must perform their function within and during interactions between consumers and vendors on the Internet. As vendors themselves collect private information on consumers, privacy is a concern in commercial interactions. This analysis suggests that audience research on the Internet should be pre-designed to allow consumers to manage the disclosure of private information in the same way that they do in interactions with vendors. Otherwise, audience research could have a reflexive influence on commercial interactions.

From a 'social constructionist' perspective, this thesis shows that consumers manage disclosure of private information in face-to-face and computer-mediated commercial interactions by evaluating "situational cues" that confirm or destroy normative beliefs and expectations. Computer-mediated interaction is evaluated against face-to-face interaction because the latter contains all dimensions and expectations to which all individuals are accustomed. It is further shown that while common social-rule governed processes of

disclosure are in operation across commercial settings, variations in the structure of interaction sequences and disclosure strategies can be correlated with functional differences in the specific activities which the interactions serve to coordinate. The Long Interview method of qualitative research was used with six informants from consumer culture to study how they use concepts from their culture to make sense of "situational cues" in different commercial settings. The findings show that when a "situational cue" is identified the mental processes that initiate action involve a sequence of thoughts that correspond with the interrelationship of cultural categories - relationship, trust, reciprocity and disclosure. These findings suggest new directions for audience research on the Internet.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family for their love and support. Special mention of my mother who understood the emotional effects of this experience. Without her strength, wisdom, prayers and encouragement, it would have been harder to achieve my goal.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many debts have been incurred in writing this thesis. Thanks is due to Dr. Andrew Templer who agreed to be my outside reader, and to Dr. Irvin Goldman who provided key pieces of advice as my departmental reader. Thanks are also due to Dr. Kai Hildebrant, Dr. Stanley Cunningham and Ann Gallant. Dr. Hildebrant also provided useful advice. Dr. Cunningham helped me realize my academic potential by challenging my intellect and ability to research at the beginning of the program. Ann Gallant was extremely helpful with the logistics of achieving this degree. My deepest debt, however, is to my advisor, Professor Myles Ruggles, whom I was fortunate enough to study under. His methods gave me structure, direction, insight, inspiration, and enthusiasm when I needed those things most. It was truly an exciting and challenging experience, intellectually and emotionally.

Cheers!

viii

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ix

x

LIST OF APPENDICES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Are viewers really 'taking charge'? And if so, what exactly are they taking charge of, what does it mean, and what implications does it have? From the industry's perspective, what is going on is very confusing indeed. Both for the networks, who see their established, virtually monopolistic position threatened, and for advertisers who are faced with doubts about the affectivity of their current strategies of communicating to potential consumers, the old certainties have begun to crumble: they feel like they are losing steady grip on the audience. The advertisers' basic worry, of course, is whether network television is still the best medium to reach their intended audience with their commercials, while the networks are confronted with a heightened necessity to develop ever more effective programming and marketing strategies in an increasingly competitive environment. And in this new and chaotic situation, audience measurement has become a central focus of concern, the site on which the uncertainties and worries are expressed and articulated." (Ang, 1991, 69)

Interactive Media and Relationship Marketing

In the contemporary media environment, wireless cable, fibre optics, personal computers, electronic networks, cellular wireless networks and other new communication technologies are giving rise to interactive forms of media, such as the Internet. The evolution of new media in the last few decades has been attributed to a shift in the field of marketing towards the concept of market segmentation (Jhally, 1987, 123). Prior to 1950, marketing activities were limited to publicizing the advantageous characteristics of one product/service in relation to its competitors (Liess et.al., 1986, 44). Since 1950, the focus of marketing has shifted towards representations of consumers and the lifestyle benefits of products/services (ibid.). In pursuit of greater marketing effectiveness, vendors (i.e., suppliers/producers of any type of product or service) correspondingly segment consumers into a number of smaller homogeneous markets based on their demographics (i.e., age, sex, marital status, etc.) and psychographics (i.e., tastes, attitudes, lifestyles, etc.). Hence, the term "market segmentation"

1

(Jhally, ibid., 123-131). This has led to the development and use of new technologies by organizations in media, advertising and telecommunications, attempting to match audience segments with market segments (Jhally et.al., 1987, 126).

The new forms of media now emerging are distinct from traditional forms of mass communication (i.e., television, radio and print) in that they enable two-way communication with subscribers, and do so increasingly on a global basis. For vendors, this means that they can now reach wider markets on a more direct and individual basis with more timely information about their products and services, and with an even more finely-differentiated perception of consumer demand. This is causing vendors to shift their marketing strategy again, this time to building and maintaining one-to-one relationships with consumers. This latest concept is referred to as "relationship marketing". In recent years, much interest has been expressed in relationship marketing, and its underlying premise that long-term positive commercial relationships with consumers will provide ongoing profits (Barnes, 1995, 107).

Contemporary marketing strategies emphasize the importance of achieving a competitive advantage by predetermining consumers' tastes, attitudes, lifestyles etc. in order to proactively build one-to-one relationships (Arnaut, 1996, C8). To this end, vendors are also using interactive media, supercomputers and databases to store, use and transfer information on every aspect of consumers' lives (Flaherty, 1985, 5). Because these technologies make the creation of huge networks of information that provide detailed accounts of consumers' lives not only possible but easy, vendors are placing greater emphasis on gathering detailed information on consumers. These networks, referred to as warehouses of information, allow vendors to not only analyse consumers' behaviour but also project it.

2

Vendors seem to believe that "relationship building" involves any effort that encourages long-term transactions with consumers, thinking of this process in terms of database marketing, and assuming that a relationship can be formed with a consumer under any circumstances (Barnes, 1995, 107). From this point of view, the new interactive technologies of communication seem to offer unparalleled opportunities to modernize and intensify the marketing process. In this context, however, consumers are becoming increasingly concerned about their privacy. There is increasing evidence that vendors are damaging consumer trust with the methods of data gathering that they now employ, whereby they either extract private information from consumers involuntarily or request the information without reciprocating an equivalent amount/type about themselves (Samarajiva, 1996a, 3). In this thesis, private information is defined as all information which may be employed in developing relationships, including such things as: name, address, e-mail address, telephone number, social insurance number, age, sex, marital status, attitudes, tastes, lifestyles, financial history, commercial-transaction partners, medical history, educational background, legal information, etc.

The question that arises from all this is: Is this what constitutes "relationship building" in the sense of human interaction (Ruggles, 1992)? If it is, it certainly seems one-sided. The irony is that a relationship between two or more individuals requires that they know each other, and that they mutually perceive the relationship to exist. A critical element in building a relationship is trust, which is easily jeopardized by one individual (or party) not providing adequate information in terms of the relationship. All individuals must disclose certain information and trust that it will be used appropriately and that it will be reciprocated.

3

In the process, more private information is more likely to come from individuals who trust the use of it (ibid.). For purposes of this thesis, trust is defined by Gambetta (1988, 217):

"When we say we trust someone, we implicitly mean that the probability that he will perform an action that is beneficial or at least not detrimental to us is high enough for us to consider engaging in some form of co-operations with him."

In order to properly develop and implement a "relationship marketing" strategy, it seems that vendors need to become more familiar with the situations, and their characteristics, that establish positive, trustworthy relationships with consumers (Barnes, ibid., 114). Vendors need to attend to the consumer's perspective of the normative, trust-building elements of their commercial interactions that involve the disclosure of private information.

Audience Research in the Contemporary Media Environment

Interactive forms of media are creating new relationships with audiences. By the year 2010, media markets and audiences should be very different because their environment is expanding globally and becoming increasingly complex through new communication technologies (Hulks, 1992, 791). For traditional distributors of media, a global environment has the potential to cut their piece of the audience pie substantially. Audiences are expected to fragment and migrate to the new forms of media, where they will mix on a global basis and no longer be dependent on traditional media timetables and services (Braman, 1990, 361). This substantial shift in audience behaviour threatens traditional distributors of media because they rely on advertising vendors as a major source of revenue. Advertising vendors

4

are discovering that the new forms of media are better for tailoring messages about products/services on an individual basis.

As interactive media appear to provide vendors and their advertising agencies with the opportunity to increase their power to effect the consumption behaviour of a greater number of individuals, audience research for the new media, especially for the Internet, has become an issue of increasing importance (Ang, 1990, 249). Audience research firms are currently competing to develop effective data-gathering techniques for the Internet, but this is challenging. The Internet provides a context so different from the traditional media environment because: it is interactive rather than passive; subscribers view vendors' sites on the World Wide Web as opposed, for example, to television programs; subscribers can complete commercial transactions at the same time; and vendors can survey subscribers in the process. The Internet is a medium of two-way communication, which vendors utilize to: promote their products/services; conduct commercial transactions with their consumers, and research their consumers.

In this context, vendors not only want aggregate information on a sample of Internet audience members for purposes of mass advertising, vendors also want detailed private information on individual audience members in aid of one-to-one relationship marketing on the Internet (Gandy Jr., 1993, 37). In traditional media, audience research methods have generally assumed audiences to be an aggregate of individuals for purposes of mass marketing (Anderson et.al., 1980, 264). Meanwhile, audiences are not only characterized by objective qualities such as size and composition, their individual members also have significant subjective and intersubjective characteristics that must be considered in this new

5

global interactive media context (McQuail et.al., 1974, 289). Some commentators have gone so far as to suggest that new communication technologies challenge the ways in which the individual and relationships have been conceptualized, thus challenging the whole nature of societies and cultures (Gergen, 1991, 7). Gergen (ibid., 10) examined the concept of "self" and found that individuals are constituted by the social processes or, more precisely, by the language of the conversations that they engage in with others. This was established by the fact that individuals travel within a variety of social circles, each with unique conversations that define a "self concept" which, in turn, defines behaviour in that context.

From this point of view, it is very important that vendors obtain precise data on individual audience members of the Internet in order to develop and implement an effective "relationship marketing" strategy. To meet the information needs of vendors, audience researchers must perform their function within and during commercial interactions taking place between consumers and vendors on the Internet. This can cause the identity of vendors to become ambiguous, given that vendors also survey consumers. In traditional media, while advertising vendors have always placed great importance on audience research, they have relied on external sources for their data. Vendors, advertising agencies, advertisers (i.e., vendors performing the function of advertising agencies for themselves), media organizations and audience research firms have distinct and separate roles in these forms of media. Using television as an example, vendors produce and sell the products/services that appear in commercial advertisements during programming; advertisers and advertising agencies create the commercials and decide where to strategically place them in the programming schedule; media organizations determine the programming schedule and sell portions of it to the

6

advertisers and advertising agencies; and audience research firms gather and provide the audience information that is needed to enable this buying and selling of programming time between media organizations and advertisers/advertising agencies.

While there are large incentives for audience researchers to design data-gathering methods for the Internet that extract detailed private information from subscribers, the methods must be implemented during and within the direct interactions of consumers and vendors. This suggests that audience research methods for the Internet should be predesigned to allow consumers to manage the disclosure of private information in the same way that they do in commercial interactions. It makes sense that audience researchers should attend to the consumer's perspective of the normative elements of commercial interactions that involve the disclosure of private information. Audience researchers would have a better chance of meeting their objectives if they avoid disturbing commercial interactions in progress, especially because consumers are already concerned about vendors tracking their private information.

The questions that arise related to this are: How do consumers conduct their computer-mediated commercial interactions involving the disclosure of private information? Do they apply norms from other settings or do they develop new ones (Kiesler et.al., 1984, 1125)? Because the electronic environment is relatively new and no rules seem to exist for interacting in it, the most efficient way that people will find to adapt will be to apply what they know about their interactions in familiar settings (Good, 1988, 41). It is logical that individuals, who interact in the electronic environment, are affected by the same social forces, relations, and conflicts which affect them generally (Samarajiva, 1996a, 3.).

7

There are normative structural elements of interaction that remain constant across mediums of communication in order to guide the behaviour of individuals. Individuals apply what they know and expect of their interactions across mediums of communication; and they develop their relationships in the same ways and to the same level of competence over time. Face-to-face communication is the standard against which all communication events are compared because it contains all the dimensions and expectations to which individuals are accustomed (Walther, 1992, 61-69).

In face-to-face interactions, consumers expect situations to arise where they will be asked for private information by vendors. These types of commercial interactions become complicated because there is a possibility that the privacy of consumers will be violated. Consumers must create a level of trust with vendors for there to be an outcome of disclosure. To create trust, consumers regulate and manage the process of disclosure of private information by collecting information that reinforces or destroys their normative beliefs about the situation. Consumers respond to vendors by taking into account their beliefs and expectations as they interact and learn more about what they and the vendor know and understand about themselves, each other, their interaction, and their relationship. In short, consumers manage the disclosure of private information by following a set of criteria and making decisions according to "situational cues". It is important to note that while common social-rule governed processes of disclosure are in operation across commercial settings, variations in the structure of interaction sequences and disclosure strategies can be correlated with functional differences in the specific activities which the interactions serve to coordinate (Sternthal et.al., 1975, 25).

8

Rather than defining commercial interactions in terms of their physical settings, they can be defined in terms of "information systems", or in terms of a given pattern of access to the social behaviour of the individuals involved (Meyrowitz, 1985, 37). Thus, consumers and vendors should be responsible for sharing some information about themselves in computer-mediated interactions, and for negotiating and managing the boundaries by which they act in the same way that they do in their face-to-face interactions (Samarajiva, 1996a, 3-5.). The significance of accounting for the normative elements of this process in audience research on the Internet gives rise to the research of this thesis.

The Research of this Thesis

In order to design an effective audience research method for the Internet that extracts detailed private information from subscribers, this thesis finds it important to investigate how consumers manage the disclosure of private information according to "situational cues" in computer-mediated and face-to-face interactions in different commercial settings. A few research efforts have aimed to fulfil this sort of subjective and intersubjective gap in audience research by applying theories of communication (Ang, 1990, 250). This research is framed in the theory of social constructionism because it focuses on the interaction process itself. This theory perceives that communication constitutes the world as people know it. Reality (i.e., events and objects) is not something external to individuals that they describe in conversation. Reality is constructed by individuals in their patterns of communication, meaning everything from economic systems to riding a bicycle are collectively constructed by the continuing dialectic of individuals interpretations and actions. Individuals typically

9

engage in complex sequences of actions in which any one act takes on significance only as it relates to other acts in the sequence and to the normative rules that apply to the interaction (Pearce et.al., 1979, 68). Individuals typically make use of information collected in their immediate environment in order to respond to each other effectively, and the individuals themselves, as a source of information, are no different from other aspects of the environment (Goffman, 1969, 11).

The question is: How do individuals make sense of their interactional processes? This question is answered in qualitative research. The purpose of this type of research is to investigate the thoughts and actions of individuals. Qualitative research does not address issues of distribution and generalization. It is intended to help researchers interpret and describe what people think and do, not how many people think and do it. A small group of research participants are recruited as informants of a particular culture, not as a sample representative of a larger population (Feldman, 1995, 49).

The particular qualitative method used in this thesis was the Long Interview because it alleviates the time and cost constraints that are normally associated with qualitative research (McCracken, 1988, 29). Using an open-ended interview guide and an audio cassette recorder, long, intensive interviews were conducted with six informants from consumer culture who were familiar with the Internet. The purpose of the research was to interpret and describe how the informants make sense of "situational cues" in interactions with vendors of different commercial backgrounds in order to manage the disclosure of private information. The results are intended to be useful for designing audience research methods for the Internet.

10

Qualitative studies applied to audience research may still be considered relatively

new, especially in interactive media (Moores, 1993, 3). Furthermore, it seems that there have

not been any qualitative studies strictly framed in the theory of social constructionism

conducted on the disclosure of private information in computer-mediated commercial

interactions. Research in this area is only beginning to be considered (Samarajiva, 1996b,

131). In exploring this area, this thesis is organized as follows: the next chapter looks at

audience research systems in traditional media versus the new interactive media; chapter

three provides a literature review of relevant theoretical perspectives; chapter four re-states

the research question and describes the methodology used for its investigation; chapter five

reports the research findings; and chapter six discusses the findings and makes concluding

remarks.

11

CHAPTER II

AUDIENCE RESEARCH IN TRADITIONAL MEDIA VS.

INTERACTIVE MEDIA

This chapter covers the history of audience research for different forms of media. For purposes of clarity, it is split into two major sections. The first section reviews the systems and services deployed in traditional media and the type of data that they provide. The second section explores the initiatives that have been taken to develop audience research standards for the Internet.

Audience Research in Traditional Media

Advertising vendors have always placed great importance on audience research for the traditional forms of media. As vendors rely on external sources for their audience data, their needs are met in two ways: either audience research studies are sponsored by a particular media organization, a group of media organizations, or a research organization, and offered to anyone interested in buying them; or else a research organization performs its services under the sponsorship of several advertisers, advertising agencies, and media firms, and issues reports only to them (Barton, 1964, 395-396).

The major audience research organizations in Canada include: the Broadcast Bureau of Measurement (BBM - a not-for-profit organization formed by broadcasters, advertisers and advertising agencies); A.C. Nielsen of Canada (a profit-making subsidiary of A.C. Nielsen in the United States); and the Print Measurement Bureau (PMB - the equivalent of BBM for print media). The next two sections review some of the research systems and

12

services that these organizations have offered for traditional media and the type of audience data that they provide.

<u>Research Systems and Services</u>

While surveys are a frequently-used method of collecting audience data in the traditional forms of media, research firms have also deployed other methods in their efforts to meet the information needs of advertising vendors. Until recently, the diary method seemed to be the most popular for television and radio. This method involves a sample of households using a diary to record their media habits. For one week, the sample is required to make entries in the diary on quarter-hour time slots (Withers et.al., 91-93). One of the drawbacks of the diary method is that "viewing" and "listening" are defined as paying attention to the television or radio for at least five minutes in a fifteen minute span, which means that viewing or listening for less than five minutes is not counted. Nonetheless, this method is inexpensive, and thus it is still used in smaller markets (Occhiogrosso, 1992, 409).

In larger markets, the meteor/diary integration method has been a more common approach to audience research. This involves two samples of households, where one sample receives an electronic meteor that attaches to their television or radio to record their viewing or listening practices, and the second sample receives a diary and follows the method previously described. The main advantage of the meteor/diary integration method is that the meteors gather more precise and accurate information on media habits which can be linked to the demographics captured in the diaries (ibid., 409-411). To record both the media habits and demographics of one sample of households, the meteor/diary integration method was replaced by what is known as the peoplemeteor, which includes an electronic meteor and a

13

remote key pad (Withers et.al., ibid., 92). Each member of a particular household has a designated button on the key pad that is to be pressed at the beginning and end of a viewing or listening session. The advantages of the peoplemeteor are that it can record all required information on a minute-by-minute basis, and it makes it easy to monitor audiences for long periods of time (ibid., 92-103).

Research organizations are currently developing systems that require no physical recording by sample members (ibid., 106). For example, A.C. Nielsen is developing an apparatus called the passive peoplemeteor, which uses image-recognition technologies to scan and identify household members present during media engagements. BBM is working on a similar device called the portable passive peoplemeteor, which can be carried by viewers or listeners outside the home, and has the capability to combine television and radio measurements (ibid., 106-118). The next section looks at the type of data that these and other systems provide on audiences of traditional media.

Audience Data

In 1995, PMB (1995) conducted a telephone survey on the media habits of Canadians twelve years of age and older. For the 24,045,000 Canadians in this age range, the survey revealed their demographics and media use patterns as given in the tables that follow.

Demographics	Data (%)	
Household Status	With Children < 18 years of age living at home	
	44.8	
Employment Status	Employed	Unemployed
	59.2	40.8

14

Demographics	Data (%)					
Marital Status	Married/Living Together			Single/Widowed/Separated/Divorced		
	58.3			41.7		
Sex	Male			Female		
	49.2			50.8		
Age	18-24	25-34	35-49	50-64	65+	
	11.8	30.4	27.3	16.3	14.2	
Education	No High School	High School	Trade Diploma	University Diploma	Bachelor Degree	Post-graduate Degree
	32.9	24.3	11.5	18.1	8.6	4.6
Household Income	<$20,000	$20,000-$24,999	$25,000-$34,999	$35,000-$49,999	$50,000-$74,999	$75,000+
	17.6	6.6	13.5	20.7	24.4	17.2
Occupation	Skilled/Unskilled	Clerical/Secretarial	Technical/Sales/Other White Collar	Owners/Managers	Professionals	Other
	23.0	11.0	7.3	12.9	4.9	40.9

Source: PMB (1995)

Media	Data		
Radio	Heavy Users	Medium Users	Light Users
	More likely to be: - 18 to 24 years of age. - Graduates of a trade diploma. - Earning $25,000 to $34,999. - Employed in clerical and secretarial positions.	More likely to be: - 35 to 49 years of age. - Graduates of a bachelor degree. - Earning $75,000 or more. - Employed in professional positions.	More likely to be: - Without high school education. - Earning $20,000 or less. - Unemployed.
Television	Heavy User	Medium User	Light User
	More likely to be: - 65 years of age and older. - Without high school education. - Earning $20,000 or less. - Unemployed.	More likely to be: - 25 to 34 years of age. - Graduates of a bachelor degree. - Earning $50,000 to $74,999. - Employed as managers. - Males.	More likely to be: - 35 to 49 years of age. - Graduates of a post-graduate degree. - Earning $75,000 or more. - Employed professionals. - With children under 18 at home.

15

Media	Data		
Magazines	More likely to be: - 35 to 49 years of age. - Graduates of a post-graduate degree. - Earning $75,000 or more. - Employed professionals. - Female.	More likely to be: - 18 to 24 years of age. - Graduates of a trade diploma. - Earning $50,000 to $74,999. - Employed in clerical or secretarial positions. - With children under 18 at home.	More likely to be: - 65 years of age or older. - Without high school education. - Earning $20,000 or less. - Unemployed.
Newspaper	Read Yesterday and Saturday	Read Sunday	Read Yesterday, Saturday and Sunday
	- Majority of respondents. - Majority of those with high school education or higher while those with less were evenly split. - Majority of those earning $35,000 or higher while those earning lower were evenly split. - Almost half or just over half across all occupations. - Almost half or just over half of females, males, singles, widows, divorcees. - Those married or living together were more likely to have. - Percentage increases with education and income.	- Those with a bachelor or post-graduate degree were evenly split. - Majority of those with a university certificate or less education said they never do. - Majority of those who earn $50,000 to $74,999 or less do not while those earning more were evenly split. - Most levels of occupations were evenly split except clerical and secretarial staff or lower who mostly do not. - Majority of females, males, singles, widows, divorcees said they do not. - Males were more likely to. - Percentage of those who do decreases as income increases.	- Those from 50 to 64 were more likely to while those 65 and older were less likely to. - Those with a post-graduate degree were more likely to while those with less than high school education were less likely to. - Likelihood increases with education. - Those with a household income of $75,000 or more were more likely to while those unemployed were less likely to.

Source: PMB (1995)

The information in these tables shows that audience research firms collect and aggregate data on the demographics and usage patterns of audience members of traditional forms of media. While this has been meeting the needs of advertising vendors in an environment of mass consumption, the advent of the Internet and customized mass production are posing new and unprecedented problems for audience research firms

16

(Samarajiva, 1996a, 4). Vendors not only want aggregate information on a sample of Internet subscribers for purposes of mass advertising in that medium, vendors also want information on individual audience members of the Internet so that they can market their products/services on a direct one-on-one basis (Gandy Jr., 1993, 37). For example, vendors want to know that Kim Myrick, a female 29 years of age at a particular address and telephone number in downtown Toronto, browses the World Wide Web on the Internet for information on travelling and mountain biking. Collections of data like this are just as valuable, if not more valuable, to vendors than, say, 45.0% of the females who live in downtown Toronto like to do the same thing. The next section looks at the initiatives that have been taken to meet the emerging needs of vendors.

Audience Research in Interactive Media

Audience research firms are currently competing to be the first to develop research standards for the new interactive forms of media, in particular the Internet. Small independent firms are developing software to track the usage patterns of subscribers to the Internet, while large organizations, such as A.C. Nielsen, are forming partnerships to combine data from various sources (Race is on to develop standards for measuring interactive media, 1995, 1). This section examines some of the systems and services that have been created.

PC-Meteor

Comparable to the peoplemeteor used for audience research in traditional forms of media, the PC-Meteor has been designed to research the audiences of the World Wide Web

17

on the Internet (Smith, 1996). Created by a marketing research firm in the United States known as the NPD Group, the PC-Meteor is the first device to passively collect data on Internet audiences. The meteor is a software application which is installed on Windows-based personal computers (PCs) of a sample of households. To recruit participants to join the PC-Meteor sample, standard direct mail techniques, marketing the system under the name "PC Ratings", are used and ongoing incentives are offered, including an annual gift, periodic sweepstakes, and unexpected "thank you" gifts (ibid.).

By attaching itself to the operating system of a PC, the PC-Meteor tracks usage patterns of individual household members. It records when applications (or programs) are initialized, when they are terminated, and when a switch occurs between them. At the same time, the PC-Meteor tracks the demographics of users in a particular household. Before they can operate their PCs, users must identify themselves by selecting their names from a list on screen that was created by the household, and if users change in mid-session, they are obligated to indicate the change. Included on the list are the birth date, gender, income etc. of each user.

When users access the Internet via one of the commercial online services or any other service provider, the PC-Meteor monitors the web sites that they browse as material is displayed on their computer screens. For web site owners/managers, this means that the meteor can provide data on their audiences, including: the number of individuals who visit them on the web; the demographics of those visitors; the web pages that visitors observe; their navigational paths while connected to the Internet; the date, time and length of their connection; and their frequency of connection and use of the Internet (ibid.).

18

The main advantage of the PC-Meteor is suppose to be its capability to compare audiences across time, computer applications, web sites, web pages, and service providers, as well as show any duplication (ibid.). It is significant how closely the PC-Meteor compares to the peoplemeteor for television. An underlying assumption of this method is that research techniques used in traditional media are transferrable to the Internet, when this is not expected to meet the information needs of vendors in today's customized-mass-production economy. The next section explores other initiatives that attempt to meet vendors' demand for precise data on individual audience members of the Internet.

<u>Other Systems and Services</u>

A.C. Nielsen, in the United States (US) and Canada, has made some advancements towards developing audience research standards for the new interactive media, forming an alliance in May 1995 for this purpose with two other American companies, Yankelovich Partners and ASI Market Research ("Race is on to develop standards for measuring interactive media", ibid., 1). Known as ANYwhere Online, the goal of the new organization is to develop a comprehensive range of research services for the online world. As each partner specializes in a different area of research (i.e., Nielsen providing television audience measurement, Yankelovich analysing social trends and consumer values, and ASI performing advertising and television programming research), together they provide an integrated approach to studying the activities of users of the Internet, and determining when and where advertising is effective in online transactions.

The main competitor for ANYwhere Online is Next Century Media in New York. It has developed a software application called Interactive Information Index, which compiles

19

usage data for web sites and generates up to 13 reports of that data (ibid., 1). Another major competitor of ANYwhere Online is Arbitron, which provides a wide range of media research services to broadcasters, cable systems, advertisers, advertising agencies and new media industries (Interactive study: Arbitron's new media Pathfinder study identifies consumer segments for interactive marketers to pursue, 1995, 13). Arbitron's primary system, known as ScanAmerica, measures the television viewing behaviour and the product purchasing decisions of a sample of households. Participant households are supplied with peoplemeteors, for monitoring their media use, and electronic wands, for scanning the universal barcodes of products that they purchase. Arbitron recently produced the new media pathfinder study which identifies consumer groups for interactive media marketers (ibid., 13).

In October 1995, A.C. Nielsen of Canada, conducted the first random-sample based Internet survey in Canada, covering usage patterns and attitudes across the country (Boyd, 1996). The specific objectives of the research were: to understand Canadians' access and use of online services; to determine the demographic profile of current users; to identify the services that subscribers favour; to analyse the use of services at home, work, and school; and to probe Canadians' attitudes and actions toward online marketing and shopping. The purpose of the survey was to meet the needs of businesses interested in using this information for marketing (ibid.).

