CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE
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OVERVIEW & DEFINITION

Ever since the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) encouraged explicitly naming competing brands in advertisements, many investigations have been conducted by advertising researchers in America to determine the effects of such a practice. The use of numerous independent and dependent variables in these investigations has generated a wide spectrum of results.

While some researchers (e.g. Levine 1976; Prasad 1976; Swinyard 1981) suggest that overall comparative advertising is inferior to non-comparative advertising, others (e.g. Belch 1981; Golden 1979; Goodwin and Etgar 1980) claim that there is no difference in the effectiveness of comparative and non-comparative advertising. Naturally, the measures of effectiveness vary considerably in these studies. But on the whole, the results of these studies indicate that, at best, comparative advertising is as good as non-comparative advertising in generating favourable responses towards the challenging brand. These researchers contend that users of the competing brand tend to argue for their brands, undermining the claims of the challenging brand.

However, a small number of studies (e.g. Gorn and Weinberg 1984; Sujan 1987) provide some positive results of comparative advertising.
These studies show that comparative advertising can bring the sponsor’s brand closer to the competing brand by showing the similarities between the brands. This may be beneficial to the sponsored brand. Both camps of researchers have compelling reasons to encourage or discourage the practice of comparative advertising.

**DEFINITION**

Marketers have often used the "brand X approach" where the other brand(s) is/are referred to as the "other leading brand(s)" instead of being explicitly named. However, a consumer who is extremely familiar with the product class may be able to identify this "brand X" (Goodwin & Etgar 1980). Since the early 70s, however, the FTC (Federal Trade Commission) began encouraging the naming of the competing brands in commercials in U.S.A. because it provides consumers with more factual information and eliminates any deception due to indirect comparisons. Hence we saw the birth of comparative advertising in America as we know it today.

The topic of comparative advertising was initially addressed by Wilkie and Farris (1975) who defined it as advertising that (1) compares two or more specifically named or recognizably presented brands of the same generic product or service class and (2) makes such a comparison in terms of one or more specific product or service attributes.
The definitions of comparative advertising as forwarded by Wilkie and Farris (1975) has guided the majority of the investigations in comparative advertising. Any advertisement that compares, implicitly or explicitly, two or more brands and states or implies that information has been obtained or a test has been conducted on a comparative basis, or that states or implies a particular market standing in relation to other similar products, whether the brands are named or not, shall be deemed comparative.

The case for comparative advertising appears to rest on one critical assumption that comparison between two or more explicitly identified brands is valuable to consumers. The sponsoring organization strives for favourable responses from the consumers when his brand is compared with another. An inherent objective of comparative advertising is to assist consumers in processing brand information by comparing two or more products. Comparative advertising is believed to accomplish this objective by providing them with a frame of reference. This frame of reference is assumed to enable them to compare the alternatives which may be similar in at least one respect.

To ease the consumers evaluation tasks, the brands are compared and the superiority of one brand over another is identified. While
incorporating a comparison in the advertisement may facilitate the decision making tasks, the explicit comparison may not be required in the advertisement to propagate it in their minds. Consumers may think of competing brands even if they are not identified in the advertisement. Conventional advertisements that do not identify the competitor's brand but refer to the sponsored brand in comparative terms, such as 'best', 'cheapest', 'freshest', may imply comparisons to the consumers. Thus, a degree of comparison may always be present in a persuasive message. The advertisements describe the sponsored brand in relative terms. Therefore, as long as the comparison is made in consumers minds, the advertiser's objective of assisting consumers in their evaluation is satisfied.

Further, the comparison may be made not only on several dimensions such as products attributes, but also on other dimensions such as customer satisfaction, past experience, among others. For instance, brand A may be compared with brand B on price, size, colour, or any other attribute. Brands may also be compared by showing the satisfaction some users have had in the past. Further, if target audience members have used the sponsored product, their past experience may serve as a reference for comparison purposes. Moreover, various constraints (e.g. economical) may not allow for exhaustive comparison between the sponsored brand and other
brand(s) on all attributes.

Yet another issue in comparative advertising is related to attributes of the brands. Specifically, when the sponsored brand is compared with another consumers may be able to conduct comparisons on attributes regardless of the presence or absence of those attributes in advertisements. Also, consumers may be able to compare the brands on attributes that may not be included in the advertisement. Thus, certain specific attributes may not always be needed in an advertisement for it to be considered a comparative advertisement.

The objective of assisting consumers in the process of comparison among brands may be accomplished in two ways. First, the comparison may be made for consumers. By explicitly identifying the competitive brand and making comparison on specific attributes, advertiser make the comparison for consumers. Current practice and research in U.S.A. in comparative advertising is pursued along this path. The other option is to lead the consumers to compare the alternatives for themselves. If a comparison is initiated in their minds, the purpose of comparing the brands is served. That is, by implying comparisons between the sponsored brand and a competing brand, the advertiser can accomplish the purpose of having consumers compare different brands.
It is now possible to offer the definition of comparative advertising to guide this research. As discussed above, comparisons can be made explicitly or implicitly in an advertisement on a variety of attributes. The third alternative, of course, is not to compare the sponsored brand with another, implicitly or explicitly. It is proposed that the following definition of comparative advertising be adopted for this research.

An explicit comparative advertisement is one that identifies and compares the sponsored brand with another. The attributes of competing brand(s) may or may not be specified in the advertisement.

An implicit comparative advertisement is one that suggests or implies a comparison of the sponsored brand with unspecified other(s). The attributes of competing brand(s) may or may not be specified in the advertisement.

