CHAPTER 4

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

To examine these three objectives specific hypotheses were developed. The first set of hypotheses compared the persuasiveness of Online Review and Advertisement. The second set of hypotheses examined the role of psychological mechanisms and persuasiveness generated, when individuals integrate information from multiple exposures to communication stimuli. Two different studies were conducted to test these hypotheses.

4.1 RELATIVE INFLUENCE OF ONLINE REVIEWS IN COMPARISON TO ADVERTISEMENT

The first objective of the dissertation was to understand the extent of persuasiveness exerted by similar information contained in Print Advertisement and Online Consumer Reviews, and if argument quality and product involvement influence such persuasive effects.¹

The ELM model suggests that involvement is associated with the motivation to process information, and as involvement increases individuals tend to have greater motivation to comprehend the salient information. On the other hand, when involvement is low

¹ Originally Petty and Cacioppo (1981) defined a strong message as one that generated predominantly favorable responses among participants when they are asked to think about the message, whereas a weak message generated predominantly unfavorable thoughts. More recently, researchers have shifted to a relational approach that emphasizes “stronger” and “weaker” arguments (Petty, Schumann, Richman, and Strathman, 1993). By contrast, the argument quality approach has focused or strength in terms of message ambiguity, which has been operationalized based on the mere number of arguments presented (Chaiken, 1980), the importance or relevance of the copy points (Chaiken and Maheswaran, 1994), and the consistency or inconsistency of the arguments presented (Maheswaran and Chaiken, 1991).
individuals rely on peripheral cues, such as the number of arguments, perceived source credibility etc. Further, previous advertising studies (Hallahan, 1999; Loda and Coleman, 2005; Wang, 2006; Kim, Yoon and Lee, 2010 etc.) suggest that claims made through advertising are likely to be perceived as less credible than non-vested sources of communication such as publicity. However, the information in Online Consumer Reviews is expected to be perceived as more credible as it is generally posted by people who have already consumed or experienced the particular product or service and is non-commercial in nature (Chen and Xie, 2008). Therefore, given that messages have equally convincing arguments and involvement across individuals is same, Online Consumer Reviews should be perceived more credible than Advertisements. However, argument strength and level of involvement may affect perceived degree of credibility for both Advertisement and Online Consumer Reviews. Further, based on ELM and examined in previous studies (e.g. Hallahan, 1999) it is expected that for high involvement products argument strength impacts persuasiveness more as compared message source, whereas, for low involvement product message source is expected to have higher persuasive effect than argument strength. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Given both Review and Advertisement contain messages of similar argument strength (strong or weak arguments) for either high involvement or low involvement products, Review will have higher perceived credibility than Advertisement.

H2: For high involvement products, argument strength leads to greater persuasion than message source.
H3: For low involvement products, message source leads to greater persuasion than argument strength.

Further, we individually examine difference in consumer processing of and response to advertising and online reviews. We expect that online review should be perceived more credible; because of which subjects are likely to engage in more extensive processing of reviews as compared to Advertisements. Further, these elaborated thoughts are likely to be recalled better and serve as the basis to subsequent attitude and behavior. Further, previous research shows that consumers formed stronger attitudes from product trial (Smith and Swinyard, 1983; Marks and Kamins, 1988) and publicity (Loda and Coleman, 2005; Hallahan, 1999) as compared to advertising attributing this to lower credibility of advertising as compared to these sources. Similarly, unlike advertising online reviews being perceived as unbiased source of information are likely to generate stronger levels of attitude as compared to advertising. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H4: Subjects will have stronger attitude towards Review as compared to the Advertisement when argument strength and product involvement is the same.

H5: Subjects exposed to Review will have higher attitude towards brand than subjects exposed to Advertisement when argument strength and product involvement is the same.

H6: Subjects exposed to Review will have higher purchase intention than subjects exposed to Advertisement when argument strength and product involvement is the same.