A unique methodology involving what Nielsen calls the HomeScan Panel was used to conduct the Internet survey. A sample of approximately 6,700 Canadian households were issued electronic wands to scan barcodes that corresponded to their answers on the survey,

20

and respondents were instructed to submit their surveys to Nielsen's mainframe via telephone link. To ensure that the results would reflect the usage patterns and attitudes of Canadians, the sample selected represented the population demographics and the demographics of every region of the country. Nielsen did ensure full representation of younger generations because it was believed that they make up a significant portion of Internet users (ibid.).

The data that the survey produced is summarized as follows: the total number of households that responded was 5,644, which gave a response rate of 84.1%; the total number of individual household members that responded was 11,576; and 22.0% of those individuals said that they have access to Internet from home, school and/or workplace. Of the 22.0% who access the Internet: 20.0% said that they access it at home and at work or school, while 53.7% said that they only access it at work or school, and 26.3% only access it at home; the majority said that their usage was paid for by work, school or some other source, while 25.0% said that they paid for the services themselves; 55.0% said that they were male, while 45.0% said that they were female; 53.0% said that they were between the ages of 25 and 44 years old; and 43.0% said that they were "beginner" users of the Internet, while only 3.7% claimed to be "experts" (ibid.).

Probably the biggest advancement that A.C. Nielsen (of the US and Canada) has made in audience research for the Internet is a relationship that it formed with another company in the United States called Internet Profiles Corporation (I/PRO) (ibid.). This organization is one of the leading provider of services and software for measurement and analysis of web site usage. Using the expertise and reputation of Nielsen, I/PRO markets

21

three services: I/COUNT, I/AUDIT and I/CODE (described below). These services provide the demographics and usage patterns of web sites (ibid.).

I/COUNT is installed on web servers and the usage data of sites subscribed to the service is transmitted nightly to I/PRO where it is processed, encoded, indexed and loaded into a database. Using any browser, web site owners/managers can access the collected data at I/PRO's site to conduct analyses and run reports. By breaking down the data in various ways, site owners/managers can examine and analyse the following: their most frequently accessed files and directories; the efficiency of their documents as a function of frequency and recency of use; the navigational paths that users take to get to their sites; the geographic distribution, the number of employees, and the revenue of companies accessing their sites; the number of pages or screens viewed per visit and how long was spent at each of them; the names of organizations accessing a particular server; and the specific sections of it that they utilize. Web site owners/managers can complete their tasks at varying time intervals (i.e., daily, weekly or monthly) and compare the results to industry standards. In producing reports, site owners/managers either create their own or choose reports pre-formatted by I/PRO. In either case, site owners/managers transfer their reports online, automatically or according to a preset schedule. To verify their results, they subscribe to I/PRO's I/AUDIT service, which provides a third-party analysis of site usage, and audits advertising banners on web sites to provide the following additional data: ads viewed by day; ads clicked on per day; comparisons of advertisers on site without compromising their confidentiality; and a summary of advertiser statistics by page (ibid.).

22

To supplement these services (I/COUNT and I/AUDIT), I/PRO developed the I/CODE Universal Registration System. For the purpose of providing web site owners/managers with the demographics of their visitors, as compared to other sites and industry norms, the I/CODE system was designed to work as follows: I/PRO places its I/CODE logo/banner on sites that subscribe to the service; an incentive (e.g., prize, gift or access to custom web site content) is offered to entice users to "click" on I/CODE and complete a registration form (see appendix A for the I/CODE registration form); and, on the registration form, users provide personal contact and demographic information, and create a password, providing access to other sites subscribed to I/CODE. I/PRO will customize the registration form by incorporating the questions, incentives, logos, colours and graphics of web site owners/managers (ibid.).

The benefit of the I/CODE system to site owners/managers is that when users get passwords at their sites, they have exclusive rights to share the user profiles with I/PRO. While site owners/managers are entitled to demographic information, I/PRO guarantees that it will not disclose users' identities or personal contact information without their explicit authorization. In addition, I/CODE offers web site owners/managers the following: insight into the depth of repeat visits to their sites; audience preferences and reactions to the content of their sites; and aggregated audience demographics for all web sites subscribed to I/CODE. Without this system, site owners/managers normally ask users to register at each site and create a separate password for future access. Boyd (ibid.), the then Director for Interactive Media Research Services at A.C. Nielsen of Canada, thought that the problems with site-specific registration were that: it does not provide aggregate information on audience

23

members across sites; and it is problematic for users because they have to fill out multiple questionnaires and remember a number of passwords (ibid.).

At the time of this research, Nielsen was promoting I/COUNT, I/AUDIT and I/CODE as a package of services that provides web site owners/managers with the ability to illustrate their audience demographics and usage patterns to advertisers (ibid.). While these three services were designed to extract more individualized information on audiences of the Internet, emphasis was still placed on aggregating the results. Interestingly, an I/PRO representative recently revealed that in October 1996 the I/CODE service in particular was discontinued. It seems that Internet users were reluctant to provide the information that was requested on the system's registration form.

Currently, I/PRO and Nielsen promote a system called NetLine, which consists of a piece of software installed on the server of web site owners/managers, designed to analyse how people move through and use a web site. It collects user access information and transfers it to I/PRO where it is processed and stored to generate reports. Those reports answer questions such as: How many visitors are coming to the site? How does this vary by day of the week and time of day? From which sites did visitors come? From which organizations are they visiting? How many pages are they reading? Are they browsing the site or looking for specific information? How do they move through the site? From which pages do most people leave the site? How long are they spending at the site? What country do they come from (ibid.)?

Evidently, audience researchers are challenged by the foreign characteristics of the Internet. This new interactive medium provides a context so different from the traditional

24

forms of media. Audience research methods deployed in traditional media are not simply transferrable to the Internet because asking its users to record their habits and aggregating them does not provide vendors with enough audience data in today's customized-mass-production economy. Furthermore, while advertising vendors have always placed great importance on audience research for the traditional forms of media, they have relied on external sources for their data. The reason is that in traditional media, vendors, advertisers, advertising agencies, media organizations and audience research firms have distinct and separate roles. However, on the Internet, these roles tend to overlap, causing the identity of audience researchers to be ambiguous. This situation arises because the Internet presents a different set of research parameters: it is an interactive medium rather than a passive one; subscribers to it view vendor's sites on the World Wide Web as opposed, for example, to television programs; subscribers can complete commercial transactions at the same time; and vendors can conduct marketing surveys in the process. The Internet is a medium of two-way communication, which vendors utilize to: promote their products/services; conduct commercial transactions with their consumers; and research their consumers.

Audience research organizations have large incentives to design systems for the Internet that extract detailed private information from individual subscribers. In accepting this challenge, researchers must implement their systems during and within the direct interactions of consumers and vendors. It makes sense that audience researchers should attend to the consumer's perspective of the normative elements of commercial interactions involving the disclosure of private information. Audience researchers would have a better chance of meeting their objectives if they avoid disturbing commercial interactions on the

25

Internet, especially because there is evidence that consumers are already concerned about vendors tracking their private information. The significance of this is that audiences are not only characterized by objective qualities such as size and composition, audience members have significant subjective and intersubjective characteristics that must be considered by researchers in the context of the Internet. Approaching audience research on this basis is the subject of the next chapter.

26

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

Audience research methods have generally assumed audiences to be an aggregate of individuals (Anderson et.al., 1980, 264). Meanwhile, audiences are not only characterized by objective qualities of size and composition (McQuail et.al., 1974, 289). They also have significant subjective and intersubjective characteristics because their individual members live in concrete everyday contexts, jointly constructing their meanings, realities, identities and cultures. A few research efforts have aimed to fill this subjective/intersubjective gap in audience research by using a communication-theory approach (Ang, 1990, 250). This chapter looks at five communication-theory approaches to audience research. The first section provides a summary of them and their limitations in terms of this study. The second section covers, in more detail, the approach thought to be the most useful for the research of this thesis.

Communication-theory Approaches to Audience Research

This section discusses the perspectives and the limitations of five major communication-theory approaches to audience research: 'effects' research; 'uses and gratifications' research; the 'political economy' perspective; the 'cultural studies' perspective; and the 'social constructionist' perspective. With the exception of 'effects' research and 'uses and gratifications' research, which are treated together for purposes of organization and understanding, each approach is summarized under its own heading.

27

'Effects' Research and 'Uses and Gratifications' Research

Two approaches to communication studies that have dominated audience research are 'effects' research and 'uses and gratifications' research (Jensen et.al., 1990, 210). Respectively, they have sought answers to two questions: What do the media do to individuals? What do individuals do with the media? 'Effects' research takes media content and its consumption as its point of departure and assumes that the meanings decoded by audience members are the same as those encoded in the content (Rosengren, 1974, 282). From this perspective, the media is a threat to individuals' freedom and autonomy (Biocca, 1984, 59). The messages and meanings that individuals get from the media originate in the content, and the more time that individuals spend with the media, the more likely they are to have similar perceptions of reality (Gunter, 1988, 109).

The problem with 'effects' research is that it deflects attention away from the larger social contexts of the media (Gitlin, 1978, 206). It was largely for this reason that researchers such as Paul Lazarsfeld began paying more attention to variables that seem to intervene in interactions between media messages and audience members. For example, in a study with Elihu Katz, Lazarfeld found that opinion leaders mediate between mass communication and audiences. By this route, Lazarfeld and Katz became more interested in the role of individuals in the mass communication process, thereby inaugurating what they called the "personal influence" tradition of mass media research. This seemed to shift research efforts from focussing on the effects of media content to focussing on the audience members (ibid., 206-238). This is foundational to 'uses and gratifications' research, as labelled by Elihu Katz (Carey et.al., 1974, 226). While the 'uses and gratifications' approach

28

takes research from behavioural models of communication toward more sophisticated

methods that examine the medium-audience relationship in a broader social context, this type

of research seems to focus too exclusively on individual cognition; and while it illuminates

some aspects of the uses and gratifications of individuals in their use of mediated

communication, it tells little about the influence of social structures and processes in the

construction of meaning. The major limitation of 'uses and gratifications' research is that

mass communication is still treated largely in isolation from certain social processes (ibid.,

226-239). This perspective gives no consideration to the following: how the media shapes

and limits social roles; how social roles encourage patronage of certain media content; and

how social roles influence interpretations of media content.

'Political Economy' Perspective

" A good criticism of the media is firmly grounded in an understanding of its industrial structure." (Meehan, 1988, 184).

This is the central focus of the 'political economy' perspective of the media. This

perspective assumes a capitalist outlook, regarding communication resources and products

as commodities, perceiving that media industry forms distinct markets. It is the

interrelationship of the markets that determines the content of media messages (ibid.). Take

television for example, its primary markets include advertisers, programming networks, and

audience research firms, and these markets interconnect based on the needs of advertisers.

The networks choose certain programming schedules to encourage audiences to increase their

viewing time. The programming networks then sell portions of audience viewing time to

advertisers who use it to market products and services (ibid., 184-222). This makes the

29

audience a commodity of the mass media and the activity of watching a critical aspect of that commodity (Smythe, 1981, 124).

In order to buy and sell viewing time, advertisers and media organizations require information about the audience, including things like its size, composition, tastes, and attitudes. (Ang, 1991, 3). As it is the role of audience research firms to provide this information, this is how they interconnect. Audience research firms produce the official descriptions of audiences that form the basis of economic transactions among the distinct markets of the media industry. The discourse researchers use in their function provides further knowledge about the audience that is critical to the economy of the industry. As Ang (ibid., 57) explains:

"It is through ratings discourse that the social world of actual audiences is incorporated in the complex system of production and exchange that keeps the industry going...audience measurement is not a social science, but social technology."

Audience research is a way of disciplining the audience because it produces a discourse that portrays itself as a matter of research, which increases its credibility and legitimacy. Individuals incorporate this discourse into their social worlds and assume a position in the audiences that it constructs. The 'political economy' perspective understands that the media convey the meaning systems of the dominant culture, to be adopted by audience members (Curran et.al., 1982, 57). In terms of this study, the limitation of the 'political economy' perspective is that it views audience members as individuals with specific readings of media texts, and thus it ignores the whole notion of multiple readings and any resistance that can result.

30

'Cultural Studies' Perspective

To elucidate significant changes that take place in society, the 'cultural studies' perspective is the most effective approach largely because it situates culture historically and socially, examining how media, ideologies, gender, race, class etc. relate in the formation of culture (Allor, 1988, 224). In doing this, 'cultural studies' research adopts a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on social theory, critical theory, communication theory, literary studies, philosophy, economics, politics, history, Marxism, feminism, structuralism, post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, hermeneutics, etc.

In terms of audience research, the 'cultural studies' perspective relates individuals' interpretations of the media and its messages to several determinants. This is the major limitation of this perspective for this study, the focus is too broad. The 'cultural studies' approach involves a sophisticated analysis of the media, connecting culture, communications and the wider political-economic context, showing that the encoding and decoding of media content are shaped by constraints imposed by other social institutions (Davies, 1988, 9-15). This does not mean that the media is dismissed as an instrument of dominant ideology (Kellner, ibid., 36). The perspective of cultural studies does not assume that there is one ruling class that claims one truth. The perspective takes into account audience resistance as a form of subordinate power, perceiving that individuals may engage in "oppositional readings" of media messages, thereby resisting the intentions behind those messages. The 'cultural studies' perspective discerns that dominance and resistance are intertwined, giving rise to competing discourses that cause the composition of the ruling class to change periodically (ibid., 36-53).

31

'Social Constructionist' Perspective

The theory of social constructionism perceives that communication constitutes the world as people know it. Reality (i.e., objects and events) is not something external to individuals that they describe in conversation. Reality is constructed by individuals in their patterns of communication, meaning everything from economic systems to riding a bicycle are collectively constructed by the continuing dialectic of individuals' interpretations and actions. While constructing and reconstructing reality, individuals interact according to normative rules enforced by society, behaving as expected by projecting certain images of themselves and showing proper respect for others and the environment. The normative rules differ amongst interactions because they are contingent on the interaction and the environment in which it takes place (Lull, 1982, 3). The rules that are applicable are only known as individuals perform specific actions to communicate the way in which they intend to act and the way in which they intend others to respond. As individuals act accordingly, they often do so unthinkingly, meaning they decide consciously and subconsciously how to behave.

The 'social constructionist' perspective focuses on the interactions of individuals and the normative rules that they follow (ibid., 3-11). In terms of audience research, this perspective focuses on the interaction between media texts and audience members, looking closely at the point when individuals encounter the media and examining the ways in which meaning is constructed (Carragee, 1990, 81). The 'social constructionist' perspective perceives that media texts draw multiple interpretations from their audience members because members form "interpretative communities" based on shared rules for the reception

32

of media content (Lindlof, 1988, 92). Audience members actively interpret media texts according to their social backgrounds, rather than passively consuming encoded messages.

A major theoretical problem with the 'social constructionist' perspective is that it considers audience members to be actively and freely engaged in the social constructions of their realities. The theory emphasizes the actions of individuals in particular social settings and downplays the contexts, structures, institutions and so on that influence those actions (ibid., 82-87). However, the 'social constructionist' perspective is a useful theory in which to frame the research of this thesis precisely because it focuses on the interaction processes of individuals. In this study, how consumers and vendors construct their interactions involving the disclosure of private information is significant in designing of audience research methods for the Internet. The next section of this chapter reviews the details of the 'social constructionist' perspective that are applicable to this research.

'Social Constructionist' Perspective

The 'social constructionist' perspective assumes that normative rules are central to "socially constructing and re-constructing reality". As Meyrowitz (1985, 24) says:

"Each defined situation has specific rules and roles. A funeral demands behaviours different from those at a wedding, a party has rules different from those of a classroom, a job interview entailed roles that are distinct from those in a psychiatric counselling session...When people enter any given interaction, therefore the first thing they need to know is "what is going on here?" They need to know the definition of the situation. The definition of the situation is a simple concept that is used to describe the complex dynamics of encounters and the rules that govern them."

W.B. Pearce (1989, 23), a major contributor to the theory of social constructionism, explains that communication is governed by two types of rules, regulative and constitutive.

33

Regulative rules determine the process by which particular actions are considered appropriate. Constitutive rules specify the following: the necessity of certain acts; how meanings are to be assigned to experiences; and how meanings of one action affect the meanings of other actions. An act of communication is interpreted by an individual according to certain constitutive rules and regulative rules direct the next act, which is described by constitutive rules (ibid., 23-37).

The 'social constructionist' perspective claims that an adequate analysis of interaction ought to assume that communicative behaviour includes all acts, and that those acts not only convey meaning but also initiate a response and an outcome. The proper study of interaction focuses on the syntactical relations of the actions of individuals (Goffman, 1967, 2). Pearce (ibid., 79) developed a theory of communication known as "the coordinated management of meaning", which postulates that individuals do not act in isolation of each other. Individuals typically engage in complex sequences of behaviour in which any one act takes on significance only as it is related to other acts in a sequence (Pearce et.al., 1979, 68). The meaning of a certain act is established by its position in a sequence of acts because it is determined by its antecedent and subsequent acts. The theory of "coordinated management of meaning" simultaneously focuses on the relationship between intrapersonal and interpersonal systems of meaning and action, establishing that the substance of communication is created by the intertwining of intrapersonal systems (Pearce, ibid., 79-83). Individuals participate in undirected communication where they must coordinate their meaning according to the interdependence of personal factors and external social factors.

34

Similar to this, but unrelated, the theory of strategic interaction postulates that individuals typically make use of information collected in their immediate environment in order to respond to each other effectively, and the individuals themselves, as a source of information, are no different from other aspects of the environment (Goffman, 1969, 11). When they are in each other's company, individuals communicate a great deal of information about themselves and each other. By their mere presence, manner, appearance and actions, they reveal something about themselves and whoever is interacting with them. As an interaction continues, the individuals involved become aware of the interpretations that they and the other individuals have about themselves, each other, their interaction, and their relationship, and their subsequent acts reflect all this (Ibid., 2-12).

The knowledge that individuals have of the knowledge of others concerning what is occurring in their interaction effects the outcome of that interaction. When individuals consider making a certain response, they are likely to delay it until they have imagined the consequences of their actions for others involved and the responses that the consequences will initiate. Individuals try to predict the motives, intentions and actions of others by taking their point of view. By doing this, individuals control their own actions to influence the responses of others and the outcome of the interaction. Referring to this as "strategic interaction", Goffman (ibid, 101) summarizes:

"Two or more parties must find themselves in a well-structure situation of mutual impingement where every possible move carries fateful implications for all of the parties. In this situation, each player must influence his own decision by his knowing that the other players are likely to try to draw out his decision in advance, and may even appreciate that he knows this is likely. Courses of action or moves will then be made in light of one's thoughts about the other's thoughts about oneself. An exchange of moves made on the basis of this kind of orientation to self and others can be called strategic interaction."

35

The theory of strategic interaction is similar to theory of symbolic interaction which takes into account the interdependence of individuals' actions and their mutual awareness of those actions (ibid., 102). Researchers of the 'social constructionist' perspective draw on the theory of symbolic interactionism by perceiving that: meaning is created and maintained in the interaction of individuals; and individuals give meaning to their experiences based on the verbal and nonverbal symbols of communication that are used within their social groups. Reality is interpreted, expressed and analysed in symbolic interaction (Pearce, 1992, 145).

The assumptions of the social constructionist perspective are: 1) individuals do not necessarily have the same knowledge about their world and themselves; 2) individuals' knowledge is largely different across time and cultures; 3) the extent to which knowledge remains the same over time is contingent on social structures and processes; and 4) the understanding that individuals have of the world is not only socially constructed, but it also historically influenced. Because the construction of reality is done in accordance with the meaning that individuals allocate to their communicative action, understanding how individuals construct reality becomes a matter of understanding subjective processes of thought and action (Berger et.al., 1966, 20).

The question is: How do individuals make meaning or sense of actions within their interactions? Put a couple of other ways: What mental processes do individuals go through to make sense of actions within their interactions? What are the mental mechanics that operationalize the interactional processes of individuals? These questions are answered in qualitative research. The purpose of this type of research is to investigate the thoughts and actions of individuals. Qualitative research explores the ways in which individuals conceive

36

the world in general and a situation in particular. It maps out the mental processes by which individuals view the world by gaining access to their cultural concepts and showing how those concepts interrelate to form mental processes (Feldman, 1995, 2-8). See the beginning of chapter four for more details on qualitative research.

Qualitative studies as a method of audience research may still be considered relatively new (Moores, 1993, 3). Studies that have been conducted emphasize the capability of audience members to construct their own meanings, cultures, and identities. However, it seems that there have been no qualitative studies strictly framed in the theory of social constructionism conducted on the disclosure of private information in computer-mediated commercial interactions. Research in this area is only beginning to be considered (Samarajiva, 1996b, 131). The next section explores some research that has been done on information disclosure in the electronic environment.

Research on Disclosure of Private Information in the Electronic Environment

Ruggles (1993, 28) researched the experiences of North Americans using telephone Call Management Services (CMS), such as call waiting and call number display, to help Australians make decisions on offering similar services to their residents. Using a communication-theory approach, Ruggles (ibid., 28) found that CMS have caused North Americans to become increasingly concerned about their privacy. Individuals are concerned about the degree to which they control disclosure of their private information. CMS extract a great deal of information from individuals involuntarily, and the telephone networks sell that information to commercial organizations for marketing purposes. Information disclosure

37

is normally a voluntary and sequential process in which individuals establish a level of trust for revealing further information. Decisions about disclosing private information are important in structuring quality interactions and building positive relationships. Ruggles (ibid., 37) suggests that new telecommunications services should be designed to respect people's privacy by integrating, where possible, strategic elements of quality interactions (ibid., 28-37).

Similarly, Samarajiva (1996a, 6) argues:

"Communication networks are technological environments for human interaction. They should be designed on the principle that human beings should be allowed to negotiate the terms and conditions of their social relations in technological public environments (electronic public space) in the same way that they negotiate such relations in "natural" public environments...At base, the rule is simple: allow the parties in a relationship to negotiate the terms and conditions of the relationship. This rule can be used as a normative criterion to guide policy on network design."

Individuals are also becoming concerned about their privacy in interactive media. Since the new economy allows for customized production of goods and services, vendors are placing greater emphasis on differentiating potential consumers (ibid., 4). Vendors believe that interactive media can help them gather information on their markets and build one-to-one relationships with consumers. As Samarajiva (ibid., 5) says:

"In sum, flexible customized production requires surveillance of spatially dispersed, dynamic, target markets and the building of relationships with consumers. Flexible production goes with flexible marketing, which goes with consumer surveillance. The new economy places emphasis on relationships rather than one-time transactions."

It is still not clear how to create a trustworthy electronic environment for vendors and consumers to build relationships, it is not as simple as passing legislation on the practice of information collection (Samarajiva, 1996b, 131). The consumer surveillance techniques that

38

vendors deploy are having negative effects on the establishment of trustworthy relationships with consumers. Vendors are extracting information from consumers involuntarily or requesting it without providing an equivalent information about themselves. A critical element in building a relationship is trust, which is easily jeopardized by one or more parties not providing adequate information in terms of their relationship (Ruggles, 1992). Individuals who interact in electronic settings should be responsible for sharing some information about themselves and for negotiating the boundaries by which they act, just like they are in face-to-face settings, because their interactions are affected by the same social forces, relations, and conflicts (Samarajiva, ibid.).

The questions that arise are: How do individuals develop an electronic social structure? Do they apply norms from other settings or do they develop new ones (Kiesler et.al., 1984, 1125-1127)? Because the electronic environment is relatively new and no rules seem to exist for interacting in it, the most efficient way that people will find to adapt to it will be to apply what they know about their interactions in familiar settings (Good, 1988, 41). As Good (ibid.) explains:

"One could spend hours analysing the costs and benefits of each situation in order to derive the maximum benefit from it. However, time is valuable too, and clearly the sensible approach to this problem of processing limits is to develop a scheme in which extensive intellectual work is only done under certain circumstances. Often it is wisest to follow habits we have developed for ourselves, or the routines which are offered by our culture and society, and to save our intellectual resources for those conditions where the peculiarities of a situation provoke their use."

Individuals apply what they know about their interactions across mediums of communication, developing relationships in the same ways. Meanwhile, computer-mediated communication has not been considered an appropriate way to conduct intimate interactions

39

(e.g., getting to know someone). The only difference is that the development of relationships progresses at a slower rate in a computer-mediated setting (Walther, 1992, 61). Whenever computer-mediated communication is compared to face-to-face communication, the effect of time is overlooked (ibid., 58). Interactions in the two settings progress at different rates because computer-medicated communication is slower than face-to-face communication, during the same time interval. In the former environment, it takes longer to exchange messages in the former environment, but after a sufficient number of messages are exchanged in both mediums, a relationship progresses to the same level of intimacy (ibid.).

The impersonal nature of computer-mediated communication may only relate to initial or one-time interactions between individuals previously unknown to one another (ibid., 66). If the individuals continued to interact, they would accumulate textual information about the characteristics and attitudes of each other, causing them to respond with more personal messages. If individuals have no other source of information about each other than their computer-mediated messages, those individuals are likely to become motivated to develop impressions of one another, and seek strategic elements of their interactions that help them determine a level of trust with one another (ibid.). Meyrowitz (1985, 37-39) explains further that:

"...we need to abandon the notion that social situations are only encounters that occur face-to-face in set times and places. We need to look at the larger, more inclusive notion of "patterns of access to information." "Information" is used here in a special sense to mean social information: all that people are capable of knowing about the behaviour and actions of themselves and others. The term refers to the nebulous "stuff" we learn about each other in acts of communication...Another way to think about a social situation is as an "information-system," that is, as a given pattern of access to the behaviour of other people...The concept of information-systems suggests that physical settings and media "settings" are part of a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Places and media both foster set

40

patterns of interaction among people, set patterns of social information flow...Interaction settings themselves, of course, are not the only source of situational definitions. The shared meanings of situations develop over time and through social traditions. Religious ritual, social custom, and legal codes all contribute to the stock of situational definitions, and they guide people's use of available settings...The point is that while mediated and live encounters are obviously very different in some ways , they can be analysed using similar principles."

In determining how the new interactive media can be designed to enable the formation of trust between consumers and vendors, the physical or technical environment is not the only consideration. It seems just as important to consider the social interactions of consumers and vendors in electronic-mediated settings as compared to face-to-face settings. The results of this comparison should reveal how consumers and vendors use information disclosure management processes to create trust between them, and should also reveal the problems that arise in transferring commercial interactions from one medium of communication to the other. Face-to-face interpersonal communication is the standard against which all communication events are compared because it contains within it all the dimensions and expectations of communication to which all individuals are accustomed (Walther, ibid., 61-69). It is important to note that while the normative elements of interaction are not affected by the medium of communication, the specific actions required to enact the elements are determined by the setting (Meyrowitz, ibid., 43). However, there are certain basic structural elements of interaction that remain constant across mediums of communication, guiding the behaviour of individuals. The next section looks at research conducted on interactions, specifically related to the disclosure of private information and commercial settings.

41

Research on Disclosure of Private Information and on Consumer-Vendor Interactions

This section reviews research that was conducted on consumer-vendor interactions and on the disclosure of private information in face-to-face interactions. In studying the disclosure of private information, Altman and Brown (1981, 112) observed that individuals explore the early stages of a relationship, gradually disclosing private information. The rate and level of development of a relationship are affected by the rewards and costs that arise as a result of interaction; and the greater the rewards relative to the costs, the faster a relationship moves towards a level of intimacy (ibid., 112-126).