A non-comparative advertisement is one that does not, explicitly or implicitly compare the sponsored brand with another. The attributes of the sponsored brand may or may not be specified.

The definition of explicit comparison calls for a comparison between two or more brands as long as they are identified. The implicit comparative advertisement implies comparison of the sponsored brand with
another without identifying the competing brand(s). Finally, the non-comparative advertisement may present a supportive case for the sponsored brand without referring to another brand.

**COMPARATIVE ADVERTISING PREVIOUS FINDINGS**

The issue of comparative advertising, however, has been a sea of controversy. It appears to be no more effective than traditional non-comparative advertising when it comes to credibility and believability of the claims made (Droge and Darmon 1987; Goodwin and Etgar 1980; Levine 1976; Prasad 1976; 1978; Swinyard 1981), attitude towards the brand (Belch 1981; Goodwin & Etgar 1980; Gorn and Weinberg 1984), purchase intentions and actual behavior (Swinyard 1981). Some claims have also been made to the effect that comparative advertising will only benefit the competitor (Levine 1976). Comparative advertisements have been perceived to be offensive, and also aggressive and intense.

Some researchers claim that it does increase sales for the sponsor (Demirdjian 1983). Demirdjian (1983) found that the purchase rate of low cost products increases more through a comparative advertising strategy providing objective information than through a conventional advertising strategy. Comparative advertisements are perceived to be more informative in nature and more persuasive (Levine 1976). Goodwin and Etgar (1980)
found comparative advertisements to be more helpful in terms of information content. Perhaps the issue of the effectiveness of comparative advertisements is based on the relative importance of the attributes on which comparison is based to the audience. If the information is issue-relevant, the comparison will be found to be interesting and informative. If the brand attributes discussed are of marginal interest, then the advertisement will be less effective (Droge and Darmon 1987).

The whole issue of believability and credibility was explained by Wright's (1973) cognitive response framework. Consumers evoke more counterarguments in the case of comparative claims than in non-comparative claims. Hence, minimizing counterarguments appears to be of essence to the acceptance of a message. Attribution theory also suggests that greater counterarguing is evoked by comparative claims (Swinyard 1981). If the consumer believes that the advertiser is motivated to making representations to serve his own purpose rather than of the consumer, counterarguments should be expected.

The credibility and believability of comparative advertisements can be increased by constructing an advertisement which is two-sided (Provides positive plus negative claims). Swinyard (1981) reported that the acceptance of a key claim was greater for a two-sided advertisement than for a
one-sided one. Similarly, Goodwin & Etgar (1980) reported that a two-sided advertisement was significantly more effective than a one-sided one. However, Belch (1981) found no evidence to support the claim that a two-sided format was more effective than a one-sided format for both comparative or non-comparative advertisements.

A series of hypothetical such as beliefs, attitudes, perception, cognitive response and intentions have been used in the past to measure the effectiveness of comparative advertising. Gorn and Weinberg (1984) found that comparative advertising was effective in reducing the perceived difference between the promoted brand and the leading brand and suggested that attitude may not be the most sensitive dependent measures of the effectiveness of comparative advertisements. Further, it has been suggested that cognitive response to the comparative advertising treatment may not be the primary mediator of product perceptions and attitude (Belch 1981; Gorn and Weinberg 1984; Swinyard 1981). Demirdjian (1983) measured the effectiveness of comparative advertising by examining its impact on purchase behaviour. He reports that comparative advertising outperforms its non-comparative counterpart in sales effectiveness.

In studying associative positioning strategies, Droge and Darmon (1987) investigated if comparative advertisements, whether product-based or
not, were more effective in positioning a new brand closer to the compared-to-brand in Multi Dimensional Scaling space (accuracy) and with less variance in the sponsor's position (clarity). Accuracy referred to how close a consumer perceived a brand to be to its targeted position, while clarity referred to the level of perceived certainty with which the brand's position was held. Their study found no evidence to support the claim that comparative advertisements are superior to non-comparative advertisements in terms of positioning accuracy at the attribute level. However, evidence did indicate that comparative advertisements were indeed superior to non-comparative advertisements when it came to generating positioning clarity. Droge (1989) found that comparative advertisements are more persuasive than non-comparative advertisements in inducing perceptions of similarity.

From an advertiser's point of view, a comparative advertisement is designed to either reduce the perceived differences between the promoted brand and the category leader (stressing similarity in the minds of the consumer) or to achieve differentiation. Direct comparison between two or more brands makes it easier to position the advertised brand, since direct comparison enables clearer and more focused perceptions (Droge 1989). Direct comparisons further increase the potential for learning how brands
differ/or are similar and also to what extent they do so (Gorn and Weinberg 1984). When carefully designed to achieve differentiation, comparative advertisements should be more effective in increasing the preferences of the targeted groups since they make differences between brands clearer (Droge 1989).

COGNITIVE RESPONSE FRAMEWORK

The recipients of the message are considered to be active, rather than passive, information processors who generate responses to the messages. Advocates of the cognitive response theory make the assumption that when a person receives a persuasive communication, an attempt is made to relate the information in the message to the preexisting knowledge that the person has about the topic. This process necessitates considering information that may not be found in the communication itself. These additional self-generated cognitive responses (thoughts) may agree with the proposals being made in the message, may disagree, or may be entirely irrelevant to the communication.

