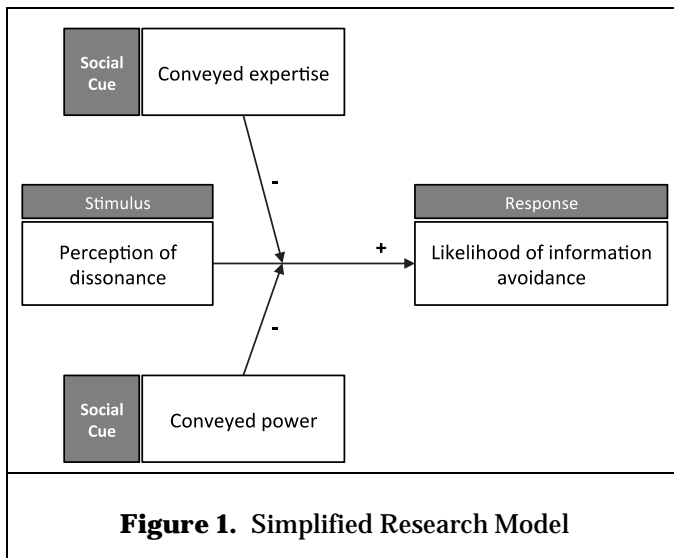# Preventing Information Avoidance Behavior

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Only information that is being used can contribute to a firm's success. The avoidance of useful information can be considered a pathologic information behavior. A main cause of avoidance is the perception of information dissonance (Nickerson, 1998). Information is dissonant if it challenges existing beliefs. The threat of having to change existing beliefs leads to a negative affective state in the individual. Since information may be *dissonant* but *relevant* the question of how to prevent this psychological process emerges (Sweeny and Melnyk, 2010).

Based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Tam and Ho, 2005) and Social Exchange Theory (Shelby, 1986) we hypothesize that social information cues have the ability to decrease the likelihood of information avoidance. Social information cues in this context refer to information about the author of a text, and include a photo, the name, and the job title of the author. The effects of social information on cognitive processes have previously been studied (Benbasat et al., 2010). Based on the literature on persuasion (Cialdini and Trost, 1998) we hypothesize that the author's *conveyed power* (work hierarchy), and the author's *conveyed expertise* (domain knowledge) have significant effects on the likelihood of avoidance. *Power* refers to the ability to influence others because of institutionalized leadership. *Expertise* refers to the ability to influence others because of informational capital. Figure 1 presents the simplified version of our working model.

Figure 1. Simplified Research Model

For testing our model we conduct an experiment. Participants read a sequence of articles on a subject they have no prior knowledge of. One subset of the articles speaks in favor of opinion *A,* another subset speaks in favor of opinion *B*. Through the sequence of presenting combinations of *A* and *B*, and the associated priming effects, we induce the perception of dissonance. Each article is equipped with a social cue. We manipulate the cue's *conveyed power* by presenting the author to hold a "junior" or "senior" work position. We manipulate the cue's *conveyed expertise* by presenting the author as being a domain "expert" on the article's subject. These manipulations are summarized in table 1.

Table 1. Factorial Design		
	Factor "Expertise"	Factor "Power"
Level 1	Conveyed as expert	Conveyed as junior manager
Level 2	No information on expertise	Conveyed as senior manager

We anticipate social cues to have strong attention-allocation effects. However, we are not interested in whether or not participants fixate the cues, but in the cues' effects on the consumption of the surrounding texts. Because information avoidance may occur unconsciously traditional methods of inquiry have limits. We thus use the psychophysiological methodology of eye-tracking to measure information avoidance. For that we statistically analyze differences in view patterns of the texts between the experimental conditions (table 1). We work towards theory building. However, it is also of great relevance to IS designers to potentially prevent information avoidance by including social cues.

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