Petronio (1991, 313) studied the management of private information disclosure between married couples, at the point when the process is initiated by one partner providing unsolicited information, and found that couples have a need to regulate the way that they communicate in order to avoid having their privacy violated. Married couples create boundaries of communication and manage the intersection of those boundaries to protect their privacy. The boundary management process that married couples abide by involves: one spouse deciding whether or not to disclose private information based on the perceived privacy level of the information, the need to disclose information, and the potential outcome of the situation; that spouse sending a message to the other spouse, not only disclosing information but also indicating expectations about a response; and the receiving spouse determining a response by evaluating the expectations and seeking information about the motives and intentions of the disclosing spouse. The receiving spouse takes into account five sources of information, including: the content of the message; the context of the message; nonverbal cues; the physical environment; and information from memory (ibid., 313-316).

42

Focussing on consumer-vendor relationships, Barnes (1995, 107) observed that there is little consistency between the concept of relationship marketing and how it is practised. It seems that vendors relate relationship marketing to database marketing. The goal is to use communication technology to collect, store and analyse detailed information on consumers, in order to develop relationships with them. While a more intimate knowledge of consumers may be considered important in building relationships with them, it does not mean that consumers themselves will feel that they are involved in a relationship.

Similar to Samarajiva, Barnes (ibid., 111) noted that the approach to relationship marketing has been too much from the perspective of the vendor. Vendors have not spent enough time considering what a relationship with a commercial organization means to the consumer. In order to properly develop a relationship marketing strategy, vendors need to know more about the situations that are conducive to the establishment of positive relationships with consumers, and vendors need to understand this from the consumer's perspective (ibid., 107-115).

Crane (1965, 15) was concerned with the processes by which consumers and vendors make decisions to buy and sell and how their separate decision-making processes converge in their interaction. To effect the consumption behaviour of consumers, vendors create advertising messages by taking into account: the audiences expected to receive the messages; the act of communicating itself; and the audience's actual response. The decision-making processes of consumers are influenced by creative advertisements along with: publicity; word of mouth; personal selling; and certain attributes of the vendor, including visibility, credibility, power, and attractiveness (ibid., 15-75).

43

From the perspective of social exchange theory, Levy and Zaltman (1975, 4) observed that consumer-vendor interactions constitute a communication process that produces a social system. Because consumers and vendors share the goal of completing transactions, they must interact, using verbal and nonverbal communication and respecting the social norm of reciprocity. Reciprocity refers to the sense of obligation one individual has for providing something of value to another individual who has provided something of value. This interactional process creates shared ways of thinking amongst consumers and vendors and thus within society (ibid., 4-25).

Sheth (1975, 131) developed a more comprehensive conceptual framework of consumer-vendor interaction (shown in appendix B). The basic postulate underlying the framework is that the quality of consumer-vendor interactions is determined by the style and content of communication. Content entails everything involved in suggesting, offering, promoting or negotiating a product/service. Style includes the preferences and normative expectations of both the consumer and the vendor about the process of interaction itself. These two components of communication in commercial interactions are determined by a number of personal, organizational and product-specific factors (ibid., 131-134).

By establishing that the decision-making processes of consumers are essentially the same in nontraditional settings (e.g., health, education, welfare) and traditional settings (e.g., retail), Sternthal and Zaltman (1975, 4) realized that the conceptual framework of consumer-vendor interactions created by Sheth is applicable to a variety of situations. This makes the framework useful for researching consumers' behaviour in different contexts, with the objective of determining how consumers' behaviour is affected by the situational factors of

44

a particular setting. For Sternthal and Zaltman (ibid., 141), the question was: To what extent do situational factors influence consumer behaviour? Applied to this study, the question is: To what extent do situational factors influence the interactions of consumers and vendors that involve the disclosure of private information? The answer to this question is given in the next section.

Disclosure of Private Information in Commercial Interactions

In North American culture, consumers and vendors expect interactions with each other that generate coherent, unproblematic paths to completed transactions. They expect each other to perform certain roles, which at a basic level entail: the consumer seeking information on a particular category of products/services and subsequently making a selection from the choices available within that category; the consumer seeking information on vendors that provide the particular product/service and subsequently choosing one of the vendors to purchase from; the consumer approaching the vendor and motioning to make the purchase; the vendor requesting payment from the consumer for the product/service; and the consumer providing the payment.

In certain interactions, vendors want or need information from consumers about themselves. Examples of these types of interactions are: 1) Before completing a transaction, the vendor might want to know how a certain product fits the lifestyle of the consumer. 2) During a transaction, the vendor may need to know the financial status of the consumer for purposes of payment. 3) After the completion of a transaction, the vendor may request the name and address of the consumer for purposes of future promotions. It is important to note

45

that the events described in these examples do not necessarily take place before, during and after transactions. Vendors complicate their interactions with consumers by requesting private information from them because consumers understand that there is a possibility that their privacy will be violated. Consumers must create a level of trust with vendors before disclosing private information. Of course, the level of trust that consumers aim to create depends on the circumstances. When they are required to provide more information, consumers require a higher level of trust because they associate a greater amount of risk with the possibility of their privacy being violated (Gambetta, 1988, 227).

As stated in the introduction, trust is defined by Gambetta (ibid., 217):

"When we say we trust someone, we implicitly mean that the probability that he will perform an action that is beneficial or at least not detrimental to us is high enough for us to consider engaging in some form of cooperation with him."

Trust involves the extent to which one party assesses and accepts that another party will perform a particular action. It is related to individuals' uncertainty about the behaviour, intentions and motives of others and to how individuals deal with the possibility that their own expectations will be disappointed.

Similar to what the spouses of married couples do in their interactions, as described by Petronio (1991, 316), consumers regulate and manage the process of disclosure of private information in order to create trust. In initializing the disclosure management process, the vendor sends a message to the consumer, usually including a demand or request for information along with a promise, offer or condition set in exchange for the information. While the latter part of the message may be implicitly or explicitly stated, it is a necessary part of the disclosure management process. There must not only be an incentive for the

46

vendor to request information, there must also be a reciprocal incentive for the consumer to provide the information. The consumer should feel like something is being provided in exchange for the information and that may be as simple as the possibility of completing a transaction.

In determining a response to the request for private information, the consumer evaluates the vendor's expectations and performs attributional searches. Attributional searches involve seeking information to determine the motives and intentions of the vendor. The goal is to create trust by reinforcing or destroying normative beliefs about commercial interactions that involve the disclosure of private information (Gambetta, ibid., 222). Normative beliefs are the perceptions that society has of the roles of consumers and vendors and their expected behaviour. This is interesting because trust is required for controlling the disclosure of information, but trust is created by exercising that control competently.

Consumers approach commercial interactions involving information disclosure expecting the following: to interact with a particular representative of the vendor; the interaction to take place in a specific environment; a certain amount/type of private information to be requested; and something of value to be offered in return for disclosing the information. Consumers take these expectations into account as they interact with vendors and learn more about what each of them knows and understands about themselves, each other, their interaction, and their relationship. Like in any interaction, consumers typically make use of information collected from their immediate environment in order to respond to each other effectively, and consumers and vendors themselves, as a source of information, are no different from other aspects of the environment. In short, consumers tacitly search for

47

"situational cues" in order to develop a response to a vendor's request for private information. "Situational cues" are all the factors particular to a time and place that facilitate or inhibit the responses of consumers by revealing difficulties, risks, threats, and incentives (Sternthal et.al., 1975, 25).

The "situational cues" common to commercial interactions involving the disclosure of private information are defined by the researcher of this thesis as follows:

Content of Request: Specific information requested and the associated level of privacy, contingent on the situation. Private information includes things like name, address, e-mail address, telephone number, demographics (i.e., age, sex, marital status, etc), psychographics (i.e.,tastes, attitudes, lifestyles, etc.), medical history, financial history, legal history, etc.

Level of Reciprocity: The benefit, reward, satisfaction, etc. that is received in exchange for responding to a request for private information.

Interactional Knowledge: Information learned, implicitly or explicitly, during the interaction about what all individuals know and understand about themselves, each other, their interaction, and their relationship.

Environmental Factors: Characteristics of the physical surroundings in which the interaction takes place.

Consumers use these "situational cues" to reinforce or destroy their normative beliefs, thereby creating or destroying trust with vendors. Within this process, consumers decide whether or not to disclose further information. The disclosure management process in commercial interactions is sequential, whereby the actions of consumers only have meaning in terms of other actions that take place. Further, the dynamic nature of interaction leads consumers to use the "situational cues" in any order.

48

It is important to recall that consumers' decision-making processes are essentially the same across commercial settings. However, the behaviour of consumers is affected by the settings. While common-rule governed processes of disclosure are in operation across commercial settings, variations in the structure of interaction sequences and disclosure strategies are correlated with functional differences in the specific activities which the interactions serve to coordinate. In other words, the behaviour of consumers changes across commercial settings, but the ways in which it changes and the reasons for which it changes usually remain constant. The use of "situational cues" may differ across commercial settings, but it does not differ across the mediums of communication within a particular setting. Within a particular setting, face-to-face communication is the standard against which all communication events can be compared because it contains all the dimensions and expectations of communication to which all individuals are accustomed.

The remaining question is: How do consumers make sense of "situational cues" in face-to-face and computer-mediated interactions with vendors of different commercial backgrounds in order to manage the disclosure of private information? The research of this thesis investigates this question. The results are intended to be useful for designing audience research methods for the Internet.

49

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

How do consumers make sense of "situational cues" in face-to-face and computer mediated interactions with vendors of different commercial background in order to manage the disclosure of private information? Qualitative methodology was used to investigate the answer to this question because this methodology is deemed to be more appropriate than quantitative methodology when research explores the ways in which a certain group of individuals conceives a situation. While qualitative research may be much less precise and directive than quantitative research, it is much more intensive than extensive. As McCracken (1988, 17) says: "...qualitative research does not survey the terrain, it mines it."

Qualitative research is designed to uncover the assumptions and ideas that organize the behaviour of individuals in a particular situation as well as show how those ideas and assumptions enter into the perceptions of the individuals (Feldman, 1995, 2). A fundamental assumption of this type of research is that culture informs the thoughts and actions of individuals. Qualitative research maps out the mental processes by which individuals view the world by gaining access to cultural concepts (or categories) and showing how those concepts interrelate to form mental processes (ibid., 2-8).

This type of research does not address the issues of distribution and generalization, meaning quantitative conclusions cannot be made from a qualitative study (ibid., 18). The purpose of qualitative research is to uncover the thoughts and actions of individuals of a particular culture, rather than uncover how many individuals think and act a certain way. For this reason, it is more productive to spend a lot of time with a few individuals from the

50

culture under study. Research participants are recruited as informants of a culture, not as a sample representative of a larger population (ibid., 18-49). Representation is a non-issue in qualitative research. McCracken (ibid., 17) explains:

> "Where quantitative research requires investigators to construct a sample of the necessary size and type to generalize to the larger population, in qualitative research, the issue is not one of generalizability. It is that of access. The purpose of qualitative interview is not to discover how many, and what kinds of people share a certain characteristic. It is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world. How many and what kinds of people hold these categories and assumptions is not the issue. It is the categories and assumptions, not those who hold them, that matter."

The objective of qualitative research is to interpret and describe how the members of a culture understand a particular phenomenon as well as how culture is intrinsic in the phenomenon under investigation. The goal is to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. This type of research requires techniques of analysis that allow the investigator to sort data collected, searching out patterns of association and assumption (Feldman, ibid, 49).

In this thesis, qualitative research was designed to provide data to support the application of the theory of social constructionism to the disclosure of private information in commercial interactions. The first section of this chapter discusses the particular qualitative method used in the investigation of this study; section two describes the informants recruited from consumer culture to participate in the research; section three looks at the research instrument; and section four explains the process used to control and analyse the collected data.

51

The Long Interview

The method of qualitative research used in this study was the Long Interview because this method alleviates time and cost constraints that are normally associated with qualitative research. The Long Interview involves a four-step method of inquiry into the cultural phenomenon under investigation. The steps include: 1) a literature review of the relevant theoretical perspectives; 2) a review of relevant cultural categories; 3) an interview process; and 4) an analysis of the interview data (McCracken, ibid., 29). To clarify step two, the researcher reflects on personal knowledge and experiences of the topic under investigation to supplement information found in step one. It is precisely because qualitative researchers are working in their own culture that they can utilize the Long Interview method of inquiry to its potential. Researchers fulfil their objectives by drawing on their own experiences, imaginations, and intellect. It is through their own understanding and view of the world that they interpret the data generated in the Long Interview process (McCracken, ibid., 12-29)

Steps one and two of the four-step inquiry structure the design of the remaining two steps by: establishing cultural categories and the interrelationship of those concepts, all of which the interview process is intended to explore; and indicating what to look for when analysing the interview data. The purpose of the interview process is to explore the cultural categories and relationships that were discovered in the literature and cultural reviews. An interview guide is designed around the categories that were identified and the interrelationship of those categories, with the objective of generating sufficient data for analysis. The objective of data analysis is to show how the categories, their interrelationship, and the assumptions that they generate inform the views of the culture under study about the

52

world in general and about the topic of research (ibid., 29-42). McCracken (ibid., 7) explains:

> "The Long Interview calls for special kinds of preparation and structure, including the use of an open-ended questionnaire, so that the researcher can maximize the value of time spent with members of the sample. It also calls for special patterns of analysis so that the researcher can maximize the value of time spent analysing the data."

The Long Interview method of qualitative research involves an accelerated yet focussed and intense process which reduces the indeterminacy and redundancy that results in more unstructured qualitative research methods. It is an efficient and productive method of inquiry when certain experiences of a particular group of individuals is the subject of investigation, and lengthy participant observation within that group is impractical or impossible. While the Long Interview method is less intrusive because the researcher is neither intimately nor repeatedly involved in the lives of research participants, the method is intended to achieve qualitative objectives (ibid., 5-7).

The Long Interview is designed to observe the actions of individuals and to determine the meaning behind those actions. Researchers have time to: listen to what people say, study their use of the materials and objects around them; and make inferences from all this. This method allows researchers to determine how a particular idea, thing, event, etc. works as a constituent of an individual's daily experience. A fundamental assumption is that a large part of people's behaviour consists of implicit knowledge, and that individuals act towards things according to the meanings that they have for them. By accessing the implicit assumptions that underlie people's actions, researchers can see how they define and experience the objects and events of their world (ibid., 7-13).

53

In this study, the Long Interview was designed to get a group of informants from North American consumer culture to talk about the disclosure of private information in face-to-face and computer-mediated commercial interactions in three settings: retail services, personal services, and legal and financial services. Retail services includes convenience stores, grocery stores, department stores, clothing stores, jewellery stores, cosmetic stores, electronic stores, sporting goods stores, restaurants, etc.; personal services encompasses health care and dental care; and legal and financial services covers law firms, banking institutions, insurance companies, investment companies, etc. These three commercial settings were arbitrarily selected for this research because they span a large number of situations where vendors request private information from consumers. These settings represent different points on a continuum of situations in which consumers expect to be asked for different amounts/types of information.

During the first half of the interviews, the informants were asked about their face-to-face experiences in retail services, personal services, and legal and financial services. In the second half, the informants were directed to visit certain web sites on the Internet, which were pre-chosen by the researcher, and then they were asked to talk about their experiences at those sites. The goal at this time was to expose the informants to a variety of computer-mediated situations in which they were asked for private information. Each informant explored three sites in total, with two of the sites being directly related to one of the three commercial settings. While more than one informant attended to a particular setting, none of the informants visited the same sites. The informants were not directed to visit web sites in each commercial setting because this would have been too time consuming. The third site

54

which all of the informants explored displayed the I/CODE audience research system (described in chapter two). The purpose of this was to compare their responses to the I/CODE system with their responses to the other sites that they visited. Ideally, the plan was to have the informants access the I/CODE system at a site from the same commercial background as the other sites that they visited, but I/CODE was inactive at the time of this research, so the informants were asked to imagine themselves in the situation.

The interviews were held in the researcher's home where access to the Internet was available. The researcher informed the informants that their involvement in the research process was entirely voluntary. The informants were given the option of deciding the location of their interviews; they were not obligated to respond to everything in the interview; and they were free to withdraw their participation at any time. The informants were also made aware of the following: the background of the researcher; the nature and purpose of the research; the nature and purpose of the Long Interview; the incentive for participating in the research, being a copy of the final thesis report; the right to anonymity; and the right to contact the University of Windsor to confirm the legitimacy of the research. Informing the research participants of these things seemed to create a level of trust with them. At the beginning of the interviews, the informants were asked to read, sign and date a participant consent form, which outlined the information above. This form (shown in appendix C) was approved by an ethics committee at the University of Windsor, along with the interview guide.

55

Research Informants

The Long Interview methodology requires six to eight informants from the culture under study to participate in the research (McCracken, ibid., 19). This research included six informants from consumer culture, including one female and five males. More detailed descriptions of the informants is given below. The descriptions were written from the responses that the informants made to questions at the beginning of their interviews. Those questions were of a biographical nature, designed to obtain descriptive details to inform the subsequent responses of the informants. In order to preserve their anonymity, the informants were given pseudonyms.

The first informant, named Barnaby Lazy, was a single male, 35 years of age. He was born in St. Catharines, Ontario into a family of five children, including three boys and two girls. Approximately ten years ago, Barnaby graduated from the University of Toronto with a degree in economics and history. At the time of the interview, he was living in Toronto and working as a Quality Control Manager for a printing and packaging company. Although Barnaby explained that his job involved computer work, his experience with the Internet was minimal. He was only exposed to the Internet in his work environment as an observer while co-workers used it. However, Barnaby had been observing others use the Internet for about a year, and he had been reading a lot about it. While the Internet was of low priority in Barnaby's routine activities, he believed that he should learn how to use it because it is something that everyone will eventually have to know. In his spare time, Barnaby said that he likes to: participate in sports; listen to all types of music; watch old movies; and watch select shows on television, especially the Simpsons.

56

The second informant, known as Jay Musique, was a single male, 22 years of age, who was born and raised in Toronto. His family consists of his mother who is originally from Paris, his father who is originally from New Delhi, and his younger brother. At the time of the interview, Jay was living in Peterborough where he was attending Trent University, working on a degree in computer science. In his spare time at the university, Jay said that he was a Disc Jockey for his own radio show. He explained that music was his primary interest and the types of music that interested him mostly were what he called techno and ambient. Jay found it difficult to define these types of music as he said:

"It's kinda like defining the Internet or Cyberspace. You can't pin point what it is because there are so many different things that are under that heading techno. There are different styles of techno. There's some techno that like ranges from hip hop and reggae, and they just speed up the beats to ludicrous speeds to like 200 beats a minute and chop it up so it's not a flowing beat. It's just bits and pieces of percussion that come in and out and get mixed all together...it's all electronic and that's it and that's, well that's what I love about it...O.K. the easiest way I can define it [ambient] is techno with no beats"

In relation to his interest in music, Jay said that he was using the Internet at home and at school for three or four years. He was subscribed to four or five different digests and news groups that he said were the only places that he could find information on his music. For this reason, the bulk of Jay's spare time was taken up with using the Internet. Other than that, he said that he watches a few select programs on television, including the Simpsons and the X-files.

The third informant, named Tom Cod, was a single male, approximately 21 years of age. He was born and raised in Ontario as an only child. At the time of the interview, he was living at home with his parents in Mississauga and working as a technical support person for an Internet service provider. Prior to his employment in this position, Tom used the Internet

57

at home for three or four hours a day for about one month. He used it primarily for purposes of entertainment, and this took up the bulk of his spare time. Other than that, Tom said he likes to: listen to classic rock music; watch television programs, especially comedies, sports and the X-files; and read books of an adventure or fictional nature.

The fourth informant, known as Max Beer, was a 37 year old male. He was born in Deep River, Ontario and raised in Ottawa with his older sister. In Ottawa, Max attended the University of Carlton and graduated with a degree in Journalism. He worked for approximately 15 years as a writer with small newspapers in Ontario and Alberta. At the time of his interview, Max was: divorced; living in Barrie with his child; and working as a writer for a pension plan in Toronto. Max explained that he used the Internet for about seven years and that he considered himself to be an "expert" user. He said that he was only using the Internet at home, eight or nine hours a month, primarily for e-mail and freelance writing. With his busy schedule of raising a child as a single parent and commuting to work in Toronto, this was the only time that Max could spare for using the Internet. When he can manage, Max said that he also likes to: play the guitar; play hockey and football; read about history; and travel.

The fifth informant, named Michael French, was a male in his mid to late 30s. He was born in Ottawa but lived a large part of his life in Quebec and France. Michael explained that his educational background included studies in chemistry and computer science. However, he had never worked in those fields. At the time of his interview, Michael was living in Toronto with his girlfriend and two children, and he was self-employed as a French Translator. In this employment, Michael said that he found the

58

Internet to be his most powerful tool. While Michael used the Internet mostly for work, he was subscribed to a news group on guitars. In his spare time, he said that he likes to: play the guitar; take part in physical activities such as running, swimming, and badminton; read about sports; and watch movie videos.

The sixth informant, known as Hally Pleasant, was a married female in her mid to late 30s. Hally was born and raised in Toronto, where she graduated from Humber College. At the time of her interview, Hally was living in Etobicoke, a suburb of Toronto, and working in the Human Resources department of a telecommunications company. Hally explained that she was also taking computer courses at Ryerson Polytechnic Institute, and that she was excited by the technology of the Internet. Hally had been using the Internet for about one year at home and at work, primarily for e-mail and accessing information. In her spare time, Hally said that she likes to: read about computer technology; dance; travel; watch comedies, hockey, the X-files and other science fictions programs on television; attend rock concerts; make crafts; and shop.

These were the six informants from consumer culture who voluntarily participated in the research of this thesis. The researcher located them through three resources, including: 1) personal contacts; 2) the client database of a family member's business; and 3) an advertisement that was posted in a number of places around the University of Toronto. The informants found in the first two ways were recruited during a telephone call made by the researcher. Those found in the third way were recruited after they made contact with the researcher on the Internet. The informants were screened to meet certain criteria: they were perfect strangers; they had no special knowledge of the topic under study; their demographics

59

varied; and they had some experience using the Internet. By interviewing consumers with different demographics, the researcher sought to gain a clear understanding of what is happening in their culture. By requiring that they have some experience with the Internet, the researcher thought that the informants could draw on that experience during their interviews, especially when they had to use the technology.

Interview Guide

The Long Interview is designed for the researcher to have some control over the collection of data (McCracken, ibid., 22). This is usually accomplished by using a well-designed interview guide that forces order on the process. The interview guide does not dictate what happens at certain points in the interview, ruling out the open-ended nature of qualitative research. The guide serves to establish a clear sense of direction so that the researcher covers everything with every informant. The questions are structured in a general way to prompt non-directive responses, open for further exploration. The objective is to spur informants to talk about the topic of research without directing what they say. The interview guide allows the researcher to find ways to bring the informants to talk about their beliefs and actions that they take for granted. The guide is flexible in that it accommodates: questions asking informants to recall experiences; facial expressions, like raising eyebrows or looking surprised; body postures; and conversation cues, like making humour or repeating a term used by a participant (ibid., 22-25).

The interview guide used in this study (shown in appendix D) had two objectives which were: 1) to get the informants to talk about what they take for granted about the

disclosure of private information in face-to-face and computer-mediated interactions with vendors in different commercial settings; and 2) to provide the researcher with a clear sense of direction and control in getting the informants to talk about their experiences. The questions were based on the cultural categories found in the literature review and cultural review (steps one and two of the four-step inquiry of the Long Interview methodology). The categories that were found were disclosure, reciprocity, trust, and relationship. In North American culture, a positive relationship between two or more individuals (or parties) means knowing and trusting one another; trust means believing that the other party will act in ways that are beneficial, or at least not detrimental, to the relationship; reciprocity means providing of something of value in return for something of value; and disclosure means divulging valuable information.

Relationship, trust, reciprocity, and disclosure are certain facts upon which social order is based in North American culture. They are socially constructed concepts that are maintained by the beliefs and practices that have developed around them and the interrelationship of them (Feldman, ibid., 16). The cultural categories - relationship, trust, reciprocity, and disclosure - normally interrelate as follows: a positive relationship between two parties is based on trust; trust is created when individuals disclose information and receive something of value in return for disclosing that information (often an equivalent amount/type of information); reciprocity follows disclosure; and disclosure does not take place without the expectation of reciprocity. The interrelationship of these cultural categories constitutes the process of "relationship building" in North American culture. Typically, relationship building is a gradual process, where individuals engage in a series of

61

interactions, divulging a little bit more information each time as the situation becomes more trustworthy.

Based on this process, consumers make sense and meaning of their world in general and of their commercial interactions involving the disclosure of private information. When consumers engage in these types of commercial interactions, the relationship-building process is implicit as background knowledge. The cultural categories and their interrelationship constitute the thoughts and actions of consumers when vendors ask them to disclose private information. Subconsciously, consumers think about the stage of the relationship-building process that they are in with a vendor requesting information, causing consumers to act accordingly. The mental process that initiates their actions involves a sequence of subconscious thoughts that correspond with the interrelationship of the cultural categories. In other words, consumers subconsciously think through the interrelationship of the cultural categories, and they relate that thought process to their immediate situation.

By behaving according to their thought processes, consumers reconstruct the meaning and reality of the cultural categories, relationship, trust, reciprocity, and disclosure, and their interrelationship. When their thought processes are challenged, consumers typically find ways to justify for the challenge and to integrate it into reality, without much thought. In the process, not only do consumers maintain the norms of their local culture, they similarly influence the larger North American culture. Consumers simultaneously reproduce the realities of their social groups and of their master culture (ibid., 40).

Based on all this, the interview guide was drafted and tested in two pilot interviews. The first pilot-test interview was held with a single male, 30 years of age. The participant

was living alone in downtown Toronto and working as a distributor of high-quality frozen foods to residential homes in Ontario. His knowledge of the Internet, and of computers in general, was minimal because he had never had reason to learn about either one. The second interview was conducted with a single female, 30 years of age. She was living in Toronto with her older brother, while attending the University of Windsor as a graduate student with the department of communications studies.

For purposes of controlling the data collected in the pilot-test interviews, the researcher used an audio cassette recorder to tape and transcribe the participants' responses. This procedure avoided the limitations of having the researcher rely on recollection to analyse the results. In a preliminary analysis, the researcher reviewed each utterance of the transcripts to make observations. The cultural categories defined above were observed in the data. For example, both participants said that a positive relationship between two parties requires understanding and trusting one another. The participants implied that creating a trustworthy or untrustworthy relationship with someone is an intersubjective process. Vendors prompt certain responses by the information that they request and by what they offer in exchange for that information. At this level of analysis, it became obvious that the interview guide needed to be revised. It needed to probe into how consumers use cultural categories to make sense of "situational cues" in face-to-face and computer-mediated interaction with vendors of different commercial backgrounds in order to manage the disclosure of private information (see appendix E for original interview guide and appendix F for pilot-test interview transcripts).

63

Process of Controlling and Analysing the Research Data

The objective of analysing the data collected in the six interviews of this research was to explore the assumptions, categories and relationships that inform the informants' view of the world in general and the topic under investigation. The Long Interview process generated so much data that the first task was to organize the data in a systematic way, efficiently for analysis. The six interviews, like to pilot-test interviews, were taped and transcribed using an audio cassette recorder. Due to the length of the transcripts they are not presented as part of this report. They are available upon request from the author of this thesis or the department of communications at the University of Windsor.

Without focussing on a particular type of interaction in a specific setting, the researcher examined each utterance of the six interview transcripts to make observations about things that affect the informants' disclosure of private information in a commercial interaction. The observations that were made were marked in the interview transcripts, next to the utterances that suggested them, as follows: size/nature of a potential transaction; perceived role of the vendor; perceived role of the consumer; amount/type of private information requested by the vendor; intentions of the vendor for requesting the information; relevance of the request to the informant's personal background, including the informant's values, interests, attitudes, etc.; guarantee of privacy provided by the vendor; incentive offered by the vendor in exchange for the information; customer service provided by the vendor; and image of the vendor.