To the extent that the communication evokes cognitive responses that are supportive, the individual will tend to agree with the message. To the extent that the communications evokes antagonistic cognitive responses, the individual will tend to disagree with the message.
The fundamental premise of cognitive response theory is that the initial attitude change produced by a message will depend on the extent to which favourable or unfavourable thoughts are generated by the message recipient at the time of the message exposure. This premise has clear implications for comparative advertising as discussed next.

**Implications for Comparative Advertising**

The key to the cognitive response theory is the predisposition of the individual prior to exposure to the message. If the individual is favourably predisposed to agree with position advocated in advertisement, he will generate support arguments. However, if not favourably predisposed, counter argumentation will occur (Berkman and Gilson 1986). Thus in comparative advertising, the users of the competing brand may react by counterarguing against the comparative claim (Wilkie and Farris 1975). The stronger the individual's predisposition toward the comparison brand, the greater the discrepancy between his/her position and that of the advertiser making the comparison. A defensive reaction may occur whereby negative thoughts (e.g., counterarguments, source derogations, rejections) may be emphasised in processing the message. Not only may negative thoughts be more available and accessible to the individual favourably predisposed to the comparison brand, but also the motivation to argue against the
comparative message may be stronger than when no comparison is made.

In summary, as stated earlier, the chief objective of the cognitive response theory is to determine how various features of the persuasion situation influence the number of favourable and unfavorable responses that will be generated. These responses mediate the acceptance or rejection of the advertisement (Wright 1973). Based on Wilkie and Farris's (1975) speculation that users of competing brand may react by counterarguing against the comparative claim, several researchers have measured the cognitive responses to determine the impact of comparative advertising (Belch 1981; Swinyard 1981). Using this approach, researchers have investigated the effects of various situations as well as independent and dependent variables in analysing the consequences of comparative advertising. Appropriateness of taking a cognitive response perspective in comparative advertising can be determined by an analysis of past investigations in this research stream. The next section closely reviews that these studies and brings out relevant conceptual as well as substantive issues in comparative advertising.
EFFECT OF COMPARATIVE ADVERTISING

Effect of Comparative Advertising on Cognitive Measures

Several cognitive measures have been used in investigations of comparative advertising. These measures include thoughts evoked due to comparative advertising, recall effectiveness, brand awareness and perceptions of challenger-leader similarity. Included in this section are discussions of those investigations that used these measures and their findings.

Thoughts Generated by Comparative Advertising

A few investigations have examined the effects of comparative advertising on arguments or thoughts evoked due to exposure to comparative advertisements. Indeed, these arguments or thoughts could be in favor or in opposition to the message conveyed in the advertisements.

A study investigating the arguments generated by comparative advertising was reported by Belch (1981). With type of message (comparative or non-comparative), message sidedness (one or two-sided) and message repetition (one, three, or five exposures) as the independent variables. The participants, members of church groups, when exposed to commercials for a new fictitious brand of toothpaste conveyed their reactions in terms of positive thoughts, negative thoughts, and attitude.
toward sponsored brand. The author found a significant main effect of message type on negative thoughts, i.e. comparative message generated more negative thoughts than non-comparative messages.

Recall Effectiveness

An early study to assess communication effectiveness of comparative advertising was reported by Prasad (1976). Because novelty and contrast elements in stimulus serve to increase attention levels of the audience (Engel, Kollat and Blackwell), he conceptualized high recall effectiveness of comparative advertising due to its novelty at the time. In this study, student subjects were exposed to explicit comparative as well as brand X comparative advertisements for movie camera with or without prior preference for a well-known brand.

The results indicated that claim recall was higher among subjects who were exposed to the comparative advertisement than among those who were exposed to the brand X advertisement, regardless of their prior preferences towards the well-known brand. Further, perception of the competitive position of the sponsor's brand was found to be no different between the explicit comparative and brand X comparative advertisement.

According to Prasad (1976), a comparative advertisement can enhance message recall to some extent. However, an issue regarding the
appropriateness of presenting a persuasive message to an audience that may not typically purchase such a brand remains unresolved. Specifically, students may not be the target market for movie cameras, and therefore, the results of this study should be accepted with caution.

**Brand Awareness**

Levine (1976) conducted an investigation to determine the differences in the effects of comparative and non-comparative advertising commercials of health and beauty aids and drug products. The pre/post test included exposing female heads of households to stimuli to determine their responses on identification of the sponsor as well as awareness about the sponsor’s brand. The frequency analysis enabled him to conclude that the comparative advertisements suffered from greater misidentification of the sponsor. The awareness about the sponsor’s brand was not found to be different for comparative or non-comparative advertisements.

**Perceptions of Challenger Leader Similarity**

A study investigating the effects of comparative advertising on perceived similarity between the advertised brands, in the context of simultaneous advertising by the competitive brand, was reported by Gorn and Weinberg (1984). Because real-life situations involve advertising by a challenger as well as by the market leader, the authors contended that
investigations of comparative advertising should include context of presence
or absence of (non-comparative) advertising by the leader as an independent
variable. In their experiment, type of advertisement was varied between
comparative and non-comparative and context was manipulated by presence
or absence of a (non-comparative) leader advertisement in the stimulus
material. Type of products (i.e. cigarettes, toothpastes and golf balls) was a
repeated factor. With the objective of studying the impact of comparative
advertising on perception of a brand in a product category, the authors
hypothesized greater perceived challenger-leader brand similarity with
exposure to comparative versus non-comparative advertisements. Also
hypothesized was greater brand similarity for a hypothetical new brand (in
the same product category) with exposure to comparative versus
non-comparative advertisements. The results supported both hypotheses for
the main effects of advertisements and products. Additional analysis showed
that cigarette brands were seen as significantly more similar than toothpaste
brands with golf balls in between for both challenger-leader similarity and
perceived similarity of new brands. Further, the authors investigated
carry-over effects of comparative advertising in other product categories.
That is, they hypothesized greater perceived brand similarity among two
brands of cola soft drinks with exposure to comparative advertisements
versus non-comparative advertisements. This hypothesis was also supported.
In just opposition similarity among two brands of physically different deodorants (one being a spary and the other a roll-on) was not found (as expected) with exposure to comparative versus non-comparative advertisement.

