CHAPTER-VI
CONCLUSIONS
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SUMMARY OF RESULTS

This dissertation provided new insight to evaluating the effectiveness of comparative advertising. In examining how effectiveness of comparative advertising has been evaluated, it was found that studies have treated consumers as a single homogeneous group. Drawing from the fact that individuals vary significantly in their personal characteristics, this study proposed that the encoding of the message in a comparative advertisement will depend to a large extent upon the characteristics of the individuals, namely their individual differences in variables such as involvement and familiarity.

Consumers who are less or not acquainted with the advertised product class will find it difficult evaluate product attributes across brands (Etgar and Goodwin, 1977). Hence, product familiarity is a necessary prerequisite to measuring comparative advertising effectiveness. Similarly heightened product involvement facilitates evaluation of brands based on specific brand attributes since involvement will lead to relevant information acquisition. Further, externally available information may serve as a retrieval cue, accessing prior information in memory, this prior information is retrieved as a clear picture further facilitating effective evaluation of
brand attributes. Hence prior measurement of involvement and familiarity is significant to the evaluation of comparative advertising effectiveness. This study focused on the influence of these variables on the effectiveness of comparative advertising.

The study used Households as subjects because the product classes investigated cold drink and moulded furniture, are salient to them (i.e. they use/purchase and consume brands from these product classes). Subjects involvement with both product classes was measured with Zaikowsky’s (1985) involvement scale (Table 4.1). The level of familiarity was determined by several questions (table 4.2).

Our study found that comparative advertising may be effective when individual differences are taken into consideration. Comparative advertisements are able to affect the purchase intentions of consumer groups who are well informed and highly involved with purchase situations. Further, by discussing attributes that have important benefits they can change the predispositions and purchase intentions of groups who had received messages counter to their existing beliefs. The very nature of comparative advertisements enables even the less familiar, and the uninvolved to recall them. Because they are so different (more informative) that even such consumer groups are able to recall such advertisements.
Further consumers rate comparative advertisement for moulded furniture higher on price and value, design and style, consumers' profile etc. measures than non comparative advertisements. This is because comparative advertisements provide more information on these measures as they compare sponsor brand with competing brands on these lines. For cold drinks, however, there is no greater change in perception because of comparative advertisements. This is perhaps because of the heavy and repetitive advertising of these products and low-cost of the products.

In essence, for comparative advertisement to be effective they must be tailored for the different consumer groups based upon their characteristics and highlight those attributes which provide important benefits. Only then will the advertisement be interesting, informative and make positive impact.

CONTRIBUTIONS

This research has attempted to resolve the controversy over the effectiveness of comparative advertising by incorporating research in individual differences. Individual differences in two areas were examined - product involvement, and product familiarity. The major distinguishing feature of this study is the linking of two areas of research (individual differences and comparative advertising) and attempting to resolve the issue
of comparative advertising effectiveness.

The study also looked at attribute selection based on whether advertising information was counter to or congruent with existing belief structures. We have found that when new information is congruent with existing beliefs, the beliefs are further reinforced. When new information assimilated is different from existing beliefs, and attribute information carries important benefits, reorganization of belief structure occurs and triggers curiosity for more information search and evaluation. Consequently, such consumers develop a favourable attitude towards the advertisement and greater purchase intentions.

Drawing from our findings we have found that in designing comparative advertisements, the focus should be not only on product differences but also on audience differences. Since an advertisement serves as a source of information, it should be specifically designed for the audience it is designed to serve. Attributes highlighted should be those which have important benefits to the target audience.

What then does all this mean to the marketing practitioner? Given the fact that millions are spent on advertising campaigns, the design of an appropriate advertisement which would induce purchase behaviour, is certainly important. Drawing from the findings of this study, it is clear that
acknowledging consumer heterogeneity is crucial to advertising effectiveness. If a comparative advertisement is targeted to the highly involved or informed, it must compare attributes that matter. Marketers must acknowledge the fact that consumers have different processing strategies based on individual cognitive abilities. Consumers vary significantly in encoding abilities, preferences and the ability to store information in memory. Advertising effectiveness would depend to a large extent on comparing determinant attributes - attributes that become the decisive factors at the point of purchase. Further from what our study has found with regards to message believability, it appears that even if the message claims a feature which is different from the norm, the advertising message should stress this difference. The involved or informed consumer will take the pains to verify this claim. In deciding when to use a comparative advertisement, the marketer must first know the characteristic of his target audience. For example, drawing from the findings of this study, we may recommend that if a marketer wants to place an advertisement for a computer product in a computer magazine, they might prefer to go with the comparative advertising format. Given that the readers of such a magazine would belong to the familiar and involved group, such an advertisement would prove to be effective. On the other hand, a non-comparative format may prove more effective if the advertisement is to
be placed in a non-technical magazine catering to a wider audience. Hence, understanding the relationship between information presentation and the individual's predisposition for information should lead to more effective advertising campaigns.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

We believe that a sincere attempt should be made to gather information from subjects other than households.

The sample size of this study was small. With larger sample sizes in the various groups, the empirical findings of this study would have been more significant and would have provided a feel for an increase in advertising effectiveness by not treating the consumers as homogeneous.

FUTURE WORK

This study made propositions based upon the main effects of the different variables. The measurement of interaction effects will be the first extension to this present experiment.

Drawing from this study, we would like to investigate the influence of these individual differences on the perceptions of competitive products.

Further, the influence of other individual characteristics such as that of cognitive integration and differentiation on the effectiveness of
comparative advertising would be of interest. How cognitive structures influence information assimilation would be significant to the design of comparative advertising. Further how cognition affects perceptions would be worthy of investigation. Not only should main effects be examined but interaction effects should also be noted.

It would also be of interest to model the relationships between the various measures of advertising effectiveness and determining how they vary for comparative and non-comparative advertisements.