Following this, the researcher created an electronic spreadsheet in Lotus Release 4 for Windows, using the observations named above as column headings, and the names of the

64

three commercial settings (i.e., retail services, personal services and legal and financial services) as row headings, making the spreadsheet into a matrix. The utterances that reflected the observations in each particular setting were transferred electronically from the transcripts in WordPerfect v6.0 to the spreadsheet in Lotus and placed under the proper headings. This removed from consideration all the parts of the transcripts that did not reflect an observation.

The spreadsheet allowed the researcher to easily examine the observations in relation to one another. It appeared that the observations were systematically related. There was meaningful overlap among them in terms of the "situational cues" and normative beliefs, so the utterances under the observations were re-categorized under these things as follows: amount/type of information requested fell under content of request; guarantees, incentives, and personal relevancy were categorized under level of reciprocity; intentions of the vendor and customer service were placed under interactional knowledge; image of the vendor fell under environmental factors; and role of the vendor, role of the consumer, and size/nature of a potential transaction were categorized under normative beliefs.

This process organized the data in a meaningful way for conducting an effective and efficient analysis. In relation to their headings on the Lotus spreadsheet, the utterances were subjected to an ethnomethodological analysis. This type of analysis helps a researcher find out how reality is constructed in a particular culture by focussing on how the norms of that culture are developed, maintained and changed. The key is to determine how sense or meaning is made of the norms by uncovering the mental processes by which meaning is made, or by which interpretations of behaviour are made (ibid., 8-11).

65

Ethnomethodological analysis is concerned with discovering the culturally-based mental processes that people follow to evaluate and produce acceptable behaviour in a variety of situations. The underlying assumption of this type of analysis is that members of a culture have procedures or processes for making sense of a variety of situations, and that those processes are embedded in the culture. In other words, cultures consist of procedures that their members follow to make sense of their actions and coordinate their future actions and interpretations (ibid., 13-16).

Discovering the processes that members of a culture follow to maintain their norms is not easy because no one usually talks about the processes, or is even aware that they occur. In fact, the norms and realities which the processes serve to maintain are so embedded in culture that they are typically taken for granted. When individuals interact, engaging in conversation or story telling, their norms and operational processes are implicit as background knowledge. To uncover culturally-based processes, the ethnomethodological analysis studies individuals' conversations or stories, looking for behaviours through which interpretations are made. The researcher goes through the utterances of individuals looking for behavioural cues in order to establish the assumptions and beliefs upon which interpretations are based. In the process, the researcher also considers any behaviour that violates cultural norms because the culturally-based mental processes can actually be identified more easily when this happens (ibid. 17-21).

This was the analysis performed on the data collected in this research. Data analysis was just one stage of the research process. It was preceded by data gathering and followed

66

by a process of making interpretations in terms of the research question and the applied

theory. A description of how the findings were interpreted is in the next chapter.

67

CHAPTER V

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter provides an interpretation of how consumers make sense of "situational cues" in face-to-face and computer-mediated interactions with vendors of different commercial backgrounds in order to manage the disclosure of private information. Defined in chapter three, the "situational cues" that consumers implicitly use to manage the disclosure of their private information in all commercial interactions include: content of request, level of reciprocity, interactional knowledge, and environmental factors. The intention of consumers is to build trust with vendors by confirming or destroying normative beliefs about their interactions.

While common social-rule governed processes of disclosure are in operation across commercial settings, variations in the structure of interaction sequences and disclosure strategies are correlated with functional differences in specific activities which the interactions serve to coordinate. The first section of this chapter discusses the normative beliefs that govern the consumers' disclosure strategies in face-to-face and computer-mediated interactions with vendors in retail services, personal services, and legal and financial services. The second section provides an interpretation of how consumers make sense of "situational cues" in the different commercial settings, correlated with the normative beliefs that are in operation. The discussion includes a summary and interpretation of the testimony of six informants. The intention is to show how consumers think and act, not how many of them think and act a certain way. For purposes of clarification, excerpts from the interview transcripts are provided throughout the chapter.

68

Consumers' Normative Beliefs About Commercial Interactions

Normative beliefs were defined as the perceptions consumers have of their role and expected behaviour as well as that of vendors during commercial interactions involving the disclosure of private information. As a consumer shopping for food, clothing, furniture, etc. in retail services, it is normal to be asked for personal contact information (i.e., name, address, e-mail address, and telephone number) by vendors in certain situations. For example, when ordering or refunding a produce/service, it is often standard procedure for vendors to request personal contact information.

On other occasions, retail vendors ask consumers to disclose private information about themselves in market research surveys. As a consumer in this type of situation, it is not necessary to disclose the information that a vendor requests. Consumers are obligated to disclose their information only if they want or need to establish some sort of relationship with the vendor. While this is the norm, the belief is that retail vendors ask consumers for their private information in surveys for the ultimate purpose of making profits, not building relationships. It is not that this is improper behaviour by vendors. It is understood that vendors need certain information from consumers to function competitively - measure trends, plan production, establish sales targets, develop promotions, etc. But this does not oblige consumers to help vendors. Rather, as a consumer, it is normal to exercise control over the disclosure of any information that the vendor requests.

> That's like a specific instance, but to other retail industries like, you got to [give information] to return something...(Musique, 14).
>
> They [retail vendors] have to, like I say, they have to get their market stats, their market research some how (Musique, 22).

69

> Well, in retail they're doing general market surveys and that's how they fix they're prices, fix they're products, move things along, how they plan for trends in their market industry and they want to be with the trends...they're generally looking to make a sale or a profit from you, and whatever it takes, they will do to make a sale or a profit. (Lazy, 10).
>
> I think there was a trend in the '70s where they began to ask for marketing information, so when more people are asking it, you don't really feel that, you know, it doesn't seem out of line for somebody to ask you to fill out a kind of little information form, you know. It's just, it's just as I say a gradual change and you sort of know why they're doing it, and you think, well, why not kinda thing (Beer, 22).
>
> I have more control of the situation. I don't have to really. I don't feel I have to. I can say yes or no (Pleasant, 12).

As a consumer of personal services, it is normal to expect the vendors of these services to request certain information during transactions. It is not that these vendors aim to build relationships with consumers. Rather, requesting private information from consumers is a formality embedded in the institutional structure of personal services. In order to function effectively, vendors of personal services, such as doctors and dentists, have to understand the personal backgrounds of individual consumers. As a consumer, it is necessary to divulge certain information, resulting in less control over the disclosure process. However, it is normal to trust vendors of personal services because they are expected to be professional, straightforward and honest. After all, the information they request is to be used only to service consumers, personally. From this perspective, some sort of relationship pre-exists with vendors of personal services.

> You've got to give that information if you want to use this doctor or the health system, sure, you have no choice...basically it's a personalized service and I think they draw it to apply it to you personally (Lazy, 8).

70

I mean in comparison to a retailer they have a lot more of something, I don't know what because you'll part with or give them information without a second thought whereas if you're in a different setting you'd reach across the counter and stop a person you know, like what are you asking me stupid questions like that for (Musique, 9).

For personal service, I don't think they are really trying to build a relationship. I think they are trying to understand. I think it is entirely physical. They want to know the type of person you are and what sort of activities you might be doing that might or might not lead to one condition or another. I think it all works towards one goal, better terms of reference to judge you on...entirely for the doctor's benefit, the doctor's ability to diagnose you properly (Musique, 27).

I guess it's different because it is personal. There is already a personal thing there involved. There is already a relationship established...(French, 6).

But in personal services I tend to answer more. I assume that they need the information for the service that they will provide (French, 7).

...but personal services for some reason I think you don't have much control. Probably because you want to give them information so they can bill you properly or check you out. Of course they want to know what the problems are so they can diagnose you properly, right...But I guess it is you don't have a lot of the knowledge. You figure they're the professional and they know more. You shouldn't be questioning things because they should know the answers. You don't have the information...You put trust in them. You trust that they know what they're doing. (Pleasant, 12).

I don't expect the secretary and the doctor in the dental office talking to anyone else about my problems or to be asked when I phone to make an appointment but my secretary use to but nobody ever told her (Pleasant, 15).

As a consumer of legal and financial services, it is expected that the vendors of these services will ask for private information when initial contact is made. The situation is usually mandatory, allowing consumers little control over the disclosure of private information. Because of the nature of their business, vendors of legal and financial services need certain information from consumers. The information enables these vendors to perform their functions, assuming that they use the information to: communicate with consumers; determine the level of service consumers require; and determine the risk associated with providing that service. When disclosing private information to vendors of legal and financial

71

services, these vendors can be trusted to provide a certain level of service in return. This does not necessarily mean a relationship pre-exists between vendors and consumers of legal and financial services. It does, however, mean that the vendors are trusted to respect the privacy of the information being disclosed.

> The bank doesn't need them to loan you money, you need them to loan you money. Same with legal, you're obtaining a legal service. They need your money and service too but you actually approach these places. They don't approach you (Lazy, 15).
>
> They probably use it mostly for that, for their, to find out who is going to give them, who is going to pay them back their loans and things and also the best way to get customers to invest (Musique, 16).
>
> Visa they gotta know because to give them their money or they're out the money and they don't want that...Same with legal aid. They gotta know where you are, they gotta know where to find you if you need to pay or if things come up in your case and they need to get a hold of you...(Cod, 4).
>
> At a bank you gotta go into the bank and fill out the loan application and talk to someone there and give them personal information just to see if your financially stable to get the loan and pay it back, so basically you have to tell them a little bit more. You have to go see them, they don't come see you. Same with lawyers and stuff like that (Cod, 16).
>
> Like in banks they want to see if they can make money off you. Are you a big risk for them? They have to be more careful. They might have to say no. They are trying to determine the risk and that is how I see it (French, 19).
>
> I figure it's one of those things you have to give even when you don't want to. I mean they need to know, when you go into a bank they need to know more information for a credit rating to grant you a loan (Pleasant, 13).

In all three commercial settings, retail services, personal services, legal and financial services, vendors are expected to: request a certain amount/type of information from consumers; offer something of value to consumers in exchange for their private information; interact with consumers in an appropriate manner; and interact with consumers in a certain environment. As a consumer, these things are "situational cues" that indicate when it is appropriate to disclose private information. How consumers make sense of these "situational

72

cues" in face-to-face and computer-mediated interactions with vendors in these commercial settings is mapped out in the next section.

"Situational Cues": Confirming Normative Beliefs

This section gives an interpretation of how consumers make sense of "situational cues" in face-to-face and computer-mediated interactions with vendors of different commercial backgrounds in order to manage the disclosure of private information. Descriptions of how the cues are used by consumers, in retail services, personal services, and legal and financial services, are provided under separate headings, along with the researcher's interpretations of how consumers make sense of these cues.

Content of Request

Content of request was defined as the specific information requested during a commercial interaction, and the level of privacy associated with that information. In face-to-face and computer-mediated retail settings, it is normal and acceptable for vendors to survey consumers on their opinions of products and services. In the process, vendors usually ask consumers for specific information about themselves. It is understood that by gathering as much information as they can about consumers, vendors can better meet their own marketing objectives. However, as a consumer, it is normal to be reluctant to provide certain information to retail vendors.

Consumers are most reluctant to disclose demographic *and* personal contact information to retail vendors. This is normally the response that consumers have to the Internet's I/CODE audience research system, which asks for both types of information.

73

Consumers have the same response when asked for their social insurance numbers. This single piece of information is believed to be the key to people's personal backgrounds. With all this information, it is easy for vendors to violate the privacy of consumers by providing the information to other vendors. It is tolerable for retail vendors to request *either* demographic *or* personal contact information from consumers. Personal contact information in particular can be easily obtained in a telephone or Internet directory. A vendor cannot do much with this information or demographic information, other than use it for their own marketing or communication efforts; and if consumers did not want this, they would not divulge the information in the first place.

The implicit assumptions here are: trust or any sort of relationship has yet to be established with the vendor requesting demographic and personal contact information; in developing a relationship, information should be disclosed in small amounts at a time in order to establish a level of trust; and information disclosed should only be used within the relationship. When retail vendors request demographic and personal information, in the absence of trust or a relationship, they challenge the cultural categories of relationship, trust, reciprocity and disclosure. However, consumers unthinkingly integrate the challenge into reality by believing that this is how business operates.

I don't want to answer ones about myself. I'll answer about something, but I don't see any reason to give them information...I wouldn't give my social insurance number to someone in the retail, no. (Lazy, 3, 16).

In retail, name, address, phone number, if you use Interac. How often you shop at that particular location, do you shop exclusively at sales. How much you spend on whatever item or whatever items they offer in a given time (Musique, 15).

74

> I'll answer the basic personal information, name, address, phone number most of the time depending on what it is...When it gets into stuff, like when they start asking about your income or marital status. Do you have children? Do you own or rent? Are you going to own or rent? Questions I don't see have anything to do with that business. That I don't think should be asked...I'm just thinking you may be asked how a service was. Surveys on stores (Pleasant, 8, 13).
>
> They're asking for your address and your address isn't much. They can get that by looking up your name in the telephone book so it's general information no matter if you put it or not, your address and your phone number (Cod, 4).
>
> I didn't, like I don't think that, you know, if they're gonna be doing demographics, they should be asking different questions more about what kind of products do you like, not how much you make, what you buy, you know, instead of what you make and who you work for (Cod, 31).
>
> ...they don't need to know your S.I.N. number...it's an identifier number, and everything is keyed on that number...(Beer, 15).
>
> ...at restaurants, you often get a comment card. At hotels you get a comment card where they ask you to sort of comment on the service you had, whether it was good or bad, that sort of thing... I guess when you buy anything there's a good chance they're going to ask you to measure your satisfaction with the product (Beer, 3).
>
> I just, I just gave them my name and address and asked them to send me bedding. So I didn't give them any demographics. They can pick up my name in the phone book if they like (French, 43).

As a consumer of medical and dental services, it is normal to respond unthinkingly to a vendor's request for demographic and personal contact information. Vendors of these types of services can ask consumers for any of the following: name, address, e-mail address, telephone number, personal medical history, family medical history, insurance coverage, previous practitioners, etc. The implicit thinking here is that it is appropriate to disclose information to vendors of personal services because these vendors can be trusted based on a pre-existing relationship. However, it would seem strange if vendors of personal services asked consumers for information on their financial background. As in any relationship, only information relevant to the relationship needs to be disclosed.

75

It is normal for vendors of personal services to request most private information during the initial interaction with consumers. It would be unusual if vendors did not at least request personal contact information at this time. During subsequent interactions, vendors are expected to request only information that pertains to the reason for the interaction. The underlying assumption here is that additional pieces of information are normally disclosed during each new interaction in a relationship.

> I expect to give my medical history, health card...your previous physicians, previous address, current address, any insurance that you're covered under (Musique, 15).
>
> ...they need your personal age, your social insurance number, where you live, your address. Other then that, unless it was to help a specific situation...on your family's past history, personal history, things like that for their own file...(Lazy, 14).
>
> It's less obvious in personal services cus there tends to be something that happens at the beginning of the relationship with that service provider. In other words like all the sort of third party stuff is kinda done, it's almost like an introductory visit. They may take your information and channel it into the system and once you're on the system that third party is, is more or less fed, but after that there still has to be updates on you, so there's still a third party sittin' there but it's not as noticeable (Beer, 36).
>
> If I was going to the doctor and he was asking about past diseases that had nothing to do with that service, like say I was going to a skin doctor and they started asking me about like sexual diseases, like I would say why do you want to know this. I wouldn't answer those kinds of questions (Pleasant, 16).

As a consumer of legal and financial services, in a face-to-face setting or over the Internet, it is normal to think that vendors of these services are very inquisitive. Vendors of legal and financial services often ask consumers to provide any of the following: name; address; e-mail address; telephone number; social insurance number; demographics; financial history; as well as medical history, if it is related to insurance. In general, it is normal for a consumer to disclose the information that a vendor of legal and financial services requests, because that vendor can be trusted to provide certain services in return. However, it is

76

appropriate to question the requests of vendors, depending on the services being provided. For example, as a consumer applying for a Registered Retirement Savings Plan at a bank, it is normal to think that this would not require disclosing details about other personal investments. The implicit understanding is that when developing a level of trust or a relationship with another party, it is only necessary to disclose information relevant to the relationship.

Similar to retail vendors, vendors of legal and financial services often survey consumers for marketing purposes. While this is acceptable, it is not appropriate for vendors to request the same information that they ask for during routine transactions. As a consumer, it is normal to be unwilling to provide private information in marketing surveys that vendors of legal and financial services conduct. The reasoning is that vendors of legal and financial services have not established any sort of relationship with consumers under these circumstances, so these vendors cannot be trusted with private information. When vendors of legal and financial services conduct marketing surveys, they often challenge cultural norms. However, consumers unthinkingly integrate the challenge into reality by believing that this is how vendors of legal and financial services sometimes operate.

> Name, address, phone number that kinda thing. Previous address, how much or your current financial state, if you've ever been bankrupt. If you're a student or if you're working, where you work if you work, what type of or if you have a home, if you have a car and other assets. If you have any credit cards and more about you credit history, I guess. Other than that RRSPs, stuff like that (Musique, 15).

> But for financial, I guess if they started asking about your personal spending habits. I think that's too much. Because I think if they ask about your spending habits they can make a false impression of the type of person you are...(Musique, 19).

77

...but why do you need to know every single detail of my financial portfolio. They need to know if I have a job and like I say that's fine. They don't need to know what I have here, what I have there (Pleasant, 13).

But if it's for, if it's for a financial or legal services like a bank and insurance companies too much information would be basically going into your personal life. Like they just need to know your financial life. That's what they have to know. They're starting to ask you personal questions then that's too far. Whata ya like? Whata ya do in your spare time? You know, who is your girlfriend? Where does she live and all that kind of stuff? What sex are, what sex do you prefer? Stuff like that (Cod, 11).

If you're calling a lawyer who's got a legal information line and he says what's your shoe size you think this a little weird, you know, this is some shoe fetish guy, you know. Like what's goin' on here (Beer, 49).

Level of Reciprocity

Level of reciprocity was defined as any benefit, reward, satisfaction, etc. received in exchange for disclosing private information. When dealing with vendors in retail services, the attitude of consumers is that there is no benefit in disclosing private information. The only parties gaining anything are the vendors themselves, especially in small transactions. As a consumer, it is normal not to disclose information without there being some sort of incentive, which could be the opportunity to: receive a warranty with a product/service; win a gift or prize; gain some personal satisfaction; or simply complete a transaction. In addition to needing an incentive for providing private information in retail services, consumers expect vendors to provide a written or verbal guarantee of privacy. The thinking behind all this is that when disclosing private information, something of value should always be provided in return, especially when no trust or relationship have been established.

78

If it fits into I figure something I consider useful I will be answering (French, 10).

Well, if the person told me they were going to give me a chocolate. I love chocolate. I might answer for that. And then there are different, I might answer if she gives me money (French, 19).

I've got stuff from Molson's, you know. They send ya a little bottle opener or something and a big long survey. I don't have a problem with that (Beer, 14).

You know it seems like a waste of my time for them to get my address, phone number, etc. to buy something less then two, three bucks...you'd think Jesus this is a bit sick I'm only spending two dollars here..if you're buying something where's there a warranty concern, that seems worth it to take the time to fill out the information in case something goes wrong with it, but if it's some small ticket thing like a pair of skates or something and they get all fussy about you address, you know what's the deal. You do feel that that's a bit irritating (Beer, 34).

...if they're paying me for it I might give it to them but to stand there and answer questions for you know, nothing, no (Lazy, 7).

In retail, privacy. Just as a matter of fact. Or an incentive. It would make you feel good and a lot of people go for that. They say heh, you like this, well what about this. I think that is important (Musique, 23).

Then on the other hand I do fill in things for contests...Just a contest or something I'd like to get, a car, a computer, or a trip, or a bike or sometimes it's just a catalogue like if I'm in a fashion store and I wanted their catalogue I'll do that. Depends on the situation (Pleasant, 6).

There should always be a guarantee of confidentiality (Pleasant, 15).

You get a free gift or, but no you don't, if it's gonna, if it's a customer service survey and it's gonna change the way people treat you in the stores then by all means I'll do it because people in the stores that work behind the counter are not always nice people (Cod, 4).

In personal services or legal and financial services, it is assumed that consumers' privacy is guaranteed in vendors' requests for private information. The incentive for providing private information to vendors of legal and financial services is the opportunity to receive the service that these vendors make available. As a consumer, it is normal to respond to vendors' face-to-face and computer-mediated requests for information based on the

79

expectation that the vendor will provide a certain service. The implicit understanding here is that there is a certain level of trust established with these vendors. However, while vendors can be trusted not to violate privacy, there still has to be a level of reciprocity perceived for disclosure to take place. Trust is reconstructed in the ongoing process of disclosure and reciprocity. When a request for private information is not directly related to acquiring the services of a legal or financial vendor, like in the situation with I/CODE on the Internet, an incentive comparable to that which is anticipated in retail services is expected. The underlying assumption in a situation like this is that there is no pre-established level of trust with the vendor, but when something of value is expected in return for certain information, it is appropriate to disclose the information.

Because I need the service where I don't need to shop at any one store. I need to go to a particular doctor or dentist or I could go to others but it is a little more personalized, more important (Lazy, 24).

I'm using the health industry as an example...You came in for a specific service and I think that comes that you expect that you're going to have to give out some information and you're willing to go and give out that information to get that service (Musique, 9).

...yeah, it is important that you hear something back. Usually, if you give, if you give your personal information for a credit card and they call and you get a credit card, you get a credit card. If you don't get it then at least they let you know. You're not approved blah, blah, blah. They probably still keep your information on file in case you wanna do it again at a later date when you have a job or the money that can pay for it (Cod, 12).

You're getting something in return. You're providing them with something and I want them to do something with it and give me some answers...you're the client looking to invest something and I want to get the right information to do what's best for me and they're there to provide that (Pleasant, 24).

Personal, I go for service and they ask me questions related to the service I'm looking for. That's different. I'm willing to give the information to get the service (French, 14).

Interactional Knowledge

Interactional knowledge was defined as information that consumers learn - implicitly or explicitly - during their interactions with vendors about what each of them knows and understands about themselves, each other, their interaction and their relationship. As a consumer in a face-to-face or computer-mediated interaction with a retail vendor, it is appropriate to disclose private information if it seems like the vendor intends to use the information for its own marketing purposes. It is not unusual to want personal information stored in the databases of certain vendors so that those vendors can communicate regularly about things like new products/services and upcoming sales. When a vendor intends to use the information to create a mailing list and sell that list to other vendors who want it for marketing purposes, it is normal, as a consumer, to be concerned and to refuse the vendor's request for information. Being on a mailing list means receiving telephone calls, "junk mail" or "junk e-mail" from other vendors about their products and services.

The implicit thinking here is as follows: disclosure of private information is part of the trust-building and relationship-building processes between individuals; disclosure of private information takes place between individuals for the purpose of their relationship; and information disclosed between individuals should only be used by them for purposes of their relationship. Based on this, vendors should not share consumers' private information. When vendors do share this information, they cross the boundaries of their role, thereby challenging cultural categories. However, consumers subconsciously integrate this challenge into reality by thinking that this type of behaviour is to be expected from retail vendors.

81

As a consumer of retail services, it is normal to want vendors to provide information on things such as: their purpose for requesting private information from consumers; their financial status; verification of their existence; and the size, number and addresses of their physical locations. When a vendor does not disclose this information up front, it is appropriate to note this and request that the information be provided. If a vendor is too anxious or aggressive in gathering data on consumers, this may be perceived as unacceptable. On the other hand, when vendors do offer information about themselves up front, the gesture is appreciated, and it is used to build trust. The reasoning here is that: a relationship between two or more parties involves knowing and trusting each other; and the relationship-building process involves disclosing private information in exchange for something of value - often an equivalent amount/type of private information.

It matters that they know what they're asking, they know what they're talking about, that they appear well trained. That's what matters to me. I don't really care, you know, what education, what level they are. It's whether they act professionally, talk professionally, they can help you out and know what's going on (Pleasant, 19).

If I can't answer in my head why are you asking me this, I would stay away from those types of questions. I guess I'm trying to understand what the motive is for it so I just stay way from them (Pleasant, 9).

In the retail industry, very courteously because they know that the customer is always right...the customer is slightly elevated (Musique, 11).

I have no problems or no qualms with talking to whoever it happens to be an employee of the retail industry or the retail store I'm in because I figure if they're working there then everyone has some degree of knowledge and authority in the store...(Musique, 9).

I don't want them sending me "junk mail" (Lazy, 3).

If they want your name and address maybe it's because they want, they're gonna put you on their mailing list, or a lot of companies, they get your name and address and they sell it to a mailing list. So they, they can probably, they make money off it which isn't right but who is to say which company is gonna do what (Cod, 10).

82

> If they're nice and they treat you well, you like their service, you'll give it, but if they're not, you're not gonna bother (Cod, 14).

> They don't tell me who is on the other end looking at my information so why should I tell them who's writing the information. You'd wanna know who would be looking at your information. I'd like to know if one person was looking at it or a bunch of people (Cod, 35).

> How long they've been around for. If they've been around for a week, who says they're gonna be around for another week...if you're gonna give them personal information and then a week later they go out of business, you're gonna wanna know where your personal information goes after they go out of business (Cod, 37).

> I, I don't want to give out what is effectively mailing information for something I don't want, and that would be something that would concern me (Beer, 19).

> Well, if feel like the guy is being honest, you know. When I bought my car, the sales guy was pushin' me to buy, like I knew the kind of car I wanted buy. I done the research and I came in and I said I wanna buy an Escort and he said look at a Taurus and I said no, no I'd like to buy an Escort and he was goin' the Taurus, well what about the Taurus. He was trying to sell me up (Beer, 26).

> ...I received about 15 calls per week from people looking for donations like liver, heart or children or ahhhh, hungry people in South Africa. Yeah, I'm on a list somewhere because I gave some money before and I can't help regret it somehow because I should have told them keep your list for yourself...but they should tell you how it is used (French, 9).

As a consumer of medical and dental services, it is normal to trust a vendor requesting private information. However, if a certain request seems unusual, the vendor may be required to provide an explanation. When dealing with a vendor in personal services, it is appropriate to expect reciprocal communication. It is also appropriate not to want the vendor to dominate and control the interaction. The implicit assumptions are that: a relationship pre-exists with a vendor of personal services, meaning the vendor can be trusted; a relationship between two or more parties involves knowing one another; and parties involved in a relationship disclose private information in exchange for something of value, which is usually an equivalent amount/type of information. If an interaction seems to

83

involve a series of questions by an unemotional individual, no interaction is really taking place. The vendor is treating its consumers as numbers for billing purposes, and not as individuals.

Vendors in personal services should be expected to provide information on: their qualifications; the services they provide; the consumer's options in a particular situation; and the procedures involved in those options. These vendors may be expected to explain their services and procedures, as well as their requests for private information. Any information provided by the vendor provides a feeling of comfort and security for the consumer, especially in computer-mediated interactions. While it is normal to want to be more open in a computer-mediated interaction - because the other party is not physically present - it is often assumed that vendors requesting private information in the mediated environment use the information to create mailing lists to be sold to other vendors. The vendors requesting the information are not trusted because the implicit understanding is that: disclosure is part of the trust-building and relationship-building processes between individuals; disclosure of private information takes place between individuals for the purpose of their relationship; and information disclosed between individuals should only be used by those individuals for purposes of that relationship.

> When you're talking to people you have that feeling but when you're in the waiting room it's like a herd of people sitting around and waiting and waiting for the doctor to come and pick you (Musique, 22).
>
> Just offer a brief explanation of the purpose of the company. I wouldn't expect to be asked information right off hand when I enter the site...(Musique, 33).