The major finding of the Gorn and Weinberg (1984) study is that perceived brand similarity is greater with exposure to comparative advertisements than non-comparative advertisements. This, according to the authors, psychological distance between the challenger and the leader can be reduced by comparative advertising.

In summary, it appears that there is no consensus on the effectiveness of comparative advertising on cognitive measures. Belch (1981) indicate that comparative advertising generates more negative thoughts than non-comparative advertising. Prasad (1976) found comparative advertising superior to non-comparative advertising. Levine (1976) fail to provide any recommendation for comparative advertising. Gorn and Weinberg (1984) claim the superiority of comparative advertising for the perceived similarity between the compared brands.

Effect of Comparative Advertising on Affective Measures

The investigations in comparative advertising have used a variety of affective measures to capture and analyze the effects of comparative and
non-comparative advertisements. Included among them are variables such as believability of claims made in the advertisement, informativeness and interestingness of the advertisement, attitude toward the advertisement and the brand.

One of the studies investigating the effect on the believability of claims made in the advertisement was conducted by Prasad (1976). The investigation found that the subjects who had prior preference for the competitive brand found the claim in comparative advertisement less believable than those with no prior preference.

Attitude toward the Advertisements

A few investigations in comparative advertising have investigated consumers attitude toward comparative advertisements.

Goodwin and Etgar (1980), reports that measures of attitude toward comparative advertisements are no different from those for non-comparative or 'brand X' advertisements. In their experiment, only one out of nine different measures of attitude toward advertisement was significantly influenced by the type of advertisement. Moreover, one other measure of attitude was significantly influenced by the type of products used in the advertisements. The authors concluded as only a few of the main effects are statistically significant, inferences to be drawn are speculative.
Attitude toward the Sponsored Brand

The above discussed study of Goodwin and Etgar (1980) also reported findings related to the attitude toward the sponsored brand. Their investigation focused on the type of appeals (comparative, non-comparative and brand X), number of attributes in advertisements (two, five and seven) and type of products (functional or social utility). The results showed no difference between the attitude toward the sponsored brand in comparative or non-comparative advertisements where as the attitude with 'brand X' was marginally superior. In addition, the medium level of attribute information (i.e. five attributes) was able to raise the assessment of quality of the sponsored brand higher than low level of attribute information (i.e. two attributes) or high (i.e. seven attributes) levels of attribute information. Finally, subjects’ perceptions of the sponsored brand were more favourable for product classes providing social utility than those providing functional utility.

Consumers’ attitudes toward the sponsored brand in comparative advertisement have also been investigated by Belch (1981). With type of advertisements (Comparative and non-comparative), message sidedness (one and two sided) and message repetition (one, three and five exposures) as the treatments. The study analysed the effect on attitude towards the
sponsored brand. The only finding of interest was that the highest level of exposures (i.e. five exposures) generated negative attitude toward and sponsored brand.

Finally, an investigation examining the effects on the attitude toward the sponsored brand has also been reported by Gorn and Weinberg (1984). In the study described earlier, the authors varied the type of advertisements in the presence (or absence) of a leader advertisement for three different products. The results indicated no difference in attitude toward the sponsored brand due to comparative or non-comparative advertisements. However, in the absence of a leader advertisement, the attitude was more favorable. Also, the main effect of product was significant for the attitude toward the sponsored brand.

In summary, Goodwin and Etgar (1980), Belch (1981) and Gorn and Weinberg (1984) found no difference between the attitude toward the sponsored brand in comparative and non-comparative advertisements.

Effect of Comparative Advertising on Conative Measures

Several conative measures have been used in the investigations of comparative advertising. These include purchase intention, and information search intention, although by far, purchase intention has been popular conative measure used by the researchers.
**Purchase Intention**

Golden (1979) investigated the relative effects of comparative and non-comparative advertising on purchase intentions for an antiperspirant. She also investigated the effects of other variables which may effect consumer reactions to comparative advertisements, such as comparative positions of the advertised brands (three levels), claim substantiation (provided or not provided), and the theme of the advertisement (three variations). Responses of student subjects revealed that the purchase intention ratings elicited by the comparative advertisement are not significantly different from those of the non-comparative advertisement. The results were the same for the other three independent variables.

Goodwin and Etgar (1980) also investigated the effect of type of advertisement (comparative and non-comparative), type of product (social versus functional utility), and different level of information (low, medium and high information load) on the intention to purchase the promoted brand. The type of advertisement was not found to influence the purchase intention. However, the results showed a main effect for the type of product. Further analysis indicated that the purchase intention was higher for the product with greater social utility than functional utility. Unfortunately, the study does not report why the purchase intention may be
higher for one type of product than for the other.

