CHAPTER-III
HYPOTHESES
HYPOTHESES

It is important to recognize that the effectiveness of comparative advertisements will vary for different consumer groups. Based on theoretical considerations after survey of literature we make the following propositions.

INVolVEMENT

Under high involvement conditions, consumers exhibit increased cognitive activity. They gather as much information as they can for cognitive processing. Brand evaluation takes place based only on relevant information gathered from advertisement and competing vendors. Comparison of external information to existing structures of beliefs and values is likely and advertising message may be expected to affect their purchase intentions. Their acceptance of the advertised message is governed by counterarguments, source derogation and support argument (Wright 1973). Under low involvement conditions, consumers make less efforts in the cognitive processing of persuasive messages (Batra and Ray 1986; Swasy and Munch 1985) Given these characteristics the purchase intentions of the low involvement consumers would not be expected to be much affected by an advertising message. Drawing from these findings, the proposition is:
P₁: Given a comparative advertisement, the purchase intention of an audience exhibiting high levels of product involvement will be more affected than the purchase intentions of an audience exhibiting low levels of product involvement.

If \( \mu_1 = \) mean of the difference in purchase intentions before and after viewing the advertisement for the high involvement group and \( \mu_2 = \) mean of the difference in purchase intentions before and after viewing the advertisement for the low involvement group,

then \( H_{10} : \mu_1 \leq \mu_2 \)
\( H_{1A} : \mu_1 > \mu_2 \)

If empirical evidence is found to reject \( H_{10} \), then \( P_1 \) will have been supported.

When incoming information is compared to the existing belief system and a discrepancy is noted it can lead to cognitive reorganization and a further intent to acquire more information and clarification. (Simonson, Huber and Payne 1988; Wright 1973).

When presented with a comparative advertisement that has congruent association with existing beliefs. The favourable predisposition about the brand and purchase intentions that already exist are further reinforced. However when the message is discrepant with existing beliefs, there is cognitive reorganization (if the message is convincing) and this
leads to a favorable predisposition towards the advertisement. Further, the curiosity element leads to more information search and processing and a favorable evaluation (Etgar and Goodwin 1982) and greater purchase intentions than when information is congruent with existing belief. Drawing from these observations the propositions are following:

\( P_2 \) : Given an audience exhibiting high levels of product involvement, a comparative advertisement will generate a more favorable predisposition towards advertisement if the message is counter to existing beliefs than if the message is congruent with existing beliefs.

If

\[ \mu_1 = \text{mean attitude towards the advertisement of the high involvement group viewing an advertisement carrying a message counter to their beliefs} \]

\[ \mu_2 = \text{mean attitude towards the advertisement of the high involvement group viewing an advertisement carrying a message congruent with their beliefs}, \]

then

\[ H_{20} : \mu_1 \leq \mu_2 \]

\[ H_{2a} : \mu_1 > \mu_2 \]

If empirical evidence is found to reject \( H_{20} \), then \( P_2 \) will have been supported.
$P_3$ : Given an audience exhibiting high levels of product involvement, a comparative advertisement will generate a greater change in purchase intentions if the message is counter to existing belief than if the message is congruent with existing beliefs.

If $\mu_1 = \text{mean purchase intentions of the high involvement group viewing an advertisement carrying a message counter to their beliefs and}$

$\mu_2 = \text{mean purchase intentions of the high involvement group viewing an advertisement carrying a message congruent with their beliefs,}$

then $H_{30} : \mu_1 \leq \mu_2$

$H_{3A} : \mu_1 > \mu_2$

If empirical evidence is found to reject $H_{30}$, then $P_3$ will have been supported.

As stated previously, under low involvement conditions, consumers tend to expand less effort in the cognitive processing of persuasive message (Batra and Ray 1986; Swasy and Munch 1985) low involvement consumers are unable to access attitudes that they form on the basis of uneffortful information processing in memory (Kardes 1988). However, because of the novelty of comparative advertisements, they will be easily recalled. Based on these observations, the following proposition can be stated.
P₄ : Given an audience exhibiting low levels of product involvement comparative advertisements will increase advertisement recall more than non-comparative advertisements.

If \( N_1 \) = number of comparative advertisements recalled by the low involvement group and

\[ N_2 = \text{number of non-comparative advertisements recalled by the low involvement group,} \]

then \( H_{40} : N_1 \leq N_2 \)

\( H_{4A} : N_1 > N_2 \)

If empirical evidence is found to reject \( H_{40} \), then \( P_4 \) will have been supported.