...if the information is not available to anybody except for those people who you give it to then I don't see why they are asking the questions that they are asking. And they say that no one has access to those files and the files are this and that but that is not true (Musique, 35).

Basically, the question didn't even arise but when I sent out the form a box came down and told me that what you were sending out was not encrypted and gave me the option to not send it and I thought that was very good. Useless but very good. Very nice touch. And so it sort of, it sort of, reassures you that the company was looking out for your interests, I suppose or they are concerned, they're concerned about your concerns. That's always good to know. And, they mentioned a lot about privacy and the security level involved (Musique, 39).

I went to the doctor and I had to go for tests at the hospital, the doctor turns up late, doesn't even know who I am. To me I'm a number. He doesn't know anything about the appointment, he can't remember who I am or what I'm there for, O.K. I'm just another number (Pleasant, 21).

I was in a car accident once so the doctor sent me to a certain doctor. I go there and get the therapy and they say go back and see your doctor on such and such a date. Why? And then he writes you a note, la la la. Why do I have to go back there? It's another 25 bucks. I won't go back there, I don't wanna go back there. It's a business. They have to make money. I don't think patient care is number one (Pleasant, 24).

Well, it's probably easier to sit here and talk to a screen then ask the doctor about things you wouldn't want to ask them in public because you feel embarrassed or you couldn't talk to them. It's easier to do this because it's just a box. At the same time you know with the doctor, as far as you know it's staying in that room and on your file. It's not sitting on a server where millions of people can access it or break into it (Pleasant, 34).

Same with a doctor. They are more important services. It might be more important to find out certain things rather then at Woolco, you know they back up their pants, they may, or they guarantee a return (Lazy, 22).

Doctors, well usually like if you go to a hospital you're trusting someone with your life, basically pretty much, and you're doing that because you know if that person was no good they wouldn't be a doctor. They, you know, would have to be really bad not to be a doctor. And usually before you go and have an operation you meet the doctor so you know, you can, you talk to him, you ask questions and right there you know if you trust that person or not, if you want that person doing it or not (Cod, 7).

...As long as I feel like the relationship is fair and it's doing fine it's O.K. But I don't like somebody who is there and is telling me that I know you don't know and do this and do that (French, 12).

85

As a consumer of legal and financial services, it is normal to make the initial contact with vendors. Vendors usually make the initial contact only when they are soliciting business or conducting a marketing survey. When vendors are doing either of these, they are expected to offer an incentive in exchange for consumer information, and to not request the detailed information that they require in routine transactions. Essentially, vendors of legal and financial services are treated like retail vendors when they solicit business or conduct marketing surveys because they are profit oriented, and there is a possibility that they will take advantage of their role. The implicit assumptions are: a relationship does not exist with a vendor in legal and financial services at the time the vendor is soliciting business or conducting marketing research, and the vendor, therefore, cannot be trusted under these circumstances; trust is built and a relationship formed by requesting and disclosing small amounts of private information at a time; and when disclosure takes place, some form of reciprocity will take place.

It is not acceptable for vendors of legal and financial services to coerce or pressure consumers into providing private information or purchasing a service. During initial contact with consumers, vendors should provide consultation on their services and expertise without displaying any sales tactics. Their level of courtesy and knowledge may be directly related to the services that consumers require. Once services are provided, vendors may only contact consumers about things like: the status of an account or case; changes in services being provided; and changes in the administration of the services being provided. The assumptions are that a relationship is being developed, and that it is only necessary to disclose information that is relevant to the relationship.

86

As a consumer, it is understood that vendors of legal and financial services will require some private information in order to provide their services. If there is no indication that the information will be used for purposes other than providing the service, it is appropriate to disclose it without question. The underlying assumption is that a certain level of trust pre-exists with vendors of legal and financial services, and when there is trust, disclosure is appropriate. Nonetheless, it is not unusual to question the motives and intentions of vendors because they might be seeking information to sell to other vendors for marketing purposes. The main concern is that consumers' financial status could become public knowledge. It is implicitly understood that this is not acceptable because: disclosure is part of the trust-building and relationship-building processes; disclosure of private information takes place between individuals for purposes of their relationship; and information disclosed between individuals should only be used by those individuals for purposes of their relationship.

To build consumers' confidence and trust, vendors of legal and financial services may be expected to disclose their purpose for requiring certain information, including the individuals and/or organizations that will have access to the information. Two-way communication is essential between consumers and vendors of legal and financial services because a great deal of trust is required in providing and acquiring these kinds of services. As a consumer, it is normal to want to be helpful since providing private information is critical in acquiring proper legal and financial services. However, the implicit understanding is that the trust-building process involves disclosure and reciprocity, where reciprocity usually means reciprocal disclosure.

87

If I was to give my information to one financial institution I wouldn't want my information, unless I was applying for something at another financial institution I wouldn't want my information to be, able to be obtained by them and I think it can be or is being obtained by them (Lazy, 12).

I am a customer of TD bank...once in a while they call me and they want, like RRSP season last year, they called me and say I'm with TD branch and are you interested in an RRSP this year. Right quickly, on the top of my mind I thought this is my business, leave me alone, that's not your business (French, 7).

I think about it because I'm trying to figure what this person is all about. My question is who is this guy and what does he want to know. It stops in my mind because I'm giving him my money (French, 20).

I guess banks use it to build profiles of customers, demographics and products, who they are going to send their RRSP information to and what they're sending. I like to know especially if they are giving my name to somebody else to contact me because I don't like a lot of junk mail and phone calls from people I don't know (Pleasant, 7).

...our lawyer moved about two years ago and we weren't contacted. We found out through the local newspaper that his office had moved. I don't like that. I like to be told cus I'm a client and I should know that he moved. I expect like ongoing communication when it's needed (Pleasant, 14).

In financial, you're the client looking to invest something and I want to get the right information to do what's best for me and they're there to provide that but I still think a lot of them are there just to get the sale, to get their accounts and clients (Pleasant, 24).

...it's dealing once again with you know your money so you're always weary and you're always thinking about why they are asking what they are asking you. So, I still give it to them but just a little tiny bit of reservations (Musique, 15).

...but for financial services it would help if they told you that they're looking for information to set up a, a new service. So, you'd think that wow you'd feel like that you are actually helping to give you another service again. You might think that, that by doing this they're concerned with your thoughts maybe (Musique, 23).

If, if they're asking for your information you're gonna wanna know why you're giving it to them. Because if they just wanna know you're not going to give it to them, but you're gonna wanna know why because again it's personal information (Cod, 10).

88

> Logical like you hit a site and it's a lawyer and there was a little bio on the firm, you know, a map of where we are, you know sort of thing. It, it helped build in me a sense of confidence that it was a legitimate law firm, you know it wasn't some sort of crazy guy...I found as much information on those individuals as they were asking of me, you know, more on them like where they went to university and, and when they were born and stuff...they're being sort of straightforward and honest about what their motivation was and that's what they needed the information for (Beer, 55).

Environmental Factors

Environmental factors were defined as the physical characteristics of the surroundings in which disclosure management takes place. As a consumer in any commercial interaction, face-to-face or over the Internet, it is normal to expect the vendor to request private information in a particular environment. It would seem very unusual to interact with vendors outside their physical or electronic locations, especially vendors in personal services or legal and financial services. The underlying assumption here is that disclosure is a private matter between individuals, therefore individuals should disclose information within the privacy of their own environment.

Upon entering a vendor's environment, it is normal to evaluate that vendor's image, based on things like: dress code, cleanliness, tidiness, decor, layout, design, graphics, etc. An appealing and up-to-date image is generally more trustworthy, especially if the situation is critical personally, financially, or legally. As a consumer, it is usually - not always - uncomfortable to divulge information in an environment that looks dated, run down, or untidy. The implicit understanding is that: private information is valuable; something of value should be provided in return for disclosing private information; and the environment should indicate that something of value will be provided in return for disclosing private information.

89

The cleanliness of the store, the employee or the status, how they are dressed, how they carry themselves, where you are, the class of the mall maybe, the way they ask the questions (Lazy, 25).

For the personal services, like I said, it's the actual decor of the office. Like if it looks really bad or if it is run down and it has scummy wallpaper. Could be the best doctor in the world in there but you still feel like they didn't know what they're doing (Musique, 26).

A store with lots of room is a lot more trustworthy then going into a store that's got aisles and aisles and stuff that's coming down on you and it's clausterphobic. You know you get half way down and it's crowding you (Musique, 27).

Well, like that, like if you know they're not gonna lose your personal information. Organization. Tidiness. You look at the people, their attire, the place, the building, the company and all that then you build a rapport (Cod, 14).

If they're a sort of a worn out kinda place and they're looking kind of tired and desperate, you're gonna think Jesus, you know, that's my life savings, all my money's in there. I guess if a bank looked really shabby, you might get a negative feeling. Like a dentist's office? I think you wouldn't want to go to a real run down, like we had a dentist at home and, ahhh, he just had a hole in the wall kinda office and we all kinda thought Jesus, you know, what's this guy, like an army dentist or something (Beer, 27).

Well, a lot of people say that if it looks like a bit of a dumpy, divey place that they feel put off. But I often think that may mean that they do good work. Like if you're pickin' a garage to get your car fixed, I'll feel a little bit more comfortable if the garage looks a little dirty. It means there's been a lot of cars worked on...(Beer, 27)

...another place that has a nice building is the utility place, the power company and that makes me mad. My bills are really high and look at this big palace I'm goin' to pay the bill...You wanna see them in an old warehouse kinda place where they're actually workin' (Beer, 30).

...You didn't get a good picture of what the products look like [on the Internet] so why would you buy them? Appearance is everything right (Cod, 36).

I guess it's more, what comes to mind right away is H&R Block set up in the cafeteria in the mall. It's like just throwing up walls. You know it's, it just looks like it's disorganized or thrown together (Pleasant, 15).

I'm just thinking my doctor use to have this really old office before he moved...I had been going there so many years. If I hadn't I probably wouldn't go there. It was in some back alley, it was just so old. Just looks like to me well maybe their not making enough money because the painting is not that good and maybe I should go somewhere else...It's funny. Sometimes it's the other way around, the place looks good (Pleasant, 15).

90

While in North American culture consumers respond to "situational cues" in face-to-face and computer-mediated commercial interactions according to normative beliefs, it is important to note that consumers' responses may be affected by information learned about vendors from sources other than direct interaction. Quite often consumers' knowledge of a vendor stems from: research; reputations; recommendations; and past relationships and/or experiences with them. As a consumer, it is normal to collect information on vendors, either actively or passively, from other individuals or institutions. This is true even in personal services and legal and financial services, where a level of trust and/or relationship is thought to pre-exist. Relationship building is an ongoing process of getting to know another individual or party. It seems especially important to gather information about commercial vendors that offer their services on the Internet since their legitimacy is often questionable. It is hard to know if these vendors are who they say they are, or if they even exist. Checking for advertisements in other forms of media and visiting the physical establishments of vendors are appropriate ways of conducting background research on Internet vendors.

Either in a face-to-face setting or over the Internet, there is a sense of comfort in dealing with and disclosing information to large, familiar, or well-established vendors with reputations for quality products/services. These types of vendors have established a certain level of credibility with consumers. Whether face-to-face or over the Internet, the perception should be the same. By learning the background and reputation of a vendor, it is possible to determine to what extent the vendor can be trusted, and if disclosure is appropriate. This learning process substitutes for the one that takes place during an interaction with the vendor.

Understandably, it is always more comforting, as a consumer, to disclose private information to a vendor with whom a positive relationship exists, no matter if the vendor is large, small, well-established, unestablished, etc. While a positive commercial relationship is not usually as personal as that which exists, say, between friends, it still involves a level of trust. Trust is usually established between a consumer and vendor when the consumer has positive experiences with the products or services offered by the vendor. With every good experience the consumer has, a more positive relationship develops, thereby providing the opportunity for the relationship to become more personal. The assumption is that when the vendor provides something of value to the consumer, the vendor establishes a level of trust, which makes it appropriate for the consumer to disclose private information.

...the Bay for instance have been around for 200 years, 150 years. You know, you don't feel they're gonna take your information and use it or steal from you personally or abuse you with your information, right, where someone on a small level might (Lazy, 16).

I guess I figure if they're bigger they have a better reputation and you feel more comfortable about providing that information cus if they're smaller they'd just be another person trying to see what you have at home and try to break in, stuff like that (Pleasant, 10).

I feel I have better rapport, relationships with some companies then other companies but not on a personal level. Like I'm more trustworthy of certain stores then other stores only because of experience and service, that kind of thing (Pleasant, 17).

If you have other people who tell you oh wow this is actually good that's a huge plus. For financial, once again I think it's personal, personal experience like other people's experiences and if they recommended them you have a lot more, you know they are not doing it to just get you to sign on for something (Musique, 24).

Also, companies might work with other companies and therefore after, you know, if one company let's say is manufacturing computers maybe and somebody branches out makes software for them. But if you try out one person and if it works well you keep going back and back and back. The experience, the more experience you have the more the relationship expands (Musique, 29).

92

The banks, the big banks are well known. CIBC, Royal Bank, Nova Scotia, everyone trusts them. A little dinky bank owned by one teller working in it, you're not gonna give them your money because you don't know if they're gonna be there next week. But a big bank you know, or a big, or somewhere that's got a name and they've been around a while, or you know. Again, Coca Cola they've been around forever, they're reputable all across the world so people trust them and they make commercials. Most of the big companies have commercials (Cod, 7).

You're not gonna go to a lawyer if someone said don't go. So again, word of mouth, advertising, news facts. You can go on the Internet and you can bring up any company, so again like information wise. You can go to a library and check up any company in a book and they have how many people worked there this year, how they made, general information (Cod, 8).

If you were dealing with them repeatedly because there is a problem, it's always breaking down, you're not gonna, that's a bad relationship cus you're always calling and complaining and you don't want that. If their product's good then that's good too (Cod, 19).

I figure it would be nice to see how many people have used that site. A lot of sites tell you at the bottom how many people have been into the site since it started. They never told me that...If I'm gonna go, if I'm gonna go to cybershop and no one's ever bought anything there, do you think I'm gonna be the first person to buy something crappy from them (Cod, 35).

I/CODE would be more generalized. You probably see it in the paper or a magazine while the other particular companies mean trying to find in Toronto. How can I, I don't have any source that brings me to the site. I/CODE I can find out I'm pretty sure. Like if it is there, if it is secure, a big company, a company I know already. That's fine I know it (French, 33).

When you're buying something like when I bought my car I, phoned my Dad and said, you know, I need a car that's not a heavy pay, what kind of car should I get, what would you get, and, ahhh, he said I'll do some research for you, so he took a month and went to the library and went through consumer reports and everything else and they said the best car that is the cheapest is the Ford Escort. It has the highest ratings. And I phoned a friend of mine who writes for an automotive magazine and he said get an Escort cus really what that is a Mazda at half the price (Beer, 25).

In any event, what is important to understand is that "situational cues" are strategic, or normative, elements of face-to-face and computer-mediated commercial interactions that consumers use to build trust with vendors. Consumers' behaviour changes across

93

commercial settings but the ways in which it changes, as well as the reasons for which it changes, usually remain constant. Understanding this process is key to building consumer relationships and designing audience research systems for the Internet. This conclusion is the essence of the next chapter.

94

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

As new communication technologies give rise to interactive forms of media, such as the Internet, audience research is becoming an issue of increasing concern. Audiences of traditional media are fragmenting and migrating to the new media, where they are mixing on a global basis. Audience research firms are competing to develop effective and efficient methods for gathering data on audiences in this new environment. Small independent research firms are developing software to track usage patterns of subscribers to the Internet, while large organizations, such as A.C. Nielsen, are forming partnerships to combine data on Internet subscribers from various sources.

Comparable to the peoplemeteor, used for audience research in traditional forms of media, the PC-Meteor has been designed to research the audiences of the World Wide Web on the Internet. Created by a marketing research firm in the United States, the PC-Meteor is a software application which is installed on Windows-based personal computers (PCs) of a sample of households. When members of a particular household in the sample access the Internet, the meteor does the following: tracks their demographics from a user list recorded on their computer; and monitors the web sites that they visit as material is displayed on their computer screen. The main advantage of the PC-Meteor is suppose to be its capability to compare audiences across time, web sites, web pages, computer applications, and service providers, as well as show any duplication. An underlying assumption of the PC-Meteor method is that research techniques used in traditional media are transferrable to the Internet.

95

A.C. Nielsen, in the United States and Canada, has also made some advancements towards developing audience research standards for the Internet. Probably one of the biggest initiatives that it has taken involves a partnership it formed with a company in the United States called Internet Profiles Corporation (I/PRO). Using the expertise and reputation of Nielsen, the mandate of the partnership was to market I/PRO's services: I/COUNT, I/AUDIT and I/CODE. These services were designed to enable owners/managers of web sites on the Internet to understand the demographics and usage patterns of their visitors. However, in October 1996, the I/CODE service, which focussed on recording and comparing user demographics across web sites, was discontinued. It seems that users were reluctant to provide the information that the service was designed to gather.

Audience researchers appear to be challenged by the Internet because it provides a context different from the traditional forms of media. The differences with the Internet are: it is an interactive medium rather than a passive one; subscribers to it view vendor's sites on the World Wide Web as opposed, for example, to television programs; subscribers can complete commercial transactions at the same time; and vendors can conduct marketing surveys in the process. The Internet is a medium of two-way communication that vendors utilize to: promote their products/services; conduct commercial transactions with their consumers; and research their consumers.

In this new context, audience researchers are challenged in two ways. First, commercial vendors not only want aggregate information on a sample of Internet subscribers for purposes of mass advertising, vendors also want detailed information on individual subscribers in order to market products and services on a direct one-to-one basis. This

96

suggests that audience research methods deployed in traditional media are not transferrable to the Internet. Second, while advertising vendors have always placed great importance on audience research, they have relied on external sources for their data, because in traditional media, vendors, advertisers, advertising agencies, media organizations and audience research firms have distinct and separate roles. On the Internet, these roles tend to overlap, causing the identity of audience researchers to be ambiguous.

Audience research organizations have large incentives to design data-gathering methods for the Internet that extract detailed private information from subscribers, but in accepting this challenge, researchers must implement their methods during and within the direct interactions of consumers and vendors. In today's customized-mass-production economy, consumers are becoming increasingly concerned about their privacy. There is evidence that vendors are damaging consumer trust with the marketing research methods that they now employ. Vendors either extract private information from consumers involuntarily, or they request it without reciprocating equivalent information about themselves. It seems that vendors need to become more familiar with the situations and their characteristics that establish positive, trustworthy relationships with consumers. From a communication perspective, it makes sense that vendors should attend to the consumer's view of the normative elements of commercial interactions involving the disclosure of private information. It also makes sense that audience researchers of the Internet should regard the same thing because of the reflexive influence that their activities could have on commercial interactions. Audience researchers may have a better chance of meeting their objectives if they avoid disturbing the consumer-vendor interactions on the Internet.

97

The significance of this is that audiences are not only characterized by objective qualities such as size and composition. There are also significant subjective and intersubjective characteristics of audiences that should be considered by researchers in the context of the Internet. The questions that arise are: How do consumers conduct their computer-mediated commercial interactions involving the disclosure of private information? Do they apply norms from other settings (e.g., face-to-face) or do they develop new ones? It appears that consumers and vendors should be responsible for sharing some information about themselves and for negotiating the boundaries by which they act in their computer-mediated interactions. Because the electronic environment is relatively new and no rules seem to exist for interacting in it, the most efficient way that people in general will find to adapt to it will be to apply what they know about their interactions in familiar settings. Individuals tend to apply what they know and expect of their interactions across mediums of communication, thereby developing their relationships in the same ways and to the same level of competence over time. This seems logical because individuals, who interact in the electronic environment, should be affected by the same social forces, relations, and conflicts which affect them generally.

There are certain basic structural elements of interaction that remain constant across mediums of communication in order to guide the behaviour of individuals. Rather than defining interactions in terms of their physical settings, they can be defined in terms of "information systems", or in terms of a given pattern of access to the social behaviour of individuals. This is significant to determining how audience research methods for the Internet can be designed to regard the normative elements of commercial interactions that

98

involve the disclosure of private information. This thesis found it important to study how consumers manage the disclosure of private information in face-to-face and computer-mediated interactions with vendors of different commercial backgrounds. Face-to-face communication is the standard against which communication events are compared because it contains all the dimensions and expectations to which all individuals are accustomed.

Using a social constructionist perspective and a qualitative method of investigation, six informants from consumer culture were shown to manage disclosure of private information in commercial interactions through the use of tacit rules and norms of interaction. Consumers manage the disclosure of private information by tacitly searching for "situational cues" that reinforce or destroy their established beliefs about a particular situation, with the intention of creating trust. "Situational cues" are all the factors particular to a time and place that facilitate or inhibit the responses of consumers by revealing difficulties, risks, threats, and incentives. The "situational cues" common to commercial interactions involving the disclosure of private information were identified and defined by the researcher as: the information that is requested; what is offered in exchange for the information; the environment in which disclosure is to take; and the knowledge gained during the interaction about what all individuals know and understand about themselves, each other, their interaction, and their relationship.

The question was: How do consumers make sense of "situational cues" in face-to-face and computer mediated interactions with vendors of different commercial background in order to manage the disclosure of private information? Consumers make sense of the "situational cues" in terms of their normative beliefs through the use of cultural categories,

99

including relationship, trust, reciprocity, and disclosure, and the interrelationship of those categories. Typically, the categories interrelate as follows: a positive relationship between two parties is based on trust; trust is created when individuals disclose information and receive something of value in return for that information (often an equivalent amount/type of information); reciprocity follows disclosure; and disclosure does not take place without the expectation of reciprocity.

When consumers engage in commercial interactions involving the disclosure of private information, the cultural categories and their interrelationship are implicit as background knowledge. The mental processes that initiate consumers' actions involve a sequence of subconscious thoughts that correspond with the interrelationship of the cultural categories. When consumers encounter a "situational cue", they subconsciously think through the interrelationship of the cultural categories, as it applies to the particular interaction or commercial setting, and consumers use that thought process to produce an action.

From the 'social constructionist' perspective, the dynamic nature of interactions means that the "situational cues" are interrelated and that consumers do not make sense of them in a pre-established order. Furthermore, while common social-rule governed processes of disclosure are in operation across commercial settings, variations in the structure of interaction sequences and disclosure strategies are correlated with functional differences in specific activities which the interactions serve to coordinate. The behaviour of consumers changes across commercial settings, but the ways in which it changes and the reasons why it changes usually remain constant.

100

The informational disclosure management process of commercial interactions described here appears to be the key to building relationships with consumers. The results of the research provide a basis for designing a larger quantitative study to confirm this conclusion. Moreover, the disclosure management process gives rise to a basic model for audience research for the Internet. Attempting to provide a more extensive model seems impractical and impossible because the details vary with the commercial backgrounds of vendors and the nature of their interactions with consumers. In treating the model as a cornerstone of an audience research service for the Internet, it makes sense to take into account the corporate and marketing strategies of vendors when applying it. Perhaps these were things that A.C. Nielsen and I/PRO overlooked.

Using the results of this research to pre-design audience research and commercial interactions for the Internet is likely to give rise to new social behaviour. Applying concepts of face-to-face interactions to computer-mediated interactions should create new behaviour because aspects of two different situations are merged into one (Meyrowitz, 1985, 47). For example, when individuals insult each other in an electronic setting by capitalizing text, they are improvising for the nonverbal cues of a similar face-to-face interaction. It appears that this sort of substitution becomes conventionalized amongst electronic communicators who use and recognize it (Walther, 1992, 79). Applied to this research, this means that while consumers use "situational cues" to manage disclosure in similar ways in face-to-face and computer-mediated settings, the functional details of their communicative behaviour differs between the two the settings. This is a topic worthy of further investigation because the results might enhance the basic model for audience research that was presented in this thesis.

101

One final note, this thesis could have continued to explore its topic more deeply or examine other related issues. This research is a starting point that can be further elaborated by other researchers.

102

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allor, M. 1988, September. Relocating the Site of the Audience. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication.* 217-233.

Altman, L. Vinsel, A & Brown B. 1981. Dialectic Conceptions in Social Psychology: An Application to Social Penetration and Privacy Regulation. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, v.14.* 107-160.

Anderson, J.A., Meyer, T.P., & Traudt, P.J. 1980. Nontraditional Mass Communication Research methods: An Overview of Observational Case Studies of Media Use in Natural Settings. In D. Nimmo (Ed.) *Communication Yearbook 4.* 261-275. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction.

Ang, I. 1990. Culture and Communication: Towards an Ethnographic Critique of Media Consumption in the Transnational Media System. *European Journal of Communication.* 239-260.

Ang, I. 1991. *Desperately Seeking the Audience.* New York: Routledge.

(anonymous). 1995, July 24. Interactive study: Arbitron's new media Pathfinder study identifies consumer segments for interactive marketers to pursue. *Edge: Work-Group Computing Report. v6*(270), 13.

(anonymous). 1995, June 6. Race is on to develop standard for measuring interactive media. *Electronic Marketplace Report. v9*(11), 1.

Arnaut. G. May 7, 1996. Report on Information Technology. *Globe & Mail.* C1-C9.

Barnes, J.G. 1995. Establishing Relationships - Getting Closer To The Customer May Be More Difficult Than You Think. *Irish Marketing Review. v8,* 107-116.

Barton, R. 1964. *Media in Advertising.* New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Berger, P. & Luckmann, T. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality.* New York: Doubleday.

Biocca, F.A. 1988. Opposing Conceptions of the Audience: The Active and Passive Hemispheres of Mass Communication Theory. *Communication Yearbook 11.* 51-80.

103

Blumler, J. G., Gurevitch, M., & Katz, E. 1985. Reaching Out: A Future for Gratifications Research. In K.E. Rosengren, L.A. Wenner, & P. Palmgreen (Eds.) *Media Gratifications Research: Current Perspectives.* California: Sage Publications. 255-273.

Boyd. T. (A.C. Nielsen Interactive Services). 1996, March 28. *Personal Interview conducted by researcher Kim Myrick at the Canadian National Internet Show.* Toronto: Metropolitan Toronto Convention Centre.

Braman, S. 1990. Trade and Information Policy. *Media, Culture and Society. v12,* 361-385.

Carey, J.W. & Kreiling, E. 1974. Popular Culture and Uses and Gratifications: Notes Toward an Accommodation. In J.G. Blumler & E. Katz (Eds.) *The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research.* California: Sage Publications. 225-248.

Carragee, K.M. 1990, June. Interpretive Media Study and Interpretive Social Science. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication. v.7(2),* 81-96.

Carveth, R. 1992, December. The Reconstruction of the Global Marketplace. *Communication Research. v19(6),* 705-723.

Crane, E. 1965. *Marketing Communications: Decision-making as a Process of Interaction Between Buyer and Seller. 2nd edition.* New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Curran, J., Gurevitch, M., & Woollacott, J. 1982. The Study of the Media: Theoretical Approaches. In M. Gurevitch, T. Bennett, J. Curran & J. Woollacott (Eds.) *Culture Society and the Media.* London: Routledge. 56-90.

Davies, D.K. & Puckett, T.F.N. 1988. Mass Entertainment and Community: Toward a Culture-Centered Paradigm for Mass Communication Research. *Communication Yearbook 15.* 3-34.

Elliot, P. 1974. Uses and Gratifications Research: A Critique and a Sociological Alternative. In J.G. Blumler & E. Katz (Eds.) *The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research.* California: Sage Publications. 249-268.

Ewen, S. 1976. *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture.* New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Feldman, M.S. 1995. *Strategies for Interpreting Qualitative Data.* California: Sage Publications.

Flaherty, D.H. 1985. *Protecting Privacy in Two-Way Electronic Services.* New York: Knowledge Industry Publications, Inc.