Sales Response

Contending that the effectiveness of comparative advertising may not be limited to the cognitive responses, Demirdjian (1983) included the sales response as the dependent variable in his field experiment. Extending Wright's (1973) cognitive response framework, he measured sales response from students after exposing them to actual comparative and non-comparative advertisements of two equally priced brands of pen. After administration of the stimulus, the subjects were given coupons for both brands to be redeemed toward the purchase of either brand. Analysis of sales data revealed that the subjects exposed to comparative advertisement purchased more pens (both brands combined) than those exposed to non-comparative advertisements. Also the sponsor's brand was purchased more than the compared brand by the subjects exposed to comparative advertisements. Therefore, the author concluded that comparative advertising may strongly influence purchase behavior and may beneficial to the sponsor. However, due to the lack of information about the control of other factors possibly influencing the behavior of the subjects in this field experiment, the results must be regarded cautiously.
As is amply clear from the preceding literature review, there is no consensus on the effects of comparative advertising. All the investigations reported so far were conducted with the cognitive response framework. Various measures have been used in the investigations of comparative advertising. The review grouped the measured into the categories of cognitive, affective and conative measures. For all three types of measures, no consensus emerged regarding the effects of comparative advertising.

Therefore, if the consumers cognitive responses are understood, the effectiveness of comparative advertising can be measured.

**INVolvement**

Felt involvement draws unto two sources: (a) the immediate environment and (b) the intrinsic characteristics of the individual (Celsi and Olson 1988; Zaichkowsky 1985). These two sources of felt involvement are referred to as the situational and intrinsic sources of perceived personal relevance (Celsi and Olson 1988).

Any stimuli, cue or contingency in the consumer’s immediate surrounding may function as a situational source of personal relevance. For example, coupons, sales and rebates may activate personal relevant goals of being a careful, conservative shopper. Hence, such promotions could increase the felt involvement with the purchase situation. On the other hand,
intrinsic sources of personal relevance are "relatively stable, enduring structures of personally relevant knowledge, derived from past experience and stored in long term memory". This knowledge structure contains associations between objects and actions and important self-relevant goals.

Under high involvement conditions, consumers exhibit increased cognitive activity. They seek training or education in the issues they are involved in (Ganesh and Javalgi 1987). They gather as much information as they can for cognitive processing. They allocate greater resources and energy in their attention to comprehension and processing of information (Batra and Ray 1986; Celsi and Olson 1988).

Counter arguments are raised when the message differs from existing beliefs. When faced with cognitive uncertainty, consumers will seek clarification and additional information (Etgar and Goodwin 1977).

It is a widely held notion that most purchase decisions are low in consumer involvement (Wilkie 1975). A low involvement purchase may be typically characterized as an unimportant purchase. This may be because the purchase is a repeat purchase, the product value is well known or because the consumer doesn’t identify himself with it since it is unimportant to his belief system.
It has been found that under low involvement conditions sources of high and low credibility have different persuasive powers. In low involvement situations, message from high credibility sources are perceived as being correct since experts are always to be believed. Non message cues have the greatest impact on persuasion. In high involvement situations, however, the characteristics of the message content has the maximal impact.

**FAMILIARITY**

Prior knowledge influences to a great extent to which consumers recall, search for and use of information for their choice processes (Alba and Marmorstein 1987; Bettman and Park 1980).

It has been suggested that a consumer’s prior knowledge plays a very important role in the evaluative processes that the product goes through before a final decision or judgement is reached. Most consumers have a general idea of what a product can provide and they have a conceptual image of the ideal product and its attribute combination (Kotler 1980). High familiarity consumers are able to make use of both the similarities and differences (in attributes) of the brand being evaluated to the ideal product in memory. They attempt to comprehend and evaluate the arguments and rely on internal support to critically evaluate the new
information. They utilise their discrimination abilities and use of prior information they are confident is diagnostic about product quality (Rao and Monree 1988).

Gathering information, or information search, is an important part of the consumer purchase decision. Consumers search for, or gather information, to the extent to which they view the purchase to be important, (Blackwell and Kollat 1978; Bennett and Mandell 1969).

The consumer's prior knowledge or familiarity with the product results in different levels of search activities. Several studies have found that in choice tasks, the greater the level of knowledge, the lower the propensity to search for external information (Anderson, Engledow, Beckar 1979; Betman and Park 1980; Newman and Staelin 1971).

Such behaviour has received two explanations, first since high familiarity consumers have adequate information about various alternates, they do not have to seek external information; second, such consumers are able to filter information more efficiently because they know exactly what they are looking for. However, another school of thought put forth the view that in judgemental tasks, high familiarity consumers are encouraged to seek more information since it is easier for them to process new information (Brucks 1985). This may be attributed to the fact that the
perceived risk involved in a judgmental task is more than in a choice task. Hence the greater the perceived risk, the greater the search for more information.

The complex knowledge structure of high familiarity consumers enables fine grained interpretation of new information. They are able to understand where and how the new information fits in their knowledge structure. They have good discriminating abilities and are able to judge how the different information may be used effectively for diagnostic purposes. In choice tasks involving non-comparable alternatives where a decision criterion is not provided experts use abstract attributes for their decision processes. However, when comparable alternatives are provided experts use concrete attributes. No familiarity consumers on the other hand have been found to use abstract attributes when judging both comparable and non-comparable alternatives (Bettman and Sujan 1987). This may be attributed to the fact that novices become overwhelmed when provided with detailed information and spend little effort in processing this information (Bettman and Park 1980.)

According to Alba and Hutchinson (1987), consumer knowledge has two components: familiarity and expertise. Familiarity is defined as the number of product-related experiences that have been accumulated by the
consumers. Expertise refers to the ability to perform product related tasks successfully (Alba and Hutchinson 1987). It appears from the definitions of familiarity and expertise that advertising research manipulating subjects' knowledge may actually be concerned with subjects' familiarity and not their expertise. The preceding notion can be justified with two explanations.