FAMILIARITY

Expert consumers with their complex knowledge base are better able at fine grained interpretation of information. Their level of familiarity with products enables differentiation of product clusters. They are able to map different brands in terms of their attributes, use and performance. Because of their knowledge base they are more aware of the pros and cons of a product. In decision processes uncertainty about specific brand attributes leads to early acquisition of information about these attributes and information having prior negative evaluations are accessed earlier than these with favorable evaluation (Simonson, Huber and Payne 1988). It has found
that consumers accommodate incongruent messages and these are often best remembered and have the greatest impact on subsequent judgement. Hence a comparative advertising message would be expected to greatly affect their purchase decisions. Novices lack domain specific knowledge and are unable to participate in issue elaboration activities. With their rudimentary knowledge base they lack the ability to interpret information effectively and we would expect them to perform poorly at tasks involving message recall. Further, it would be expected that under purchase situation, the message would not greatly affect their purchase decisions. Drawing from these observations, following proposition can be stated.

\[ P_5 : \text{Given a comparative advertisement, the purchase intentions of an audience exhibiting high levels of products familiarity will be more affected than the intentions of an audience exhibiting low levels of product familiarity.} \]

\[ \text{If } \mu_1 = \text{mean of the difference in purchase intentions before and after viewing the advertisement of the high familiarity group and} \]
\[ \mu_2 = \text{mean of the difference in purchase intentions before and after viewing the advertisement for the low familiarity group,} \]
\[ \text{then } H_{50} : \mu_1 \leq \mu_2 \]
\[ H_{5A} : \mu_1 > \mu_2 \]

If empirical evidence is found to reject \( H_{50} \), then \( P_5 \) will have been supported.
As in the case of high involvement conditions, consumers having prior product knowledge too would be expected to undergo a reinforcement of beliefs and purchase intentions when the message is congruent to existing belief. Domain specific knowledge helps comprehension of the message and aids elaboration processes, i.e. product related inferences (Celsi and Olson 1988) When incoming information is discrepant with existing beliefs however, cognitive reorganization occurs. There is a need for more information search and clarification. There message and issue elaborations would lead to favorable evaluations of the advertisement and greater purchase intentions. Based upon these, the following propositions can be stated.

\[ P_6 : \text{Given an audience exhibiting high levels of product familiarity, comparative advertisement will generate a more favorable predisposition towards the advertisement if the message is counter to existing beliefs than if the message is congruent with existing beliefs.} \]

If \( \mu_1 \) = mean attitude towards the advertisement of the high familiarity group viewing an advertisement carrying a message counter to their beliefs and

\( \mu_2 \) = mean attitude towards the advertisement of the high familiarity group viewing an advertisement carrying a message congruent with their beliefs,
then \( H_{60} : \mu_1 \leq \mu_2 \)
\( H_{6A} : \mu_1 > \mu_2 \)

If empirical evidence is found to reject \( H_{60} \), then \( P_6 \) will have been supported.

\( P_7 : \) Given an audience exhibiting high levels of product familiarity, a comparative advertisement will generate a greater change in purchase intentions if the message is counter to existing beliefs than if the message is congruent with existing beliefs.

If \( \mu_1 \) = mean purchase intentions of the high familiarity group viewing an advertisement carrying a message counter to their beliefs and

\( \mu_2 \) = mean purchase intentions of the high familiarity group viewing an advertisement carrying a message congruent with their beliefs,

then \( H_{70} : \mu_1 \leq \mu_2 \)
\( H_{7A} : \mu_1 > \mu_2 \)

If empirical evidence is found to reject \( H_{70} \), then \( P_7 \) will have been supported.

As stated previously, novices lack domain specified knowledge and are unable to participate in issue elaboration activities. With their rudimentary knowledge base they lack the ability to interpret information effectively and they would be expected to perform poorly at tasks involving
message recall. However, because of their novelty, comparative advertisement will increase advertisement recall. Novices have little knowledge if any regarding the pros and cons of the product and unable to detect any omissions of arguments. Critical analysis of the validity of message arguments is difficult and opinions are based on persuasion cues such as source attributes. They lack diagnostic capabilities. Based on these observations the next proposition is:

P₈ : Given an audience exhibition low levels of product familiarity, comparative advertisement will increase advertisement recall more than non-comparative advertisements.

If \( N_1 = \) number of comparative advertisements recalled by the low familiarity group and

\( N_2 = \) number of non-comparative advertisements recalled by the low familiarity group,

then \( H_{80} : N_1 \leq N_2 \)
\( H_{8A} : N_1 > N_2 \)

If empirical evidence is found to reject \( H_{80} \), then \( P₈ \) will have been supported.