Gambetta, D. 1988. Can We Trust Trust? in D. Gambetta (Ed.). *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations.* New York: Basil Blackwell Inc. 213-237.

Gandy Jr., O.H. 1993. *The Panoptic Sort: A Political Economy of Personal Information.* Colorado: Westview.

Gergen, K.J. 1991. *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life.* United States: BasicBooks.

Gitlin. T. 1978. Media Sociology: The Dominant Paradigm. *Theory & Society. v6,* 205-253.

Goffman, E. 1967. *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour.* New York: Doubleday & Company Inc.

Goffman, E. 1969. *Strategic Interaction.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Good, D. 1988. Individuals, Interpersonal Relations, and Trust. in D. Gambetta (Ed.). *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations.* New York: Basil Blackwell Inc. 31-48.

Gunter, B. 1988. Finding the Limits of Audience Activity. *Communication Yearbook 11.* 108-126.

Hulks, B. (Broadcaster's Audience Research Board) & Santani, Gilles (Informatique Medias Systemes). 1994, May 1-4. What Kind of Audience Research will be Required in Future? In Advertising Research Foundation (ARF) & European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR), *Worldwide Electronic and Broadcast Audience Research Symposium.* Paris.

Jeffreys, L. 1994, Summer. Rethinking Audiences for cultural industries: implications for Canadian research. *Canadian Journal of Communication. v19*(3/4), 495-522.

Jensen, K.B. 1987, March. Qualitative Audience Research: Toward an Integrative Approach to Reception. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication. v.4,* 21-36.

Jensen, K.B. & Rosengren, K.E. 1990. Five Traditions in Search of the Audience. *European Journal of Communication. v.5*, 207-238.

Jhally, S & Livant, B. 1987. Watching as Working: The Valorization of Audience Consciousness. *Journal of Communication. v.36*(3), 124-143.

Jhally, S. 1987. *The Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Political Economy of Meaning in the Consumer Society.* London: Frances Pinter Publishers.

Kellner, D. 1995. *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern.* New York: Routledge.

Kiesler, S. & McGuire, T.W. 1984, October. Social Psychological Aspects of Computer-mediated Communication. *American Psychologist, v.39*(10), 1123-1134.

Leiss, W., Kline, S. & Jhally, S. 1986. *Social Communication in Advertising: Persons, Products & Images of Well-Being.* New York: Metheun Inc.

Levy, S. J. & Zaltman, G. 1975. *Marketing, Society and Conflict.* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Lindlof, T.R. 1988. Media Audiences as Interpretive Communities. In J.A. Anderson (Ed.) *Communication Yearbook 11.* 81-107.

Lull, J. 1982, Fall. A Rules Approach to the Study of Television and Society. *Human Communication Research. v.9*(1), 3-16.

McCracken, G. 1988. The Long Interview. *Qualitative Research Methods, v.13.* California: Sage Publications.

McQuail, D. & Gurevitch, M. 1974. Explaining Audience Behaviour: Three Approaches Considered. In J. Blumler & E. Katz (Eds.), *The Uses of Mass Communications.* California: Sage Publications. 287-301.

Meehan, E.R. 1988. Recentering Television-Centred Television Criticism: A Political-Economic Response. *Communication Yearbook 11.* 183-193.

Melody, W.H. 1990. Telecommunication Reform: Which Sectors to Privatize. *CIRCIT Policy Research Paper.* Australia: CIRCIT.

Meyrowitz, J. 1985. *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Moores, S. 1993. *Interpreting Audiences: The Ethnography of Media Consumption.* London: Sage Publications.

Occhiogrosso, M. (The Arbitron Company). 1992, June 1-3. Local Market Television Measurement: A Comparison of the Statistical Reliability of Three Methodologies - Diary, Household Meteor/Diary Integration, and People Meteor. In Advertising Research Foundation (ARF) & European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR), *Worldwide Broadcast Audience Research Symposium.* Toronto.

Pearce, W.B. 1992. A "Camper's Guide" to Constructionism. *Human Systems: The Journal of Systemic Consultation and Management.* v3, 139-161.

Pearce, W.B. 1989. *Communication and the Human Condition.* Carbonale: University of Southern Illinois Press.

Pearce, W.B., Cronen, V.E., & Conklin, F. 1979. On What to Look at When Analysing Communication: A Hierarchy Model of Actions' Meanings. *Communication.* v.4, 195-221.

Petronio, S. 1991, November. Communication Boundary Management: A Theoretical Model of Managing Disclosure of Private Information Between Marital Couples. *Communication Theory.* v.1(4), 311-335.

Poster, M. 1990. *The Mode of Information: Poststructuralism and Social Context.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Primoff, R.L. 1986. *Towards a Law of Global Networks.* New York: Longman.

Print Measurement Bureau (PMB). 1995. *General Media Habits.* Canada: Print Measurement Bureau.

Representative of Internet Profiles Corporation (San Francisco). 1997, March 19. *Telephone Interview conducted by researcher Kim Myrick.*

Rosengren, K.E. 1974. Uses and Gratifications: A Paradigm Outlined. In J.G. Blumler & E. Katz (Eds.) *The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research.* California: Sage Publications. 269-286.

Ruggles, M. 1992. Information Flows and Boundaries in the Intelligent Network, Policy Research Paper #29. *CIRCIT Policy Research Series.* Melbourne, Australia: Centre for International Research of Communication and Information Technologies.

Ruggles, M. 1993, February. Mixed Signals: Personal Data Control in the Intelligent Network. *Media Information Australia,* no.67, 28-37.

Samarajiva, R. 1996a. Interactivity As Though Privacy Mattered. Unpublished chapter for P. Agre & M. Rotenberg (Eds.) *Technology and Privacy: The New Landscape.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

Samarajiva, R. 1994. Privacy in Electronic Public Space: Emerging Issues. *Canadian Journal of Communication.* v19, 87-99.

Samarajiva, R. 1996b. Surveillance by Design: Public Networks and the Control of Consumption in R. Mansell & R. Silverstone (Eds.) *Communication by Design: The Politics of Information and Communication Technologies.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Sheth, J.N. 1975. Buyer-Seller Interaction: A Conceptual Framework. In B. Sternthal & G. Zaltman (Eds.) *Broadening the Concept of Consumer Behaviour.* Pittsburg: The Association of Consumer Research. 131-140.

Shotter, J. & Gergen, K.J. 1994. Social Construction: Knowledge, Self, Others and the Continuing Conversation. In S.A. Deetz (Ed.) *Communication Yearbook 17.* California: Sage Publications.

Shotter, J. 1989. Self Accountability and the Social Construction of "You". In J. Shotter and K.J. Gergen (Eds.) *Texts of Identity.* Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Smith, P.J. (Vice President, PC-Meteor, A Subsidiary of the NPD Group) 1996, November 25. *Telephone Interview conducted by researcher Kim Myrick.*

Smythe, D.W. 1981. *Dependency Road: Communications, Capitalism, Consciousness and Canada.* New Jersey: Albex Publishing Corporation.

Staple, S. (CBC) & Mayrand, C. (SRC). 1992, June 1-3. Diaries vs People Meteors: The Canadian Experience. In Advertising Research Foundation (ARF) & European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR), *Worldwide Broadcast Audience Research Symposium.* Toronto.

Sternthal, B. & Zaltman, G. (Eds.) 1975. *Broadening the Concept of Consumer Behaviour.* Pittsburg: The Association of Consumer Research.

Turow, J. 1992, December. The Organizational Underpinnings of Contemporary Media Conglomerates. *Communication Research.* v19(6), 682-704.

Walther, J.B. 1992, February. Interpersonal Effects in Computer-Mediated Interaction: A Relational Perspective. *Communication Research. v.19*(1), 52-90.

Webster, J.G. 1989. Assessing Exposure to the New Media. In J.L. Salvaggio and J. Bryant (Eds.), *Media Use in the Information Age: Emerging Patterns of Adoption and Consumer Use*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers. 3-17.

Withers, E. & Brown, R.S. 1991. The Broadcast Audience: A Sociological Perspective. In B. Singer (Ed.), *Communications in Canadian Society*. Scarborough: Nelson Canada. 89-121.

APPENDIX A

(I/CODE REGISTRATION FORM)

110

NOTE TO USERS

Copyrighted materials in this document have not been filmed at the request of the author. They are available for consultation in the author's university library.

111-112

UMI

APPENDIX B

(CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF CONSUMER-VENDOR INTERACTION)

113

FIGURE 1. A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF BUYER SELLER INTERACTION

	Compatible Process	Incompatible Process
Compatible Content	ideal transaction	inefficient transaction
Incompatible Content	inefficient transaction	no transaction

BUYER

Content of Communication	Style of Communication
1. Functional Utility	1. Task Oriented Style
2. Social-Organizational Utility	2. Interaction Oriented Style
3. Situational Utility	3. Self-Oriented Style
4. Emotional Utility	
5. Curiosity Utility	

SELLER

Content of Communication	Style of Communication
1. Functional Utility	1. Task Oriented Style
2. Social-Organizational Utility	2. Interaction Oriented Style
3. Situational Utility	3. Self Oriented Style
4. Emotional Utility	
5. Curiosity Utility	

Personal Factors
- Personal Background
- Personal Life Style
- Role Orientation

Organizational Factors
- Org. Objectives
- Org. Style
- Org. Structure

Product-Specific Factors
- Technology & Competition
- Market Motivations
- Buyer Seller Plans

APPENDIX C

(PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM)

115

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Hi, my name is Kim Myrick and I am a graduate student with the Department of Communications Studies at the University of Windsor. I am conducting research on how consumers and marketers build trustworthy relationships in the electronic-mediated environment focussing specifically on the Internet. The research includes tape-recorded interviews with users of the Internet designed to uncover what they know and understand about the following:

- Interpersonal interactions and relationships.
- Situations in which they are surveyed or asked for personal and demographic information including:
    - face to face in the retail industry including boutiques, convenience stores, department stores etc.
    - face to face in personal services including health care, dental care, travel services etc.
    - face to face in the legal and financial services industries including law firms, banks, investment agencies etc.; and
    - at sites on the world wide web on the Internet in one of the industries above.

In the last situation, more then one site on the world wide web will be explored where users are asked for different amounts and types of information for different reasons. One reason simply being for purposes of audience measurement because media research firms are currently designing techniques to measure audiences of the interactive media to meet marketers information needs.

While the interview questions are focussed to avoid redundancy, they are open-ended to maximize what is uncovered about what users of the Internet know about the things above but are unaware that they know.

I, Kim Myrick, am the principal investigator of this project and I may be contacted at (416) 977-9281 should you have any questions. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project. Your participation is very much appreciated. Just before we start the interview, I would like to reassure you that as a participant in this project you have several very definite rights.

- Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary.
- You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time.
- You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time.

(over)

116

This interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to members of the research team. Excerpts of this interview may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics be included in this report.

I would be grateful if you would sign this form to show that I have read you its contents.

Print Name:
Signature: Date:

Please send me a report on the results of this research project. (circle one)

Yes   No

Address for participant requesting report:

APPENDIX D

(INTERVIEW GUIDE)

118

INSIDE COMMERCIAL INTERACTION:
AUDIENCE RESEARCH IN INTERACTIVE MEDIA

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Opening Questions

1. Before we start, can you tell me a bit about yourself like where you were born, how big your family is, your age, occupation, education, marital status, if you have children, where you live and so on.

2. What about things like what you do for fun, things you read, movies and television shows you like, your interests, your hobbies, your experience with the Internet and so on?

3. How long have you been using the Internet?

4. Do you use it at home, at school, at work?

5. What do you use it for?

6. What sort of priority does it have in terms of your daily activities?

Case-specific Questions

Researcher repeats case-specific questions for traditional types of interactions (e.g.,face to face) in each of the following market settings: retail including clothing stores, convenience stores, grocery stores etc.; personal services including health care, dental care, and travel services.; and legal and financial services including law firms, banks, investment companies, insurance companies etc. Researcher repeats all questions except #1 for one of the market settings explored on the Internet during the interview. Terms are explained as needed as the interview progresses.

1. Have you ever had an experience where you were asked for your personal information in the (*name commercial setting and give examples*) industry? If yes, ask participant to describe it.

    a. Who asked you for the information?

2. Did/would you give your personal information in this/these situations? Why or why not?

119

3. Considering the amount and type of information that was requested of you, what does that say to you?

4. Did/would you believe the request(s) made of you to be legitimate or proper? Why or why not?

5. How much control would you say you have over divulging your personal information in this/these situations?

   a. Why would you say that?

6. What would make you loosen your control?

   a. Why would that make you feel that way?

7. What would make you feel the need to tighten your control over your information?

   a. Why would that make you feel that way?

8. Did/would anything make you think the situation(s) were untrustworthy? If so, what and why?

9. How did/would you expect to be asked for your personal information?

10. What type of information did/would you expect to be asked for in this/these situation?

11. What do you think they do with your information?

   a. What makes you think that way?

12. How important is it for you to know what they do with your information? Please explain.

13. How much information would be too much information for them to ask of you? Please explain.

14. If they do not communicate with you after you give them your personal information, does that tell you something? If yes, what?

15. If you receive no response from someone that you communicate something to, do you think that communicates something to you and that you are still interacting with that person? Why or why not?

120

16. If you are a member of a group and you communicate something to an individual outside that group and that individual communicates something to you as part of the group, would you think that you are interacting with that person? Why or why not?

17. What would make the situation(s) less trustworthy?

   a. Why would that make it less trustworthy?

18. Did/would anything make you think the situation(s) were trustworthy? If so, what and why?

19. Did/would they need to guarantee you anything? If so, what, why and how?

20. Is there anything about the surroundings, or the environment, that makes you more or less trustworthy of the situation(s)? If so, what and why?

21. What would make the situation(s) more trustworthy?

   a. Why would that make them more trustworthy?

22. Would this make you feel like you were getting closer to those who asked you for your information?

23. Do you perceive that there is a certain space or distance between you that could be widened or narrowed with the amount of trust you build with one another?

24. Did/would you perceive an individual of a certain position in this setting was asking you for your information? If so, explain.

   a. Why do you have that perception?
   b. What do you think your perception does to the way you interact?
   c. At what point did/would you think that you were interacting with that person? Please explain.
   d. Does it matter who asks for your information in this setting? Why or why not?

25. How much prior knowledge did you have (or would you need) about those who asked you for your personal information? (If would ask: Why would you need that much?)

26. Did/would it matter how and when they tell you certain things about themselves and about what is going on? Please explain.

121

27. What do you think are the main roles in this situation? By roles I mean any of the following: buyer, seller, advisors, intermediaries, public authorities, suppliers, partners, web browsers, web owners/managers.

28. How do you think you are perceived by those asking for your personal information (i.e., as an individual or as part of a group)? Why?

29. Did/would you think that they are asking you for your personal information to try to build a relationship with you? Why or why not?

30. When would you think that you are in a relationship with organizations like these?

   a. Why at that time?

31. What determines the level of relationship you have or can have with them?

   a. Why does that determine it?

32. Having a relationship involves knowing the other person and sharing experiences? When do you think you would be able to say that you know these organizations? Please explain.

33. Do you think businesses or companies build relationships with consumers? If so, why and how? If no, why not?

34. What makes having a relationship with a business different than having one with a friend?

35. Do you feel closer to a company when you deal with someone at a higher level? Why or why not?

36. Do you feel closer to them when you deal with them repeatedly? Why or why not?

37. How would you define the term interaction in the sense of interacting with another person?

38. What makes you think that way?

39. How would you define the term relationship?

40. What makes you think that way?

41. Does there have to be interaction between two parties that have an ongoing relationship? Why or why not?

42. Are the interactions that take place in a relationship different than those that take place under other circumstances? If so, how and why?

43. Can you have interactions without having a relationship?

44. Can you have a negative relationship?

45. To move from the initial interaction with someone to having a positive relationship with them requires building trust. In general, at what point would you say that process can break down?

46. Why do you think that way?

47. Overall, what would you say are the criteria for building trust with you in these situation? Please explain.

48. Did/would you negotiate with these people how much information you are willing to give them? If so, how and why?

49. Would you prefer to have options in terms of giving your information? I mean that for each option, you divulge a certain amount of information for a certain amount of benefits? Why or why not?

50. What do you think about being asked for your information by these organizations in person, over the phone and through the mail? Please explain.

Ending questions

51. Do you think that dealing with businesses through computer technology disrupts your relationship with them? If so, how and why?

52. Do you think of the technology like you think of a telephone in the sense that there is somebody on the other end who responds to you? Why or why not?

53. Can you compare what you do in face-to-face settings to what you do in electronic-mediated settings? I mean how do you respond similarly and differently? Please explain.

54. What improvements do you think should be made to the electronic environment to help consumers and businesses build better relationships?

123

55. Why do you think they will help?

56. What is your perception of traditional media like television, radio, newspapers, magazines and so on?

57. How does marketing and audience research fit in?

58. What makes you think this way?

59. What is your perception of the new interactive media?

60. What roles do marketing and audience research play in it?

61. What makes you think that way?

Researcher explains the concept of "relationship marketing" and the system of audience research.

As you know, new communication technologies are creating new forms of media. For businesses, this means that they can market their products and services on a more direct and individual basis. In addition, they can collect, analyse and store more information about customers. Therefore, marketers are putting pressure on media research firms like A.C. Nielsen to design audience research techniques for the new interactive media like the Internet. Like people subscribe to cable and tune into certain channels and programs, marketers want to know who subscribes to the Internet and what web sites they visit. This information will simply give marketers audience profiles that they can match with their market profiles for advertising purposes. Furthermore, it gives them another line of data on consumer activities that they can match with data they already have to build more indepth profiles of consumers. In doing this, marketers believe that they can be proactive in meeting consumers needs and build better relationships with them as a result.

62. Does this change your perception of any of the situations that we discussed? Why or why not?

63. Would you change your response in any of them? Why or why not?

64. Does this change any of your thoughts or feelings about anything we discussed? Why or why not?

124

APPENDIX E

(PILOT-TEST INTERVIEW GUIDE)

125

INSIDE COMMERCIAL INTERACTION:
AUDIENCE RESEARCH IN INTERACTIVE MEDIA

PILOT-TEST INTERVIEW GUIDE

1   Have you heard or read anything about the Internet lately?

2   What have you heard or read?

3   What do you think about the Internet?

4   In general, who do you think uses it?

5   For what purposes do you think they use it?

6   Do you use it? *(If no, go to question 8)*

7   For what purposes do you use it?

8   Have you heard of the World Wide Web? *(If no, explain what it is and go to question 45.)*

9   What do you know about it?

10   What do you think of it?

11   Have you ever observed somebody browse it or browse it yourself? *(If no, go to question 45.)*

12   While browsing the web, did you (or the other person) hit a site where you were asked for any personal information about yourself? *(If no, go to question 45.)*

13   Who asked you for this information?

14   What did they tell you about themselves?

15   What exactly did they ask you?

16   Can we go to the site and you show me what you are talking about?

17   Why did they ask you for this information?

18   What was your first impression?

126

19   Did your impression change at any time? If so, how and why?

20   How did/would you respond exactly?

21   Why do you think you responded/would respond this way?

22   Did you expect the information to be requested in a different way? If so, how and why?

23   Did you expect more or less information to be requested of you? Please be specific as to the information and why.

24   What did you expect different?

25   Why did you expect this?

26   Of those who asked you for the information, do you think that what they told you about themselves effected your response?

27   Did you expect them to give you more or less information about themselves?

28   What exactly did you expect different from them?

29   Why did you expect this?

30   What did/would you expect from them by responding the way you did/would?

31   Why did/would you expect this?

32   Did you feel like you were interacting with them?

33   Why did you feel this way?

34   Did you feel like you had any kind of relationship with them? Please explain.

35   Why did you feel this way?

36   What was your purpose for being at that site in the first place?

37   Do you think this had anything to do with the way that you responded to being asked for your personal information?

38   Do you think there was anything about the site itself that caused you to respond the way that you did?

39   Have you had other situations similar to this while browsing the web? *(If no, go to 45.)*

40   In comparison to the other situation(s) that you described, would you say that your response to this one was the same or different?

41   How was it the same or different?

42   Why do you think you responded the same or differently in these situations? Please be specific, if necessary.

43   Can I direct you to a site where you are asked for personal information to see what you think of it?

Repeat questions 13 to 37 where applicable and questions 42, 43 and 44 if applicable.

44   In general, what do you think of being asked for your personal information on the web?

45   Would you expect your responses to be different if you were asked for your personal information by somebody face-to-face?

46   Why would you expect this?

47   Can you think of any situations where you have been asked for this type of information face to face? For example, by a salesperson in a retail or department store? *(If no, act out example.)*

Repeat questions 13 to 37 where applicable and questions 42, 43, 44.

Researcher explains the concept of "relationship marketing" and the system of audience research (i.e., what its purpose is, what it is used for, why it is designed the way it is, the message it is suppose to convey, and so on).

128

48   Does this change your perception of those who asked for your personal information in each of the situations that you described? If so, how and why?

49   Does it change your perception of your role in each of the situations? If so, how and why?

50   Would your response change in each of the situations? If so, how and why?

51   In general, do you know when and why you give others your personal information? I'm not talking about just the type of situations that we have discussed. You can include any type.

52   Do you know why, when and how other people give their personal information?

53   How would you define the term "relationship"? What does the term mean?

54   What does a "relationship" involve?

55   When do you perceive a relationship to exist? What would make you think: "I've just formed a relationship with that person."

56   Is this different then having an interaction with someone? If so, how and why?

57   When you give your personal information while you are interacting with someone, do you think it effects your interaction? If so, how and why?

58   What do you expect from the other person you are interacting with?

59   When you give your personal information while having what you call a relationship, do you think it effects your relationship? If so, how and why?

60   What do you expect from the other person you are having the relationship with?

Researcher explains the concept of boundary management in communication -- what boundaries people have, what they use them for, when they are willing to take them down, and so on. (Repeat questions 50 to 52 and then stop.)

APPENDIX F

(TRANSCRIPTS OF PILOT-TEST INTERVIEWS)

130

PILOT-TEST INTERVIEW #1

Researcher: Have you heard or read anything about the Internet lately?

Participant: Nothing that comes to mind.

Researcher: You haven't read anything in the newspaper or seen anything on the television.

Participant: I've, I've, I've noticed, like every time I'll notice when like the radio stations are advertising they will say like Q107 slash com for people who use the Internet.

Researcher: Yeh, like on the news you will see it at the end.

Participant: Yeh, different things I'll see it but

Researcher: Yeh, you're not quite sure, O.K.

Participant: O.K.

Researcher: O.K. Do you have any thoughts about the Internet? What comes to mind when you think about the Internet?

Participant: Ah, business. Business on the Internet.

Researcher: O.K. so is that who you think uses the Internet are businesses or who do you think uses it?

Participant: Ah, other than business hmm.

Researcher: You can take your time and think about it.

Participant: Yeh, ah I heard about down in the states they got programs set up for people addicted to the Internet. The only problem is that the help they got to get is on the Internet. That is pretty funny. I thought that was a good one. People are getting hooked to it and the healthcare people are setting up like an Internet anonymous and it is on the Internet. It thought that was funny.

Researcher: So do you mean that a lot of individuals use it too, as opposed to businesses?

131

Participant: Yeh, I think of people and students and that in university learning. They got to and businesses use it to try to stay modern. Students learn it presently in school. I think of them as opposed to someone like me who didn't get introduced to it while I was in school and who are not in the mainstream. People with big business who are trying to stay modern having it and people who are in school. Am I right or wrong?

Researcher: No, as I said there is no right or wrong answer. The answer is what you think.

Participant: It's harder for someone who hasn't been introduced to it to be attracted to it.

Researcher: So do you think it is a complicated thing?

Participant: It sounds, it's pretty complicated to me. I know it, I feel better as you've told me a bit about it.

Researcher: Right. So, in that sense I guess, for what purposes do you think it is usually used -- school, business?

Participant: Yeh. School, business even leisure type thing. Like my friend Dave. He is an accountant and he he ah ah like he has no business use for it. It is for something to do.

Researcher: Right. Entertainment.   .

Participant: Entertainment. And he told me to pick a topic and I picked St. John's and he said pick another one and I picked Memorial University. Then he said ah what about the university. I said I don't know places to stay if you went there. Sure enough he typed it in and it started listing all the people in St. John's who put up borders going to university. Quick as that. Then we did the exact same thing on Germany. Something we knew nothing about and it did the same thing.

Researcher: Marvellous. That is just it.

Participant: And he printed the stuff out too.

Researcher: So, you have never used it yourself then.

Participant: No.

Researcher: But you've watched others use it.

Participant: Just that once. No, no twice. My uncle, I've seen him on it.

132

Researcher: O.K. So have you heard of the world wide web before I explained it to you earlier.

Participant: I heard the term World Wide Web but I don't know anything about it.

Researcher: Right. Do have any general thoughts about it?

Participant: No I don't know a big lot but it is something I would like to know more about it for business plus it interests me.

Researcher: So when you were with your friend Dave is that what you did? Did you browse the web?

Participant: I don't know if you call that browsing that he was gettin' me to pick one topic and he would type it. I don't know is that browsing?

Researcher: Yeh, that would be browsing the web. So, when you did that did you come across a site or did anything come up on the screen that asked you for personal information like your name, address your...

Participant: I don't, ah when I went to his place that night he was already in it. I don't know what he had to do to get in their. Personally, I never seen that.

Researcher: O.K. can I take you into the web here on my computer and go to a site where you are asked for information like that to see what you think of it.

Participant: Great. I would love to.

Researcher: O.K. now that you have just explored this site, Virtual Radio, and you have encountered this I/CODE registration for, my first question is who do you think asked you for this information, you personal information?

Participant: Ah, I/CODE.

Researcher: O.K. what did they tell you about themselves?

Participant: Ah, that any information that you gave them they would honour your anonymity and ah and ah not reveal it.

Researcher: Why did they ask you for the information?

Participant: I/CODE? Ah, they asked you for your name and your birth date and a hold bunch of stuff -- How much money you made. What your position was. Marital status.

133

Researcher: Why do you think they asked you for this information?

Participant: So they could keep, they could track, they could track what sites you visit and what you are interested in. So they can give this information to the people who have the sites so they can know like what age groups visit the sites. That is their business to manage information on all the people.

Researcher: Ah, what was your first impression of this.

Participant: Ah, first impression of all those questions?

Researcher: Yes. the questions, the whole thing.

Participant: Ah, well the questions in my mind, they were asking too much stuff. Yeh. They wanted to know a lot of stuff.

Researcher: O.K. Did that impression change at any time?

Participant: As I got to, yeh, yeh, that impression changed as you clarified a few things for me. I suppose just realizing ah, ah the potential of this system for business and plus the value of knowing that what you are saying they will keep anonymous.

Researcher: So, how would you respond? Would you give your personal information? We didn't do it here. I just wanted you to see and understand what your asked for. But if you came across this site on your own how would you respond?

Participant: I'd give the information. I think I would. I don't know there are so many stories you here about when people give their personal information. It gets passed around and you get a lot more junk mail. I don't know this is so new to me and I'm basically illiterate in computers that I would probably want to know a bit more before I gave too much information. Someone just knowing my name and address I'd probably be O.K. with. But ah my birth date and my name, a person could find out a lot of information.

Researcher: O.K. the next thing, the information that was requested of you did you expect it to be requested in a different way?

Participant: Ah, I didn't have any expectations. Are you asking me do I think it could be asked in a different way?

Researcher: Sure.

Participant: Ah, certain things like your birth date that could be optional. Like a lot of place like if you are leasing something and on the application they ask for your social

134

insurance and they say it is optional. But you have to realize that they don't do that with your birth date and they can use that to find out the same information.

Researcher: So, do you expect more or less information to be requested of you?

Participant: Ah, I think less but then as you explained it like when you talked about the Nielsen ratings. If you never said that I would have never made the association or understood why they were asking me for this.