4.2 INTEGRATION OF ONLINE REVIEWS AND ADVERTISEMENTS: PERSUASIVE EFFECTS AND UNDERLYING PROCESSES
In this section we develop hypothesis to test if consumers differ in degree to which two psychological mechanisms (priming and persuasion knowledge bias) are involved, and if these processes influence the persuasiveness while information is presented through single or multiple communication sources. We also test if the degree of persuasiveness differs for single and multiple message sources and impact of sequence of exposure (Advertisement first or Online Consumer Review first) and type of information (same or varied product attributes in Online Consumer Review and print Advertisement) in multi-source exposure conditions. Though, other factors such as product involvement, argument strength, and number of exposure to particular stimuli etc. may affect the persuasion generated by these sources, we do not consider these as it would further add to the complexity of research design.

4.2.1 Role of Persuasion Knowledge Bias

Friestad and Wright’s (1994), persuasion knowledge model (PKM) explains that over a period of time consumers (targets) develop knowledge about persuasive attempts of marketers (agents) and use this knowledge to “cope” with the persuasion episodes. Further, empirical evidence (Calfee and Ringold, 1994; Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998; 2000) suggests that consumers are skeptical towards advertising claims and may not consider them authentic, and thus, one of the most common “coping responses” may be to discount messages recognized as Advertisements. Obermiller and Spangenberg (2000) explain:

“Consumers were highly skeptical of information from marketing sources...(this) suggests that distrust of advertising information may stem from a broader distrust of information perceived to be controlled by marketing agents”
Understanding of consumers’ use of persuasion knowledge and their skepticism towards advertising can help us better understand the process by which consumers integrate information from multiple sources and why multiple sources of information may be superior to repetitive advertising. Based on PKM, it is expected that the way consumers would use their “persuasion coping responses” would differ for consumers exposed to repetitive advertising as compared to the one being exposed to Online Consumer Review and Advertisement. It is expected that, when consumers receive similar information from Online Consumer Review as contained in the Advertisement, there would exist some kind of “persuasion knowledge processing bias” in favor of the Advertisement as compared to repeated exposure to the same Advertisement. Further, this may change the consumer’s “coping response” towards the Advertisement. This coping response is expected to lead to different levels of skepticism towards the Advertisement (Friestad and Wright, 1994). Further, Obermiller, Spangenberg and Maclachlan (2005) found that when Advertisement skepticism was higher subjects rated Advertisements as less likable, less believable, less likely to be influential, identified more number of Advertisement claims as untruthful and generated lower attitude towards the Advertisement. Likewise, we expect that the reduced level of skepticism for multi-source exposure condition would enhance the attitude and behavioral intent of the customers as compared to the repeated source condition.

Further, based on the primacy principle of information integration theory (Anderson, 1971), this skepticism is likely to be less for subjects who evaluate Online Consumer Review first and then the Advertisement as compared to the subjects exposed to the reverse sequence order. For example, Smith and Swinyard (1982) and Loda and Coleman (2005) found that consumers’ belief strength can be affected by message sequence in which two
sources are presented. Smith and Vogt (1995) proposed that, “consumers' belief strength can be affected by message sequencing. Exposure to a credible initial message source such as direct experience generates a powerful information base for attitudinal development” Based on this, it is hypothesized that,

*H1a:* Subjects exposed to multiple sources will have less skepticism towards Advertisement than subjects exposed to repeated Advertisement,\(^2\) (*b*) which will have positive effect on attitude towards advertisement, attitude towards the brand and purchase intention.

*H2a:* Subjects exposed to review first in the multi-source condition will have less skepticism towards Advertisement than subjects exposed to the Advertisement first, (*b*) which will have positive effect on attitude towards the Advertisement, attitude towards the brand and purchase intention.