First, an important distinction between expertise and familiarity is that the former includes performance of tasks whereas the latter does not. In advertising research, if subjects are exposed to an advertisement and their responses are sought using paper and pencil measures the subjects do not need to perform any product related tasks. Much of advertising research is pursued without having the subjects perform any product related tasks. Consequently, manipulation of subjects' knowledge may be limited to subjects' familiarity and not their expertise.

The second reason to use subjects' familiarity, rather than expertise, as a measure of their knowledge is related to the dimensions of familiarity. According to Alba and Hutchinson (1987) product related experiences include advertising exposures, information search interactions with salespersons, choice and decision making, purchasing and usage situations. Higher numbers of product related experiences of an individual raise one's familiarity with the product but not necessarily their expertise. On the other
hand, higher expertise of an individual would be indicative of ability for successful task performance. Thus, an individual may be able to perform various tasks related to the product without being aware of any communications related to the product or conducting any information search related to the product. That is, an individual may be able to perform product tasks without having gone through any decision making process for the product. Advertising research related to subjects prior background and not their ability to perform product tasks may indeed be measuring one or more dimensions of familiarity. Therefore, if consumers responses to advertisements are obtained upon exposure, as it generally is in advertising research, dimensions of familiarity may be more appropriate to measure than expertise.

INSTANCES OF COMPARATIVE ADVERTISING IN AMERICA

The advertising scene in the U.S.A. is full of examples of comparative advertisements successfully used. Examples include the classic Plymouth advertising in the 1930s when a relatively unknown brand of automobile (CHRYSLER car) asked consumers to "Look at All Three" that is Chrysler, GM and Ford Car and the AVIS campaign of the 1960s, wherein a comparison was made to HERTZ. Because AVIS was number two in the rent-a-car business, the claim that its employees "tried harder"
was given as a reason for doing business with the firm. Another famous example is of PEPSI-COKE war in which PEPSI capitalised on religious attitude about taste. COKE also retaliated but could not very successfully. In 1970's DATRIL an over-the counter headache relief medicine made direct comparisons with TYLENOL, which was dominant in this product category at that time. Here the message was that the competitive product was just as effective, yet was being sold at much lower prices. In 1988, RENAULT MEDALLION car was compared with not just one but with ten other famous cars.

BRAND WAR THROUGH COMPARATIVE ADVERTISING IN U.S.A.

(1) IBM versus ZENITH

The comparative advertising resorted to by the two computer marketers, IBM and Zenith turned out to be a battle. IBM came up with a two page advertisement: One page of the advertisement was left completely blank, on the other page, IBM listed out all the distinctive features of IBM computer and challenged the competitors to fill the blank page with a better offer if they had one. Zenith immediately took up the challenge. It reproduced the IBM ad in full and filled up the blank page with the product features/characteristics of Zenith computer. In the headline Zenith declared:
"We fill in the blanks that others leave"

As we saw that one has to be very careful while opting for comparative advertising. IBM resorted and started this battle in a hope that this will establish their supremacy in the market but ZENITH proved to be more creative and they utilized the very technique which IBM used for the counter attack and were successful and in a better situation.

(2) THE COLA WAR:

One of the PEPSI’S strategic move was called the "PEPSI CHALLENGE". It involved blind taste tests between two unnamed colas. They said that COCA COLA says it is the real thing. But PEPSI believes that when it comes to colas only real thing is taste. So, that is why the PEPSI challenge had been asking thousands of people across the country to let their own taste decide. In the end it was found that more people preferred the taste of PEPSI over COCA COLA. This "PEPSI CHALLENGE" was trumpeted in TV commercials. This was a good strategy because it exploited a weak point of the competitive product. After this advertisement, COCA COLA suddenly and publicly changed their formula to match the sweetness of PEPSI COLA. This led to their decline in sales as COCA COLA was no longer the real thing.
(3) AVIS versus HERTZ CAMPAIGN:

In 1960's AVIS, a car rental company, made a comparison to HERTZ, the market leader. AVIS was number 2 in the rent-a-car business. So, they claimed that their employees "tried harder". This slogan was given as a reason for doing business with the firm.

(4) CUTTY 12 versus CHIVAS REGAL WAR:

In their advertisement a bottle of CUTTY 12 was shown being poured into a bottle of CHIVAS REGAL and the headline said "This is how to improve a bottle of CHIVAS REGAL". In the end a footnote was given as follows-

We don't recommend you to pour a great scotch into someone else's bottle. Instead we suggested you to pour CUTTY 12 directly into your glass. This comparison advertisement went too far and ended in a lawsuit between the two companies. That ended the campaign so as to settle suit.

COMPARATIVE ADVERTISING IN INDIA

For many years in India, direct brand vs brand comparisons in advertising have been avoided by the advertisers. It has been seen that explicit and direct comparisons are often made in personal selling only.
Rarely, we see a salesman who does not mention specific qualities on which his particular brand outperforms a named competitor e.g. salesman of car, insurance company, home appliances etc.

Many reason can be given as the causes for the traditional reluctance in consumer advertising for comparisons in India:

1. May be because of legal concern regarding the use of another company’s brand name or trade mark.

2. Because of business belief that it may highlight the competitor’s brand.

3. Or perhaps it may cause consumers to feel warmer towards the attacked competitor.

Despite these traditional taboos there were some consumer advertisements that employed comparison e.g., TVS SUZUKI vs HERO HONDA.