Researcher: So, what did you expect different in terms of more or less information?

Participant: Ah, maybe an explanation as to why they want this information would be more helpful in understanding it.

Researcher: Why do expect this, ah like just for your own comfort?

Participant: But then again they also say that that everything that you are saying ah, ah, that your anonymity is guaranteed.

Researcher: Of those who asked you about yourself, do you think your response would be influenced by what they told you about themselves?

Participant: Yeh, yeh, to a degree. That along with what you said. I can see myself talked into it by what they told me.

Researcher: Did you expect them to give more or less information about themselves?

Participant: About themselves? More information about what they are going to do.

Researcher: So that is exactly what you would expect from them. That is my next question what exactly did you expect in terms of more or less information?

Participant: Yeh, more about what they were going to do with it.

Researcher: Why did you expect that? Why would you want that?

Participant: To build up some credibility with me. If they want my business, you know, I got to have faith. I want to know what they are all about.

Researcher: O.K. so if you responded what would you expect from them by responding?

135

Participant: Ah, I guess you'd expect what they promised -- anonymity. Ah, things like what they are all about, what is their intention here, what is the service that they offer, where are they going with it, how is it going to benefit me and the people who own the sites.

Researcher: O.K. but do you expect that before or after you respond?

Participant: Before, before. I'd want it before I'd give mine.

Researcher: So after you respond, you wouldn't expect anything?

Participant: I don't know. We didn't go past it so I didn't know how it worked. I don't know.

Researcher: Right. my next question is if you responded, do you think you would feel like you are interacting with them? Interacting, I mean like we are sitting here now communicating with each other and interacting with each other. Do you feel that the same process would take place here.

Participant: Yeh. I don't know. I don't know. I'd almost have to see what happened after I responded.

Researcher: O.K. I'll ask you if you responded do you think you would feel like you have or you are entering any sort of a relationship, any kind of a relationship?

Participant: Ah, I don't know. I don't know. Not from what I've just seen already. But I'm sure if I got into it and I was into it on a regular basis then I guess I would feel like I was in a relationship.

Researcher: In general, what do you think about being asked for your personal information on the web? Not just here at the Virtual Radio site but in general. What do you think about it?

Participant: Ah.

Researcher: Do you like it? Do you dislike it? Do you think it is good? Do you think it is bad?

Participant: I like, ah I find it really interesting, very interesting. No. I like it. It's an excellent idea.

Researcher: Why do you feel that way?

136

Participant: Cause they can monitor you. Like if I had a web site, I'd love to know who was going there, how old they were, what sex they were. That is very good information for me as a web site owner. But me as a person in the site I'd feel invaded with all that information, there is a lot of personal information. But I'm sure if I had a site and there was people lookin' at my site and these people (I/CODE) were giving me information that was going to benefit me and my company. I'd feel like I had some partnership going. They are telling me something I would not have known. But as someone browsing through and asked all these questions for interest, I'd almost feel like there is a little ah, it is a danger to privacy.

Researcher: So you being business minded and owning a site, ah do you think that as you come across a site as a user, from a user perspective as opposed to the site owner, you would give your information because you know the potential of the use of the information. I mean at times you speak from the owner's perspective and that probably comes from your own experience in your business. Is this how you think about it as the user, would you say to yourself "well I'll give the information because they need it to target me or to sell to me. They need this information for business purposes." Would this influence you to give your personal information.

Participant: Yeh but as I'm finding out more about what they are all about which I wouldn't have known by just what was on the screen. They got to give information that proves they are credible.

Researcher: Would you expect your response to be different if you were asked for the same information by someone face to face?

Participant: Yes, exactly. Right. Yes a face-to-face situation would have a more positive influence on me. I can see me being talked into joining by a person than by pulling it up on my computer.

Researcher: Why?

Participant: I don't know. So basically I guess that goes right back to what you asked me in the beginning if I would feel like I was interacting. Basically, I suppose no.

Researcher: Can you think of a situation where you have been asked for this type of information face to face by somebody? Like what comes to my mind is sometimes when I walk into a department store like the Bay a salesperson will approach me and ask me for similar information for whatever reason.

Participant: Yeh, the first thing that pops into my mind is the last time that I was in the airport in Halifax a real genuine young girl got me right on the spot to sign up for Unitel which I cancelled afterwards.

137

Researcher: That is just because she was beautiful, right.

Participant: Probably. Yeh, because guaranteed I would have never done that for Murphy Brown on the Sprint commercials. She does not have the same effect as the girl at the airport face to face. And no seriously she didn't have to be beautiful either. It was the personal contact that was important. That is why I have to wonder if this on the Internet is really working.

Researcher: I'm going to ask you the same sorts of question in respect to your face to face experience. What did she tell you about herself?

Participant: I don't remember our whole conversation. She just ask me if I had heard of Unitel and if I knew anyone with it. I said yes my sister has it. She asked me if I knew that I would save this much over and whatever. Then she asked if I'd be interested in signing up and I signed up.

Researcher: Was it just the personal contact?

Participant: I'm sure it was because I knew about all this before. I had stuff in the mail. I even knew it was cheaper but I still never signed up until then.

Researcher: Did she tell you anything about the company itself or her position in it?

Participant: I can't remember. I know she was nice. It was just the personal contact I'm sure. But I'm like about sales people. When I go into a store I'll look around for someone I think is nice to help me.

Researcher: What type of information did she ask you for?

Participant: The whole nine yards. My name, my address, my phone number, my business phone number. It was a long application. My social insurance number, my birth date, the whole nine yards.

Researcher: Even education, income?

Participant: Oh no. She didn't get into education. I suppose all they cared about was whether you could pay the bill.

Researcher: Did she ask you what company you worked for?

Participant: Ah, she asked me what business I was in, yeh.

Researcher: And why did she ask you for all this.

138

Participant: That's their thing. They need to know for billing purposes.

Researcher: What was your first impression of this.

Participant: I didn't mind it, no. I didn't think she was going to check me out or anything like that.

Researcher: Did this impression change at any point?

Participant: Ah, no. Once I knew she could save me money I was fine.

Researcher: O.K. so you responded positively. You gave all the information she wanted.

Participant: I gave her all the information she wanted right in the airport. That's why it sticks out in my mind because that was six months ago. She was aggressive. You know, she was pretty aggressive.

Researcher: Did you expect the information to be requested in a different way?

Participant: I never had any expectations. Actually though I did point out to her that Bell Canada never asked me for all this information. I mean as long as I have been dealing with them.

Researcher: So did you expect more or less information to be requested of you.

Participant: Yeh, I think I expected less. I never consciously thought that at the time. But now when I reflect on it. Yes I would have expected less.

Researcher: Does anything come to mind "I didn't expect them to ask this." I mean anything specific.

Participant: I just expected less information in general.

Researcher: Why?

Participant: Because I felt like I'm already with Bell Canada. Unitel is trying to get me away. But Bell Canada never asked me all those questions so why should they. I know I seem to be contradicting myself because I gave it to her anyway. But the personal approach is more effective on me than any other kind.

Researcher: Did what she told you about Unitel or herself influenced your response?

139

Participant: Not what she told me because I already knew about them. I went on her whole approach. Yeh, that was it.

Researcher: O.K. but did you expect her to give you more or less information about Unitel or herself?

Participant: I hadn't thought about it. For me the bottom line was that it was cheaper and that was enough.

Researcher: Did you feel like you were interacting with the person from Unitel who approached you?

Participant: Yeh, definitely.

Researcher: Why did you feel this way?

Participant: Well, I mean I was talking to her for about a half hour or so.

Researcher: Did you feel like you had any kind of a relationship with her or Unitel?

Participant: Ah, no. But I guess. The girl and I had a long chat and I agreed to sign up with Unitel, to deal with them.

Researcher: In comparison to the situation on the web, do you think your response face to face is different?

Participant: I would have to say yes to that. For me and what I know about this. Maybe another person might be different. Be honest I just didn't feel like I was interacting here.

Researcher: That is why you would respond differently?

Participant: Yes, for sure.

Researcher: I'm going to talk about what those situations have in common and make you aware or, more aware or confirm for you what was going on in both those situations. Businesses and their marketing people today want to collect more information on consumers so that they can develop products, services and advertising that better target those consumers. This way businesses think they will be proactive and build long-term relationships with consumers. And because the Internet allows businesses to reach consumers on a more one-to-one basis and interact with them, they are have a need to know who uses the Internet. They want more information on Internet users. So what you came across here on the Internet is a system for gathering information about subscribers to the Internet that will fill advertisers' needs. It is a form of audience measurement so to speak like measuring

140

audiences of television programs. So being consciously aware of this, does this change your perceptions of the situations we talked about here, the one on the Internet and the one face to face in the airport?

Participant: Yeh. I guess to a degree. I'm sure the more you know about these situations changes your perception of them.

Researcher: Does this change your perception of your role in these situations?

Participant: Yeh, because now I understand more about why they want the information from me.

Researcher: Would it change your response in each situation?

Participant: I don't know if it would you know.

Researcher: In general, do you know when and why you give others your personal information? I'm not just talking about situations like we talked about. I'm talking about any situation.

Participant: It got to be when a representative of a large reputable organization and it got to be face to face, not over the phone or anything like that. But this is stuff that I don't even, I don't really think I do all this until you ask me about and then it starts coming to me.

Researcher: Yeh, you are learning something about yourself. That is good. You should learn something from this about yourself.

Participant: Yeh. It's alright.

Researcher: Do you know why, when and how other people, people in general, give out their personal information? It can be any situation.

Participant: For me, only for me, it is when I reach a point with a person where I trust them. It can happen in five minutes or in I don't know. That is usually easier face to face. For me, it is when I trust the person, when I am at ease. That is a good question though. It is when I feel someone is sincere.

Researcher: What usually makes you feel that way?

Participant: I don't know. It could be body language. It can be a sense of insincerity in the other person.

Researcher: What would make you sense insincerity?

141

Participant: I don't know. I guess, hmm! What would be a good scenario? Oh, I recently walked into a car dealership shopping around for a new truck and the sales guy came up to me and said do you want to drive that baby home today, you know. I said, nah that is alright I'm just lookin' around. So it was just the way he approached me. I didn't walk away with any resentment or anything like that. It was just I immediately had no interest in talking to the guy. I just cut him off. I just had no desire to talk to him but I didn't do it consciously. I didn't look for sincerity consciously.

Researcher: So it is nothing in particular that you can put your finger on that makes you think that someone is insincere. O..K. next question. How would you define the term relationship? What does it mean?

Participant: Relationship? Ah, some type of common bond.

Researcher: What makes it common?

Participant: Well, there are many variations. There are degrees of relationship.

Researcher: O.K. do you think there is anything common to the different degrees of relationship?

Participant: Ah, mutual trust I'd have to say.

Researcher: What does a relationship involve?

Participant: Ah, ongoing understanding. But a relationship can be anything.

Researcher: Well, I'll ask you this. When do you perceive a relationship to exist. What makes you think or say "I've just formed a relationship with that person."

Participant: When we have reached a mutual understanding.

Researcher: Mutual understanding of what?

Participant: Each other.

Researcher: In what sense?

Participant: Depends on the relationship.

Researcher: Is having a relationship with someone different then having an interaction?

Participant: Yeh, definitely.

142

Researcher: How and why?

Participant: A relationship involves a mutual interest in each other, whatever that may be.

Researcher: When you give your personal information while interacting with someone, do you think it affects that interaction?

Participant: Ah, if it's not subtle, if it is aggressive.

Researcher: When you give it, what do you expect from the other person in return?

Participant: Some unveiling of something.

Researcher: When giving your personal information while having what you call a relationship with someone, do you think it affects that relationship?

Participant: Depending on how long the relationship has been. If the relationship has gone on for a long time I'd probably be more quick to give my information.

Researcher: What do you expect from the other person your having the relationship with?

Participant: I don't know if I expect anything really.

Researcher: I am going to make you consciously aware of what we do with our personal information while communicating with others and building relationships with them. As we interact with others we tend to keep a certain distance from the other person and not divulge any information about ourselves until we explore the interaction. As we become more comfortable and trustworthy for whatever reasons we close the distance and reveal something about ourselves. But we do this believing and trusting that our actions will be reciprocated meaning we believe the other person will do the same. As this process goes back and forth the distance between us closes more, we give more information about ourselves and build tighter relationships. The best example of this is between husband and wife. Now I will just repeat a few final questions. First, now that you are conscious of what takes place in an interaction and relationship, does that change your perception of the situations that we discussed, the situation here on the Internet and the one in the airport with the lady from Unitel?

Participant: No because what you just said is exactly what we were doing we just weren't aware of it.

Researcher: So is that how you perceived those situations. You perceived that you were developing relationships.

143

Participant: No I just perceive that I wasn't manipulated in either situation.

Researcher: O.K. does it change your perception of your role in those situations?

Participant: I don't know.

Researcher: O.K. I'll ask you if your response would change being consciously aware of what relationship building means and involves?

Participant: No, no.

Researcher: Well, that is it. Thank you so much for your time.

144

INSIDE COMMERCIAL INTERACTION:
AUDIENCE RESEARCH IN INTERACTIVE MEDIA

PILOT-TEST INTERVIEW #2

Researcher: O.K. first question, have you heard or read anything about the Internet lately?

Participant: Yeh.

Researcher: What have you heard or read?

Participant: Oh Gosh! What did I read? The last thing I read on it was probably some newspaper article where this guy was complaining that it is not all that it is hyped up to be.

Researcher: Ah yeh! Did you read that in the globe. I can remember reading something like that in the globe.

Participant: I think that was the Star I read it in. I can't remember.

Researcher: Oh it could have been. O.K. In general, what do you think about the Internet?

Participant: Hmmm. A lot of different things I think about it. Some are positive and some are negative. I think its its good for finding information kind of thing. Hmmm. I think there's some problems with web sites in terms of accessing the information, waiting for it to download, hmmm. And I guess just because of what I'm lookin' at the problems with actually gettin' some kind of feedback from you know those forms you fill out in the web site as well, you know. Hmm, I guess that is about it.

Researcher: O.K. In general who do you think uses it?

Participant: It think, hmmm, business people, hmmm, people in educational institutions, students, hmm. Different types of people. People, hmmm, who just like playing the games and everything that is available on it and stuff. People who just wanna surf. People who wanna date, meet people over it. You find a really wide spectrum of different types of people using it, accessing it for different reasons.

Researcher: O.K. well actually that covers my next question. For what purposes do people use it? So, you use it yourself, right?

Participant: Yes.

Researcher: For what purposes do you generally use it?

145

Participant: Hmm., mainly research. Research you know in my thesis topic, hmmm.

Researcher: What's that?

Participant: I don't know yet. I hope to go surfin' and it will just jump out at me. And, hmmm, job huntin'.

Researcher: Job huntin'. Is there a job line on the Internet?

Participant: Well, you can access the Toronto Star. Hmmm, then they have Canada Employment Centre. Hmmm, if you want to find out anything goin' on with the government you can access. They have web sites for their ministries and stuff.

Researcher: Well, you've heard of the world wide web obviously. What do you know about it?

Participant: Hmmm, what do I know about that. That it's it's there. You know it's like without it there wouldn't be any Internet. It's the biggest hmm I guess in terms of hmmm what do you call it, hmmm, providing an interactive facility that is on the Net right now, you know.

Researcher: What do you think of it?

Participant: I think it's a good idea. I think hmmm it's the epitome of capitalism. I think hmm it's like hmmm the whole, going back to the whole thing of creating a need instead of fulfilling one kind of thing you know.

Researcher: O.K. so you've browsed it yourself.

Participant: Yeh.

Researcher: While you've browsed it have you ever hit a site where you've been asked for your personal information?

Participant: Yeh. I have.

Researcher: You have. Who asked you for this?

Participant: Hmmm, there's hotwired, there's hmmm when you go into Adobe, what is it Adobe. There is a web site but it is not like mandatory that you give it.

Researcher: Oh, can you advance to the next page without giving it?

146

Participant: Yeh, you can. I think hotwired hmm there's like they allow you access to certain information and then if you want other information you probably have to become a member that requires filling out stuff. That is how most of them that I have come across work, yeh.

Researcher: What ah, well just take one of your experiences I guess, what did they tell you about themselves?

Participant: Hmmm, usually they tell you information on the company, whatever company you are accessing. Ah, they usually have ah a like a FAQS section, like frequently asked questions, and ahmm different, depending on what the business is they'll tell you different things. You know like Adobe provides information on their software. Ahmm, hotwired for example would provide information on different types of articles like the journal, like the journal of computer media and communication or whatever. Ahmm, they provide different information ahmm geared towards scholars or people interested in a particular area.

Researcher: Yeh, that reminds me of an article I read in the globe a week or so ago on wired magazine. They had done an interview with one of the founders Jennifer Jennifer, I forget her last name but anyways she was explaining that they didn't know where the magazine was going. It's just going but in no particular direction. It takes them. It's not structured with any goal in mind.

Participant: You kinda get that feeling from reading it. It's like the Internet. Nobody really knows where it's going.

Researcher: Right. Sorry to get off the topic. O.K. What exactly did they ask you for?

Participant: Ahmmm, usually e-mail address, ahmmm, different types of information like O.K. maybe your address. I don't think I've ever been asked for my phone number. Ahmmm, e-mail address and any types of comments or whatever kinda thing. It's been a while cus like now I joined that hotwired thing and that was months ago when I filled that out. But they usually have a section where you can send in your comments or whatever. Same thing with Adobe about their software. And ahmm I sent them, I ask them questions related to their photo shop software and that is about it.

Researcher: Yeh, they didn't ask you for like any demographic information.

Participant: No, no. Hotwired, I can't remember if they did. But ahmmm they didn't ask me for any demographic information.

Researcher: Just your e-mail address and stuff was it.

147

Participant: Ah ha. Usually you have to give that. But then what Hotwired does is that they send you, e-mail you like ah information on what's coming up or what's coming up in wired magazine or information like, depending on what they're publishing just keep you up to date so you can go and check out the site or something like that.

Researcher: O.K.

Participant: And there was one that where I filled out to enter some contest and ahmm they were more asking for product-related information but not demographics like what you would like in a certain product yourself kinda thing.

Researcher: And did they ask for your e-mail address and stuff to go along with that?

Participant: Ah ha. And I think once you send it they automatically get it. But they asked for address and all that.

Researcher: What was your first impression of all this?

Participant: Ahmmm. I thought it was neat because if you have questions that you want answered you can just e-mail them them right away instead of getting on the phone you know and having to call them up and your put on hold or whatever and they can e-mail you back you know with the information.   Oh, the first time I went in I gave it right away cause I wanted to get in there and get their ahmmm information so of course I was gonna do it. They had information I wanted. So in order to get that you had to be a member. Then I went in there you know and copied all the articles I wanted on to disk and printed them out. So that was cool.

Researcher: O.K. I was going to ask you next that if that was your first impression did you change that impression after a while when you had been in the site for a while?

Participant: My ahmm not. I I think my impression changed in the sense of cause because your researching that area and start to think of well you know you start analysing the questions they ask, how they ask it, ahmm you know how they respond, how quickly they respond type of thing, even just the actual design of the site kinda thing you start being more and more critical of it you know kinda thing.

Researcher: O.K. you responded to it, you gave your information.

Participant: Ah ha.

Researcher: Why?

Participant: To get the information I needed.

148

Researcher: Did you expect the information that was requested of you, well you hit on this a little bit a minute ago, did you expect the information to be requested in a different way? A different way, whatever comes to mind.

Participant: No, not really. When I when I first came across those forms no I didn't really expect it to be. But I did think to myself oh well you know here they have some information about me but because it wasn't really that personal like you know most people are willing to give out their e-mail addresses you know so.

Researcher: Oh, they are, are they?

Participant: I I think, it seems that way to me. Like that's the feeling I get. I'm more than willing to give out my e-mail address before I am willing to give out my phone number, you know.

Researcher: Yeh, why?

Participant: Cus in terms of conceptually you kinda think of ahmm maintaining a distance between yourself and that other party where the telephone is a lot more personal you know the sound of voice some somebody calling your home which is a lot more personal. They can disturb you at any time but with an e-mail you can get on your computer and access that information or response whenever you feel like and if you don't feel like responding you don't have to but when you pick up the phone and someone is on the other end you are almost obligated to respond you know, especially if you wanna be able to hang up the phone for someone else to call.

Researcher: Yeh, so it is the technology. You think the technology, you like the impersonal feature of that.

Participant: Yeh, yeh. To a certain extent. For information seeking purposes. You know when it starts becoming your social life I I don't think that it should replace ahmm social interaction that people have like one on one tangible you know kinda thing

Researcher: Did you expect more or less information to be requested of you?

Participant: Ahmmm. When it comes to businesses these days and how they market themselves and because you are aware that some businesses who are more aware of their consumer or prospects out there will require or ask more information whether you wanna give it or not is up to you. But ahmmm, I expect anything, you know.

Researcher: So you would have expected more is that what you are saying?

149

Participant: Not saying that what they asked wasn't sufficient. I felt that whatever they asked they felt that was sufficient for their purposes, you know. I not gonna expect more in the sense of O.K. I think that they should be asking more. I really don't give a damm because it's their business you know how they wanna run it it's up to them. Ahmmm, if I want more information I'll request it.

Researcher: Are saying that you didn't request less either because you took it from the marketing point of view and what they are trying to do?

Participant: Ahmmm, yeh. Well you don't consciously sit there but I mean in the back of your mind that is there in the back of your mind kinda thing. Me, if they ask me the colour of underwear I wouldn't be surprised you know. Cus you never know. That would make me stop and think though you know.

Researcher: O.K. so you didn't expect anything different. Ahmmm, but of Hotwired and Adobe, or those people that asked you for your information, what they told you about themselves influenced the fact that you responded?

Participant: Ahmmm, no because O.K. first of all you have, like me personally I don't really go on there and surf cus it's too time consuming. So I'm gettin' on there for specific reasons. And usually you have some background. Ahmmm, like you know Adobe is a computer software company, Hotwired is a magazine. You know what type of information they're providing to you. So you're going on there looking for specific information in that area. So I try to find that information type of thing. You know maybe I might see one or two things that I'll go O.K. let me check this out or whatever. But I'm I'm very much time conscious about spending time on there when you have other things to do. So you just get on there and look for whatever information and if they don't have it I'm glad that they do provide an area on the site where you can actually e-mail them and request information you know.

Researcher: Did you expect them though to give you more or less information about themselves?

Participant: In response?

Researcher: No, no. Just when you went in and before you responded did you expect more or less from them about them?

Participant: I don't think I had any expectations. But I know you get on to the Adobe site and it's like information overload. There is like so many things you know that when you get on their home page you can just sit there that kinda thing which is probably because when you're looking for something specific you know you're going to find it, you know. But ahmm, there have been some sites that I have accessed and I expected more information or

150

a different type of information you know so ahmmm. There was one, what was it, I was looking for some information on, ah, it had to be like a Caribbean web site or whatever and ahmm I got there and I couldn't find any kind of information on specifically related to what I was looking for. And ahmmm, there have been some sites that I've gone into and I just think the web site is just so bad in terms of aesthetically and content wise you know what they have to offer you in terms of the information they got they just slap some graphics on there. You find like big companies, they have better web sites and then if you're accessing a smaller company, a new company I don't if it is for budget reasons or what. But I think given the type of technology I think if you're like a multimillion dollar company or like little joe blow down here it shouldn't make a difference whether or not you have an efficient web site. You know like you have to gear it towards the business that you're in and know what your consumers would be looking for you know kinda thing. So I think that maybe it's a lack of research, putting the time into research on their part in that sense where maybe the bigger companies actually did put some time into research you know. I think in general you see a lot less well designed sites then you see like better designed web sites right.

Researcher: So is what you're saying that what you expected different had mostly to do with the design and content of the web site?

Participant: Well I think information, content and design I think go hand in hand and I expect efficiency in both areas because I'm not getting on there to look at a picture. You know, I'm getting on there for a specific reason. So I hope that they have that information and if they don't have the information then they provide some means of you know accessing that information through their site.

Researcher: So you also think that the look of a site itself influences your response like to give your personal information?

Participant: No. Cus if I'm looking for some information I'm going to give some personal information in order to get some information.

Researcher: O.K. so that is your main purpose for being there.

Participant: But if I was just surfin and in there there are some sites I did come across where I'd be like you know one look at their home page I would keep going. I'd passed them right by because I wouldn't even be attracted enough but there are people on there that you know surf around.

Researcher: Ah, I think we've covered this but I'll ask it. What did you expect from them by responding with your information just that you'd get the information that you needed.

Participant: Ah ha.

151

Researcher: Some questions we seem to have covered already but anyways. Why did you expect this?

Participant: Expect to get the information I wanted? Because they provided an area where you can request information on their site and I spent the time to sit there and request it and type it in so I expected it.

Researcher: You trusted that they were going to give you the information that you needed. O.K.   Ah, did you feel like you were interacting with them when you gave them your personal information?

Participant: What do you mean?

Researcher: Well, like we sit here and interact. They gave you some information, you gave them some. Did that process make you feel like you were interacting?

Participant: I think that communicating with them I'm interacting with them but I don't think it's like one on one. I think like O.K. I'm one of many people sending in some information.   But I hope that they do take whatever comments that I send in into consideration or my request into consideration. That kinda thing. You know if there gonna sift through information and respond to everybody sort of brings it down to more of an individual level or ahmmm more a group segmentation. Anyways when they respond to me they have to respond to whatever I request individually kinda thing. So it's a lot different than you know sittin' and watchin' an ad on TV or something and not being able to interact even if you do have some views or comments to make about an advertisement or a show or something.

Researcher: So do you mean you think there is an interaction?

Participant: If there is a response I think there is an interaction. There is certainly the implication of there is going to be an interaction. There is the implication of thinking that ahmmm heh, you know, what you think as a consumer is important to us.

Researcher: So I guess if you were to give your information to just get to the next page you know you wouldn't think there is an interaction? You know, you said you'd think there was an interaction if they responded back. They have given you some information, you given some information, you think if they respond back at you that constitutes an interaction.

Participant: Yeh, I don't think that they give me information when I first access a site. I don't count that as interactive at all. I think that their out there and I seek them. It's just like you know businesses on the street. When I walk into that convenience store downstairs they're sitting there. It is when I go in and request something and I get a response then I think there is some interaction then, you know.

152

Researcher: So you think of it as you are the one who has initiated an interaction and you expect a response back for there to be one.

Participant: Yeh. Ah ha.

Researcher: O.K. why do you feel this way?

Participant: I guess it is because of how I define interaction you know. I think that even though I'm sitting here with you and I say something to you and you have no response to me there is no interaction going on. Ahmmm, at least no verbal interaction. Certainly, there is a certain amount of nonverbal interaction but you can't take that and apply it to computer technology you know. Maybe even no response can be interpreted you know that they don't give a damm. But I still wouldn't define that as interaction. It has to be reciprocal and some sort of feedback going on you know.

Researcher: That is interesting because you could look at it in a couple of ways. You have gone into the site so you've initiated an interaction, they've given you some information, you've given some back but that is not an interaction to you.

Participant: No they haven't said anything to me.

Researcher: But they have given you some information about themselves.

Participant: They have given everybody information about themselves like in a public space.

Researcher: Oh, I see. You mean they haven't responded to you as an individual.

Participant: Exactly, there's not that kind of interaction. You know, it's just like the convenience store is sitting there you know. I can pass it by and look in through the window at it you know but I'm not interacting with anybody in there. You know, I see what they have in their store by walking by but that doesn't mean anything you know and it doesn't, and it doesn't isolate me or distinguish me from the rest of the masses walking by on the street. You know, the whole Internet you look at as this public sphere. You know people are just passing by. But once I stop and go into your store and start looking around, you know, either you can say well may I help you or I can say well do you have this, there is some kind of response. I think response is the key element. Then I consider that interaction you know. Maybe if I was a company and somebody, I had a form on site and someone filled it out and sent some information I would have considered that some kind of interaction. But interaction is dependent on where you are situated and who you are you know. So maybe for them that might be some kind of interaction because they got feedback. But I didn't get any feedback from them. If they don't respond to what I send in I don't think that is any kind of interaction.