It is not always that consumers endorse product attribute information similar to the one endorsed in an Advertisement. Therefore, another possible case could be when reviews and Advertisement contain different information (henceforth referred as varied message), though in favor of the brand. Previous research on information processing in the contest of

\(^2\) We do not compare multi-source condition with repeated online reviews condition as skepticism towards the advertisement has no role to play when subjects are exposed to repeated online reviews.
varied message suggests that varied messages may further stimulate consumers’ thinking as compared to similar messages, because audience attempt to reconcile difference in such messages (Chang and Thorson, 2004). Harkins and Petty’s (1987) ‘information utility hypothesis’ also suggests that when one confronts different message sources presenting unique argument(s), one presumably perceives these arguments as independent pieces of information coming from individuals with difference perspectives and therefore tends to be more motivated and processes information more diligently. Also, when both Advertisement and Online Consumer Review endorse different product attributes, persuasion knowledge bias is expected to be more favorable for the Advertisement as compared to the case where Advertisement and online review contain similar information. Further, it is expected that the reduced level of skepticism for varied message condition would lead to higher levels of attitude and behavioral intention. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

\( H3a: \) Subjects exposed to varied messages in the multi-source condition will have less skepticism towards the Advertisement than subjects exposed to similar messages, \( (b) \) which will have positive effect on attitude towards the Advertisement, attitude towards the brand and purchase intention.

4.2.3 Role of Priming

Priming is the effect of preceding stimulus on consumers’ reaction to subsequent stimulus. Consumers may be interested to attend marketer’s message more actively, if they have already been exposed to a similar message earlier. This interest may stimulate deeper processing and easier encoding of the second message, which leads to more efficient
communication (Bronner, Neijens and Van Raaij, 2003; Edell and Keller, 1989). Further, when second Advertisement copy is exactly same as the first one, consumers may be less motivated to process the same information again. This is because the level of attention to repeated information declines as people lack interest to process same information repeatedly (Unnava and Burnkrant, 1991). Further, sources which are considered credible and expert tend to be more engaging as compared to those which do not have these characteristics (Petty et al, 1983).

In case of repeated media exposure, the second Advertisement or the online review exposed is an exact copy of the first Advertisement or online review. Given that the customer has sufficiently processed the information presented during the first exposure, repeated exposure to the same information through same source again may disinterest the customer in processing the information. Thus, one would be less motivated to process the information again and may decrease the level of attention or even totally avoid the online review or Advertisement. On the contrary, when information about the same topic comes from other source, the recipient would be motivated to process as this information may provide a different view point about the topic. When the Advertisement is viewed first, one may feel the need to confirm the information presented thorough a more credible source of information like consumer review. On the other hand, when online review is viewed first and then the Advertisement, one may be willing to attend what the marketer has to say about its product. Therefore, irrespective of whether the Advertisement is processed first or the review, equal level of priming is expected to occur. It is expected that the enhanced level of priming one involves in, while processing information from two information sources leads to more cognitive processing and which in turn leads to higher brand claim
recall, attitude and purchase intention. These hypotheses are similar to Voorveld, Neijens, and Smit (2011) who found that exposure to cross-media condition led to more priming as compared to repeated TV Advertisement, which further led to higher attitude towards the TV Advertisement, brand and purchase intention. Similarly, we hypothesize that,

\( H4a: \) Subject exposed to multiple sources will involve in more priming than subjects exposed to repeated source, \((b)\) which will have positive effect on attitude towards the Advertisement, attitude towards the brand and purchase intention.

Priming plays an important role when information provided though either a single or multiple source conveys varied messages. Previous research considering varied message strategy indicates that consumers are motivated to allocate more cognitive capacity to make sense of varied messages (Srull and Wyer, 1989). This can be attributed to the reason that consumers process initial and the subsequent message in relation to each other and try to form an integrated evaluation from both the messages (Maheswaran and Chaiken, 1991). Further, increasing the number of messages sources intensifies information processing activity (Harkings and Petty, 1987), can elicit more number of evaluative and total thoughts (Edell and Keller, 1999) and second exposure to a novel stimulus containing slightly different message can attract more attention than exposure to the same source (Putrevu and Lord, 2003). Therefore, we expect subjects would involve in more priming when messages are varied and different message source would further increase this effect. Further, it is expected that the increased level of priming would enhance the attitude and response. We hypothesize that:
H5a: Subjects exposed to varied messages in the multi-source condition will involve in more priming than subjects exposed to similar messages, (b) which will have positive effect on attitude towards the Advertisement, attitude towards the brand and purchase intention.

H6: Subjects exposed to Advertisement first in the multi-source condition will not differ in level of priming as compared to subjects exposed to Review first.