Several factors encouraged and facilitated this measures break with this tradition.

There was a strong expression of interest in comparative advertising as some people advocated comparative advertising on the grounds that it would provide more factual and useful product information.
for consumers. Further stimulus for such comparisons was the development of an official requirement that all factual claims made in advertising be substantiated in advance. In 1972 the TV networks agreed to run commercials employing named competitors. A growing variety of consumers goods marketers made use of the comparative advertising approach during 1973-74. These included packaged good (Example shampoo, detergents, etc.), major appliances (such as TV sets), and consumer services (such as credit cards and airlines). This encouraged Indian advertisers to make comparison in their advertisements.

Comparative Advertising has been gaining in usage and aggression among advertisers in India. Instances of product categories where this strategy has been used include those of detergents and butter in 1971, photocopiers during 1985-86, mosquito repellents in 1985 and two wheelers in 1989. Specific examples of comparative advertising includes HERO HONDA versus TVS SUZUKI and HCL versus MODI XEROX. These are examples of direct comparison advertising. It is more than evident from instances of comparative advertising that this strategy is gaining momentum.
EXAMPLES OF COMPARATIVE ADVERTISING IN INDIA

(i) TVS - SUZUKI versus HERO HONDA :

In this advertisement the sponsor TVS-SUZUKI compared their mobike with HERO HONDA on seven features. These features of HERO HONDA were proved as disadvantageous and the similar features of TVS-SUZUKI as efficient and economical engineering products. But here HERO HONDA, the market leader chose to be silent rather than counter attacking. But this comparison backfired on TVS-Suzuki.

(ii) HCL versus MODI XEROX :

HCL, a major photo copier company came up with a comparison advertisement campaign with MODI-XEROX which was major competitor. The advertisement gave a comparison of MODI - XEROX and HCL machines feature by feature. For analyzing the impact of the advertisement, HCL released four distinct advertisements in the same issue of chosen dailies and magazines. The ads which appeared on four different pages were :

*"Here is the entire range of Modì Xerox. Choose what's best for you."
"Here is the entire range of HCL machines. Choose what’s best for you."

The visuals showed the two models of Modi Xerox on the left and the six models of HCL machines on the right. The message went on
elaborating the benefits of the wider product range/options offered by HCL. The second advertisement on the next page continued the comparison, taking up other features:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;Here is the simplest Modi Xerox copier. It gives you size-to-size copying.&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Here is the simplest HCL Copier It gives you size-to-size copying. A jam-free paper path. Automatic exposure control. 100% edge-to-edge copying. And the option of using four or more colors. All at Rs. 30,000 less&quot;.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The third ad. appearing on another page, read:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;In half an hour Modi Xerox heavy duty machine gives you this many copies. At 17 paise each&quot;.</th>
<th>&quot;In half an hour HCL's heavy duty machine gives you this many copies. At 5 paise each&quot;.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The visuals showed heaps of papers, suggesting that HCL machine's output is seven times that of the Modi Xerox machine. The fourth ad. appearing on yet another page, summarized the relative price advantage and the operating features.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;For Rs. 95,000 you can get a good Modi Xerox copier with A3 &amp; Zoom.&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;For Rs. 95,000 you can get a HCL copier with A4 &amp; Zoom. And jam free paper path. And auto exposure. And the option of three more colours. And still have Rs. 7,000 left over&quot;.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

This was an effort by HCL to try to establish their superiority in every field by comparing their copier with that of MODI-XEROX. Inspite
of all these efforts of establishing superiority, they could not beat MODI-XEROX, which is still in a much better position as compared to HCL.

(iii) PEPSI Vs THUMS UP:

In their advertisement PEPSI has used the logo of THUMS UP so as to degrade them and turn around their logo to imply THUMS DOWN. This advertisement shows that PEPSI has overthrown THUMS UP.

(iv) PEPSI Vs COCA COLA:

Where Pepsi was compared with Coca Cola directly on taste.

(v) CONGRESS versus BJP:

During the elections in 1991 CONGRESS and BJP attacked each other by making comparisons between the two parties. BJP attacked CONGRESS by comparing on these grounds:

(a) Equality or appeasement
(b) Integrity or corruption
(c) Peace or panic
(d) Niti or Aniti

They gave a call to the people to make their choice and put an end to the Congress culture of appeasement, aniti and opportunism. On the other
hand Congress came out with an advertisement campaign saying that 'Congress keeps the nation together not by slogans (referring BJP) but by sacrifice'.

Their other advertisement campaign read "How can those who don't believe in the brotherhood of man speak of religion?"

The final impact of these comparison advertisements could be noticed after the results of elections were declared.

(vi) NUTRAMUL had publicly compared its price with that of BOURNVITA, MALTOVA and BOOST. But in this case it can be seen that some features other than price are more important for a mother when deciding to purchase such product.

Hence this advertisement could not create the impact as desired by sponsors.

(vii) SURF advertisement campaign:

In their comparative advertisements SURF tries to compare themselves with their major competitor, NIRMA. Their advertisement compared the weight of the two products and said that half Kg SURF was equivalent to one Kg. of ordinary detergent powder. Here though NIRMA has not been named but it was quite obvious.
(viii) CAMPA COLA versus THUMS UP:

When THUMS UP increased the size of their bottle they came up with an advertisement saying "More Cola Same Price". CAMPA COLA retaliated by saying "Taste is Better Than Size."

(ix) Charmwood village advertisement:

This advertisement says "While the others promise you great homes only in far flung colonies, WE DON'T MOVE YOU AWAY!" This advertisement, the competitor may be any one, hence termed as 'Brand X' comparison.