153

Researcher: Did you feel like you had any kind of a relationship with them once you responded?

Participant: Ahmmm, with Adobe no because they didn't and I went on their site like about three times requesting information and once they finally responded it wasn't a response in regards to what I was requesting. It was somethin' totally different, out of the blue that I was like O.K. that just boot me in with the masses and sent the same message to everybody or something you know.

Researcher: Do you think that they do that that they look at requests and say this is where this one falls and how we respond to that.

Participant: No, I don't even think that they payed attention to the request because they didn't respond specifically. But they got my e-mail address and they got a whole bunch of other people's e-mail addresses and then they send out the information. Hotwired does that. They have all these people's e-mail addresses and they send you all the same updated information every few days or so to your e-mail address.

Researcher: So you said earlier that you gave your information thinking that you were going to get your personal request but they don't do that?

Participant: Ahmmm, with Adobe I gave my e-mail address because I requesting specific information. But with Hotwired I was just joining up as a member, I kinda expected that because I think they actually tell you that that if you don't want to be sent information you can request not to, you can stop at any point in time.

Researcher: Why did you feel this way? Why did you feel you didn't have any kind of a relationship? I guess you've just answered that.

Participant: They didn't respond. Adobe didn't respond. They are not the only the ones that haven't responded. Like I e-mailed ahmmm companies looking for information and haven't gotten any response. So you wonder why they have it if they're not using it you know.

Researcher: So there are sites that are asking you for your personal information and not responding back?

Participant: Ah ha. But most of the sites that I've accessed I don't think they're really concerned with getting any really kind of, I don't think they're really concerned with any kind of relationship building with the consumer. First of all, with the type of information they ask for. You know, maybe if it is just like your e-mail address. If you wanna put in your mailing address that is somethin else, I guess if they decide they wanna do a direct mailing campaign. That's about it. The one, the latest interesting site that I went into that I thought was more

154

consumer aware was that sporting site. Yeh, I happened to ask some manufacturer, they were the builders of bicycles or something and they were saying that ahmm O.K. we want you to put this down because we want to know how to build our bicycles. So they were asking what you liked in a bike, what colours, how much you would pay. And as an incentive for providing that information they were running a contest where you could win a free bike. But I thought that was good because I thought that here is a manufacturer that is manufacturing a product and they're are not saying O.K. we're going to make this and this is what is available to you. You know, you have no choice. But they say we wanna know what you want and once we know that we'll analyse that and then we'll make the product kinda thing which is good business wise and consumer wise. That was one of the more interesting site. But another problem with some of those sites is that even though they provide an incentive like O.K. the contest or whatever you have to dig deep into the site to find the fine line that say O.K. this contest is probably only open to US residents because that is where they are based. You wonder when they plan the site, it's almost misleading on your home page to say enter our contest and then you have to practically go through every link to find out after you read though tons of legal jargon that you find that. In legal terms, it's like O.K. it's there you know but it's up to you to go through. And it's not like O.K. you have a pamphlet or a flyer. A flyer is much more easier to look through cause you flick through and you see that little writing in time. But because you are only seeing one page at a time on the computer you may not even go into that link. You know, and I think that is what they are hoping for. I see a lot of manipulative things going on on the web, unethical.

Researcher: Yeh but maybe it's that they are not even thinking about designing it for the web. Maybe they are thinking about how they would design a magazine and applying it to the web.

Participant: Yeh, that's true to some extent but when you look at a contest that advertises in a magazine or flyer that comes to you usually you see the rules of the contest right there on the same page you know. You're going to wonder about a magazine that advertises the contest in the front of the magazine and then have the contest rules at the back of the magazine. You have to think of these people and they are designing the thing and they have to make a conscious decision about where to situate this thing. Why didn't it end up on the home page, those contest rules. So where they strategically place the information I think they think about because they have to think about where to put everything else. They decide what they are going to put on that home page you know and they usually put whatever they think is going to catch people. I think some of it is ignorance but I think some of it is a consciously made decision to mislead people.

Researcher: O.K. in comparing the different situations, your response is different depending on what.

Participant: My response is different depending on what.

155

Researcher: Ahmmm, if you looked across the situations where you've been asked for information what did your response depend on?

Participant: It depends on if they have the information I'm looking for. It depends what information they require in return. It depends on if there is some kind of incentive.

Researcher: Now, can we go into a site where you're asked for your personal information and see what your response to it is.

Participant: Sure.

Researcher: In terms of what you just looked at who asked you for your personal information?

Participant: Ahmmm, where did we go into was it Virtual Radio.

Researcher: Yeh, Virtual Radio. What did they tell you about themselves?

Participant: Nothing.

Researcher: What exactly did they ask you for?

Participant: Ahmmm, e-mail address, address, age, sex, employment information, how many people worked where I worked, company name.

Researcher: O.K. why do you think they asked you for that?

Participant: Ahmmm, so they can use it to build a database.

Researcher: What was your first impression of it?

Participant: Ahmmm, I thought O.K. some of the information is relevant but some of it I won't wanna give like how much I make, the name of the company that I work for cus then they're asking for like secondary information that is not just information about myself but information about some company. How much they earned in US dollars I mean. And probably information I wouldn't even be able to give them if I worked for a company you know unless I was senior executive -- O.K. we have 25,000 people employed and this is how much we are bringing in in revenue you know. And I don't see why they should be interested in it. And another thing that I found interesting is the wording -- anonymous demographics, anonymous employment information. Like what the hell is so anonymous about that. What did they mean that they are not putting a face to the name or a name to the information. They don't need a name. O.K. say I/Code is in the business of providing this kind of information

156

for businesses so even if I just registered at I/Code and they give me a code and I use that code every time I access a site tell me that site is not going to get that information.

Researcher: What your personal information?

Participant: Well they don't need my actual name all they need is my demographics. You know, so it doesn't matter. So I'm sure I/CODE will be giving them that information.

Researcher: They are going to give them the demographic information but they don't give them the personal information. They don't give your e-mail address and they don't give your name and stuff like that.

Participant: They could run it where they (I/CODE) don't even need to know your actual name or whatever. It's like what's the difference if my name is Boo. They could run it on a membership name alone or a number. The government does it that way. Your a number before your name. I'm sure they are in the business of selling that information. They'll contact you and get your consent. Once they get your O.K. they'll pass it on.

Researcher: Actually, if you do go into an I/CODE site that asks for your e-mail address and you give it. At that moment you are giving I/CODE your consent to release the rest of the information that identifies you to that site.

Participant: I mean credit card companies do the same all the time. They are in the business of selling information. They don't even say we'll contact, they give them your information anyways and how can you trace it back to them.

Researcher: So did your impression of all this change at any time while you were in the site Virtual Radio?

Participant: Change about what?

Researcher: Well, you said that your first impression was that you wondered why they need to know that.

Participant: Well, I just thought that there were some things that I would prefer not give as I read further and further through the information you know kinda thing. You know you kinda get the feeling that they're in the business of selling information. Nobody really wants a lot junk mail. They don't want a lot of junk mail in their e-mail boxes as well you know.

Researcher: So your first impression was reinforced.

Participant: And another thing that I/CODE can do is not be specific. They can group people.

157

Researcher: Well they do that to. Anyway, you didn't respond here but if you went in yourself like with Hotwired how would you respond to this.

Participant: Ahmmm, I'd probably give my e-mail. But if it required that I give all the information to the site. Well considering that Virtual Radio has nothing that I want I won't fill it out but if there was something they had that I wanted I don't think that I would go that route. Maybe I would make a phone call or something.

Researcher: So you seem more apprehensive to give your demographical information then your personal information. Are you?

Participant: I don't know if I'd wanna give my address as well you know. The e-mail I don't really see it as that personal you know. It depends. Like I said I've accessed sites where I filled in my address and e-mail address but because where I'm seeking specific information. Probably those companies I don't mind if they want to mail me information because I'm interested in that you know. Ahmm I don't think that I'd give those demographics because I still consider it to be personal information. Cause they still know it's me. I'm telling them something about myself. I don't know if I want to give out that secondary information about a company or whatever. You know what do they want. You know this is your job. What are they going to be contacting the company next. I don't know what the consequences of that is so.

Researcher: So event though you can register at the I/CODE site and they will only pass on your demographic information and not your personal information and I know it is all personal I'm only trying to distinguish between the two. So the sites can not put a name to the demographics, you will still be apprehensive to give it?

Participant: Ahmmm, because like I'm not guaranteed about that. I don't know what I/CODE is doing with the information.

Researcher: You don't know what they are doing with your personal information. They guarantee that they won't pass it on but that is not enough. You still need.

Participant: I don't see it as a guarantee even if they say that. How am I going to prove it. Like I don't trust them to that extent. I don't know enough about the company to trust them to that extent and I guess that is where the relationship building comes in.

Researcher: So you don't think they gave you enough information about themselves?

Participant: They didn't give me any information about themselves. Virtual Radio or I/CODE really only that they are in the measurement business or something like that.

Researcher: Did you expect the information to be requested in a different way then?

158

Participant: I don't think I had any expectations.

Researcher: Well, did you expect more or less information to be requested of you. It sounds like you expected less.

Participant: Yeh, less. The part that I found really unusual was the stuff about. O.K. even the stuff about the stats and the age you kinda expect that but then you get on to the employment information and you could even expect about income bracket not about the company you worked for, how many employees are there, how much they make. I guess even because they ask those questions you are apprehensive about giving any information at all. It makes you wonder where is the logic. What do they need this information for?

Researcher: They didn't explain that to you. Why they want it.

Participant: No. They don't really say why they want any information. I mean it's vague knowing what exactly they are doing with the information.

Researcher: I guess you've covered my next question. Of who asked you what they told you about themselves would that influence your response? You don't think they tell you enough about themselves?

Participant: Yeh. I don't think they say enough.

Researcher: What exactly did you expect more of?

Participant: Who they are, what they're business is, ahmmm any information, product information you know. And why they would want that kind of information. What they use it for.

Researcher: Why do you expect that?

Participant: Ahmmm, I expect that because I expect that from anybody you know. As a consumer any product that I'm purchasing I wanna know about. I think that you know I got that type of personality, someone who would read the ingredients on every package and analyse it. Yeh, just knowing what they're about, and especially as someone just browsing you know. For me to give any kind of information I think I'd wanna know who I'm giving it to. It's just like any interaction you'd have with an individual. If someone came up and just started asking all your personal information you're not going to divulge that to a total stranger.

Researcher: If you responded to that then and gave your personal information what would you expect in return?

159

Participant: I guess an I/Code so I can access the site and find out what it's all about and see what else they're offering.

Researcher: If you responded would you feel like you are interacting with them?

Participant: No.

Researcher: O.K. Why do you feel this way?

Participant: Because I haven't a clue who they are and I have no sense of who the company is and what they offer. And for all I know like they are just asking me for some information. They are not saying that they're going to give me any kind of a response other then a membership code where I can access their different web sites or whatever.

Researcher: If you responded then would you feel like you had any kind of a relationship with them?

Participant: No. No.

Researcher: Why would you feel this way?

Participant: Because I haven't a clue who they are.

Researcher: In comparison to the other situations you described earlier with Hotwired and Adobe, would you say how you would respond here would be different.

Participant: How I responded to them and how I would respond here? Definitely different.

Researcher: How would it be different?

Participant: Because with those other sites you can actually access some information. You feel like O.K. they are providing the type of information you are looking for and you need to access them more. You need to fill out the form or request it or become a member so you can access that information on a regular basis. I already know a bit about the company and the site is providing me with information about the company. And the question that they ask, you know they are not asking the same things like demographics, you know where do you work, how many people work there. Like that seems way out. I can't understand those questions at all. I can only imagine what they probably do with that information.

Researcher: O.K. so in general what do you think about being asked for your personal information on the web?

160

Participant: I don't mind giving some personal information, it depends on what they're asking for.

Researcher: O.K. think about your experiences on the web and whether you think your response would be different if you were asked for the same information by somebody face to face?

Participant: No my response wouldn't be different. If I went into a company and they were asking me those questions face to face I would still wanna know why do you need this information or whatever you know. And even after that that may be the deciding factor but I probably still won't give it to them. Just out of the, just something to add, I notice that in the forms that they had that they didn't provide any room for like volunteer information or comments or anything like that. That makes me wonder how much they are really concerned with relationship building you know. I mean consumers might be willing to offer information that may be of value. Because like having that comment box is critical because I mean I would sit down and provide them with information on why I wouldn't provide them with certain information and then they can use that to restructure the questions they ask or the type of questions that they ask. But they don't have that and I think that's important you know. Aldo, they don't provide any incentive and I think that is not aspect that should be taken into consideration.

Researcher: So you think that they are just being too direct in what they want to know.

Participant: I don't only think that they are being too direct. I think it is bad business sense to design a form that way. And maybe because I'm looking at them.

Researcher: Can you think of any situations where you have been asked for this type of information face to face. Like when you've walked into a retail store or a department store or even on the street.

Participant: Credit cards. But then I can understand why they need that information right. Even with the credit cards right they say you give us this information and we'll give you so much credit what you can go out and use. That is why you give it to them right. Like when you go into Leon's and you are crediting furniture or something like that they ask for that information. Then they are saying well O.K. we'll put you on a payment plan and you can take this home and pay us later or whatever. So they are giving you something in return, there is an incentive for giving that information. Then you can see how it is related because for business purposes they want to make sure that people are not going to take this stuff and take off with it you know. They have means of paying it you know.

Researcher: So you didn't think it was incentive enough on the web that you get this one password and you never have to give your information to another I/CODE site?

161

Participant: Password for what? How many of those sites am I going to actually visit? There are millions of sites out there and plus there is so many competitors out there that even they're not going to provide me with information about themselves that I can go see a substitute product or a competitor in the same business who is not requiring so much of me you know. They have to realize that they are dealing with consumers and consumers think well heh I'm looking for a product, giving you my money, giving you my business and you expecting this information and not providing any kind of incentive. You don't even care about what I think because you haven't provided any space to let me put in my comments there. So all they are telling me is heh we're in the business of measuring audiences, give us this information, you know. I think the whole idea is primitive and it is poorly done. But they are trying and I think that if they want to learn put that comment box in there. And I mean even if you get a thousand responses that you can go to a business and say heh we got demographics on a thousand people and ten thousand are accessing your site then they are pretty poor statistics there you know what I'm saying.

Researcher: In regard to your situation face to face, can you think of one because the questions I'm going to ask you next are directed at that. Like places I've seen it is when I've walked into the Bay or Sears and I'm stopped by a salesperson.

Participant: One specifically where they ask me face to face? I can't really think of one.

Researcher: O.K. well let us pretend that you are walking into Sears and I approach you saying. Good afternoon my name is Kim Myrick. I'm a salesperson for Sears approaching shoppers like yourself about acquiring a Sears credit card. The card gives you many benefits that are outlined on this form. However, before we can issue you a card we need to know the following information: name, address, age, sex, marital status, birth date, social insurance number, company you work for, household income, number of dependents and so on. This information will also help us compile information on our customers so that we can analyse how we might better meet their needs. So who do you perceive asked you for this information?

Participant: An employee that works for Sears.

Researcher: What did they tell you about themselves.

Participant: Ahmmm, they gave me a little background on why they want this information kinda thing. And also I have prior knowledge of the department store. I shop there.

Researcher: What exactly did they ask you for?

Participant: I guess it would be like name, address, income kinda thing. Age, family, who you worked for.

162

Researcher: Why did they ask you for this?

Participant: In order to get the credit card, to give the credit card.

Researcher: What was your first impression?

Participant: Ahmmm, my first impression was that it was a normal procedure.

Researcher: How would you respond?

Participant: If I wanted the credit card I would answer the questions. If I didn't I would keep going. I wouldn't fill it out.

Researcher: Would you expect that the information would be requested in a different way?

Participant: No because I've experienced that before and the only other way is like maybe they send you a form or something in the mail where you apply for a credit card or something.

Researcher: Did you expect more or less information to be requested of you?

Participant: No. With the exception of the social insurance number.

Researcher: Why was that?

Participant: Because that has nothing to do with a credit check or even in terms of demographics for business wise. It's a personal thing and you can't just give out your social insurance number like that for any reason. You don't know how many people have access to this information you know.

Researcher: Of what the salesperson told you about themselves would that influence your response?

Participant: Probably she wouldn't have to give me a lot of information because if I definitely wanted the card, if I was regular shopper there I already know enough about the company.

Researcher: What about if you didn't?

Participant: If she didn't I would want more information about the company. Ah ha, even before I decided if wanted a credit card from them you know.

Researcher: O.K. what what type of information would you expect?

163

Participant: Ahmmm, what type of business they are in, product information, ahmmm, what they use the demographic information for if I had no knowledge of that. As much information and even any information out of the ordinary that I haven't a clue about.

Researcher: Why would you expect that information?

Participant: Because my personal information is private you know and I'm revealing something about myself so I expect to know something about who I'm dealing with.

Researcher: Ahmmm, if you responded to them what would you expect in return?

Participant: I expect ahmmm them to notify me whether I qualified for a credit card type of thing and probably if I was a regular shopper there to send me up-to-date information on sales or whatever benefits they have. You know how like the bay notifies they are having such and such a day and our cardholders get this.

Researcher: Why would you expect that after giving your response?

Participant: Because based on prior experience you know.

Researcher: In that situation would you feel like your interacting with anybody?

Participant: Yeh, I think I ahmmm got their credit card and I was a regular customer there I think I'd feel like I have some sort of relationship going on with the company. The fact that oh they considered their credit card holders preferred customers. They get certain privileges. You know you feel a little bit special. So it's good in that sense. If there were any changes in their card policy I would expect them to let me know kinda thing because I'm spending so many dollars with them.

Researcher: How about at the point when you are giving your personal information to the salesperson would you feel like there is interaction?

Participant: No, not really.

Researcher: No. Why?

Participant: The only interaction I think I would have is O.K. here is this woman doing her job and I'm applying for a credit card but it is not until that I get some kind of response from them, I get an actual credit card and then I have an ongoing relationship with them you know. A relationship would build. Any relationship can only build over time once it is ongoing. If I got denied a credit card and I never shopped at Sears again would never feel like I had a relationship with them. All I would feel like when I fill out the information is O.K. I've filled out the information and they may respond to me, yeah or nay kinda thing.

164

That will determine whether or not there is an opportunity to develop a relationship with this company.

Researcher: But would you say that there is even an interaction?

Participant: Yeh, at the most basic level. Yeh, there is an interaction. This woman talked to me and I talked to her. But that is the extent of it. You know she is like a total stranger to me. If I had no prior knowledge of the company it is like a total stranger to me.

Researcher: So who would you feel like you are interacting with or building a relationship with, the person or the company?

Participant: I would say the company because I'd probably never see or speak to that person again.

Researcher: So that is who you feel like you are interacting with when you talk to this person, is the company?

Participant: Because she is representing the company. You know and what she does is providing me an image of the company and what they are about, what they stand for.

Researcher: In comparison to the other situations you described on the Internet and this one face to face, would you say your response was the same or different?

Participant: I think it would be the same.

Researcher: How and why?

Participant: First of all if a stranger came up to me and asked me for information I'd like to know who they are, why they want that information, what they are about, what they are going to do with that information.

Researcher: So it is the same for the web.

Participant: Yeh, not in terms of when you are asking information like that. Like I know it is a computer you are using and this is an individual you are dealing with but they both represent a company and to me it is the same thing.

Researcher: O.K. I'm just going to make you consciously aware of the concepts of relationship marketing and audience research. As you know, new communication technologies are creating new forms of media. For marketers, this means that they can market their products and services on a more direct and individual basis. So their goal is to develop long term relationships with customers. But in order to do that marketers need more

165

precise information on subscribers to the Internet among other things. This means that they are putting pressure on media research organizations like A.C. Nielsen to develop measurement standards for the Internet and the form that you looked at earlier for me is part of their attempt to meet marketers' needs. Being consciously aware of this, does it change your perception of those who asked you for your information in each of the situations we discussed, face to face and on the web?

Participant: No, no. I think still how the process is carried out influences how I respond.

Researcher: Does it change your perception of your role in the situation?

Participant: No, no.

Researcher: Does it change how you would respond?

Participant: No because I am a consumer in both situations and being that I have certain expectations. As a consumer and so called interacting with any company there is still boundaries to that relationship you know. So how they approach me is really important.

Researcher: What influences you more then to know why they are doing this or to know more about them?

Participant: Both.

Researcher: Both are equally important?

Participant: I think they are both equally important. If they are requesting information I'd like to know what they want the information for, why they want it. And I'd also like to know about the company. To know that is this the type of company that even if I know why they give the information you know do I have any interest in this company. Cus if I don't I'm not going to give my information you know what I mean.

Researcher: What type of information is important to know about them?

Participant: What they do, information about the products they sell.

Researcher: What do you mean by what they do?

Participant: What business are they in to. What are you selling.

Researcher: What about nitty gritty information like the size of the company?

Participant: No I don't need to know that. If they offer that information great but I don't think that I really need to know that. I think there are areas where I wouldn't support a company that I don't morally believe in. If their involved in like child labour in the third world I wouldn't want to support them. Some companies are so massive that you can't get around that but if I'm aware of that I'm not going to support them because that is something I don't believe in.

Researcher: O.K. well wouldn't you like to know that. Wouldn't you like them to tell you that?

Participant: Are they going to tell me that? I don't think they're going tell me that. What company is going to advertise that? I'd have to research that on my own. I don't think any company is going to tell you anything negative about themselves. Anything immoral or illegal I don't think they are going to broadcast that.

Researcher: O.K. what about they are in to supporting gay rights and they say that and you are not. Like you know what I mean these types of things that some people are into while others are not. So wouldn't you like to know these things.

Participant: It would be great if they came out and said heh we're into this but I don't think a murderer is going tell you he is a murderer. I would like to know, that would be great.

Researcher: Why do you think it is all so bad?

Participant: Me personally, that is how I feel. I'm not saying that is how everybody feels. Not everybody else has to take that position.

Researcher: Yeh, they are just not divulging that information because they don't want turn off a portion of their market which makes sense. But don't you think a relationship is built on knowing those things. You are giving a certain amount of your personal information. Don't you think they should come back with a certain amount.
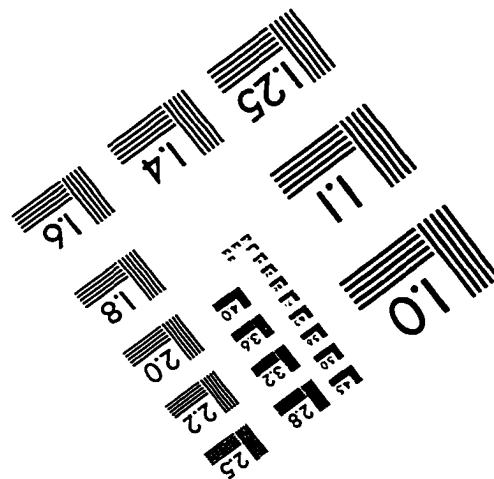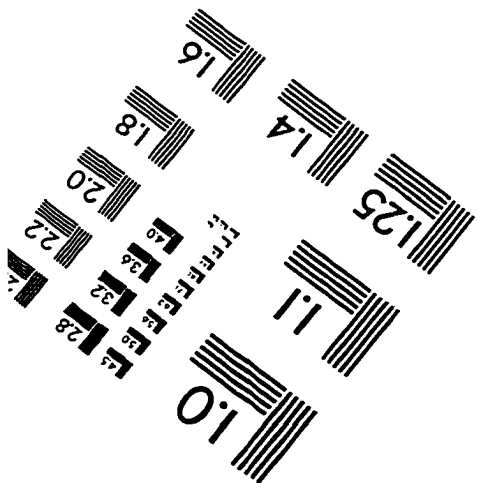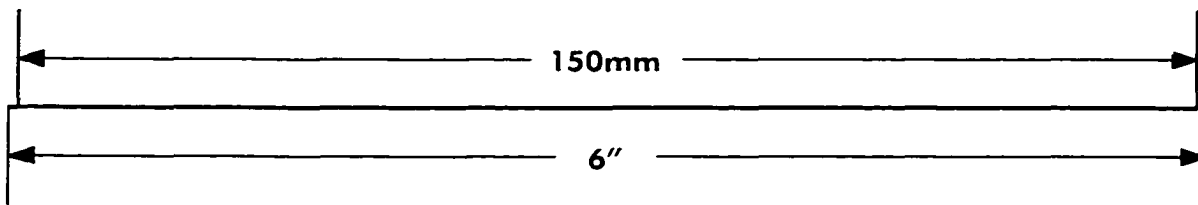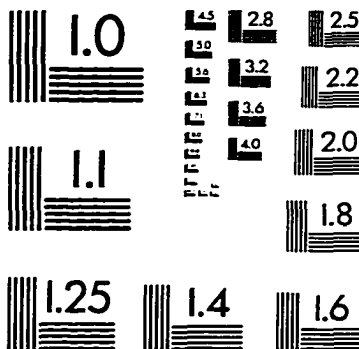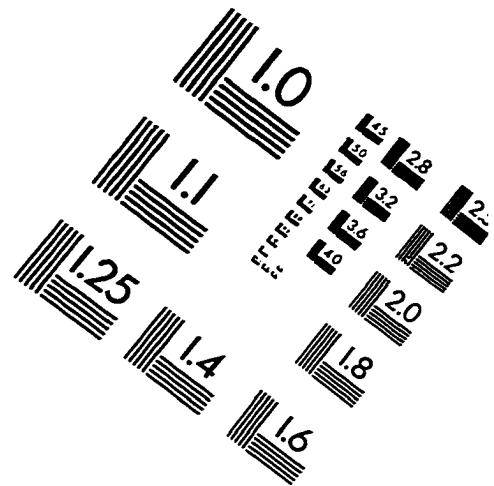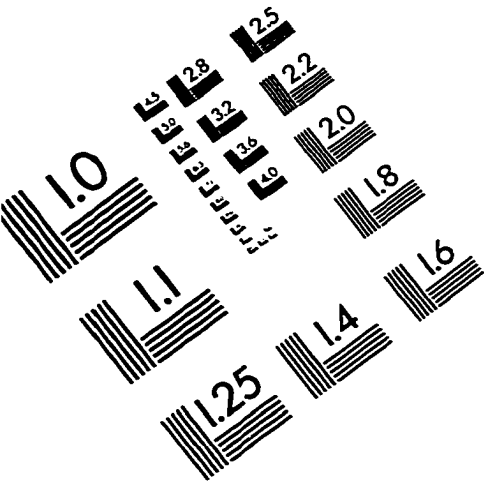
Participant: I think they should but I think that that is an idealistic belief that we're never going to see. I don't think it is ever going to happen. I think it would be great if everybody came out and said what they were in to. But they want your money. It is never going to happen because as long as you have money to spend they'll tell you whatever they want.

Researcher: Well, that concludes the interview. Thank you so much for your time and comments.

167

VITA AUCTORIS

Kimberly A. Myrick was born on June 25, 1967 in St. John's, Newfoundland. She graduated from Holy Heart of Mary Regional High School in 1985. From there, she went to Memorial University of Newfoundland where she obtained a Bachelor of Commerce (Co-op) in 1990. In 1997, she accomplished a Master's degree in Communication Studies at the University of Windsor.

168

IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA-3)

1.0
1.1
1.25

2.8   2.5
3.2   2.2
3.6
4.0   2.0
       1.8
1.4   1.6

├──────────── 150mm ────────────┤

├──────────── 6″ ────────────┤