(x) Captain Cook vs Tata Salt:

In this advertisement by Captain Cook salt, the various qualities of this salt are compared with another salt e.g. free flowing, whiter etc. Here the competitor is quite obvious i.e. Tata Salt.

(xi) Ariel vs Rin soap:

In this advertisement, Ariel shows that their detergent soap lasts longer than other detergent soap (referring Rin). Hence unnamed competitor is obvious.
(xii) Coco Care vs Parachute Coconut Oil:

In this advertisement, Coco Care is proved as clearer, purer and good smelling than another coconut oil (referring Parachute). So it is Brand X comparison.

ISSUES EMERGING FROM COMPARATIVE ADVERTISING LITERATURE

It is evident from the preceding discussion that cognitive response theory has been the dominant theoretical framework used in the investigations of comparative advertising. Consumers are believed to consciously process the message upon exposure to comparative or non-comparative advertisements. Their reactions are captured as support or counterarguments in favour of advertisement or the advertiser. With variations in different aspects of comparative advertising. The researchers have investigated the effects of comparative advertisements on a variety of dependent variables.

Comparative advertising may be undertaken by marketers to achieve one of two purposes: to associate the brand with other brands or to disassociate it from other brands. At times, the marketers want to bring their brands closer to other brands or distance it from other brands. This may be accomplished in an advertisement by pointing out the similarity of
the sponsored brand to or dissimilarity from other brands. In essence, the comparative advertisement may seek a repositioning of the sponsored brand in the minds of the consumers.

The psychological distance between the leader and the challenger may be reduced if the challenger can show that it provides the same benefits as the leader and further offers at least one unique additional advantage. Thus, comparative advertisements that have most of the references pointing out the similarities between the brands with some unique additional features may have a higher potential of bringing the challenger close to the leader. That is associative comparative advertisements may be more beneficial to the sponsor than differentiative comparative advertisements. This may be true irrespective of how long the challenger has been on the market.

If the sponsor's brands is a new entrant in the market. One of the major advertising objectives may be to get visibility comparable to the leading brand. A strategy that can place the challenger in the same league with the leading brand may be called for. An associative comparative advertisement may be expected to yield positive results in such a case. Further, if the challenger is an existing brand on the market, one of the advertising objectives may be to reduce the psychological distance between the challenger and the leader. Again this may call for an associative rather
than differentiative comparative advertising strategy.

Another issue worthy of consideration in comparative advertising is the sidedness of the message. The sidedness of an advertisement is known to influence consumers' reactions to comparative messages (e.g., Belch 1981 and Goodwin 1978; Swinyard 1981).

In order to understand the ramifications of the sidedness of comparative advertisements, it is necessary to understand one-sided advertisement, two-sided advertisements and two-sided comparative advertisements. A one-sided advertisement presents a supportive case for the sponsored brand and is therefore equivalent to a non-comparative advertisement. A two-sided advertisement attempts to present a balanced case for the sponsored brand by exhibiting the strengths while admitting a few weaknesses of the brand. On the other hand, a two-sided comparative advertisement exhibits superiority of the sponsored brand over the comparative brand on a few attributes and admits a few relatively less important shortcomings for example Ind-suzuki versus Hero-honda. Thus, a two-sided comparative advertisement implicitly recommends a reevaluation of the competitor based on the attributes suggested in the advertisement. If consumer's perceptions of the importance of attributes are congruent with those implied in the advertisement, the evaluation of the sponsor's brand may be favorable. An important feature of such an evaluation process is
that the overall evaluation is derived in piecemeal mode. As demonstrated by Sujan (1985) piecemeal judgments are slower than category based judgments.

Yet another issue in comparative advertising is related to the attribute information in comparative advertising. Typically, the investigations in comparative advertising have used advertisements that compared brand on one or more attributes. However, comparisons need not be made on attributes for an advertisement to be comparative. Brands can be compared globally, without comparing them on attributes.

Whether brands are compared globally or on attributes would influence how consumers process the advertisement. If the advertisement presents attribute comparisons, consumers would be expected to process it in the piecemeal mode. On the other hand, if the advertisement makes global comparisons, without attributes, consumers would be expected to process it in the category-based mode. As consumers mode of processing is known to influence their responses to the persuasive message (Sujan 1985), comparative advertisement with attribute cues or global cues may be expected to generate different responses from consumers.

Finally, comparative advertising research must address the explicit versus implicit nature of comparative. As discussed earlier, comparison between the products need not be direct, explicit. The consumers can be led
to compare the promoted brand with another in the same category, and that
may serve the purpose of comparative advertising. That is, comparison of
the sponsored brand with another can be implied in the advertisement. This
issue may be more relevant for experts consumers than novices. Experts can
bring their well developed knowledge of category when processing the
information presented in a stimulus. Thus even if an advertisement does not
explicitly compare the products, a suggestion to compare may initiate the
process of comparison for experts. However, because novices lack high
knowledge of the product or the category, they react differently than
experts.

In summary, it appears that the effectiveness of comparative
advertising may be influenced by the various dimensions discussed above.
Use of one or more of these dimensions in a comparative advertisement
may be dependent upon the advertiser's objective. For instance if the
advertiser wishes to promote a new brand in the market characterized by
several brands, the advertiser may want to show how the new brand is
similar to the others. In such a case an associative comparative advertising
may be appropriate. Thus, contingent upon the objectives of the advertiser,
a comparative advertisement can be designed with some of these
dimensions to achieve them.