Keeping in line with the research objectives, the psychological aspects of consumers playing an advergame were investigated in this study. Specifically, this research conceptualized and empirically established the role of motivation of advergame players in their nature of processing of brand related information embedded in the advergame. By the help of an underlying principle of motivation, the regulatory focus theory, the motivational nature of advergame players was explored. The results show an interesting picture when players are confronted with different advergame outcomes and messages. Two empirical studies were conducted in order to test the hypothesized relationships.

The first study was conducted to examine the effects of advergame outcomes, winning and losing, on players’ regulatory focus. Results confirmed that distinct situational outcomes in the form of wins and losses had the potency of inducing different types of regulatory focus within players. Specifically, empirical findings validated the fact that players winning the advergame repeated number of times were induced with more promotion focus than prevention focus while players losing the same over repeated trials were induced with more prevention focus than promotion focus.
The second study was conducted to examine the effects of valence of performance feedback on players’ induced self-regulatory states. More importantly, the effects of valence on players’ regulatory focus was hypothesized to exhibit its influence over and above the effects of advergame outcomes, i.e., winning and losing. Accordingly, positively framed feedback were provided to players losing the game repeatedly while negatively framed feedback were provided to players who won the advergame repeated number of times. As hypothesized, results confirmed that players receiving positively framed feedback despite losing the advergame were induced with more promotion focus than prevention focus. On the other hand, players exposed to negatively framed feedback after winning the advergame were induced with more prevention focus than promotion focus.

Furthermore, by drawing evidences from both the studies the framework proceeded to explain how induced promotion or prevention focus of players might dissimilarly affect their nature of information processing. Players’ processing of brand related information (brand names and logos) embedded in the advergame were measured in terms of their implicit and explicit memory, attitude toward the embedded brands, and attitude toward the advergame itself.

Based on the regulatory focus theory, it was hypothesized that more promotion focused players would be mainly concerned with advancement, growth, and accomplishment and would be strategically inclined to approach matches between current actual state and desired end state. Their main objective while playing the advergame repeated number of times would be to improve their game scores or performances. This would not motivate them to process advergame-related stimuli in an elaborative or conceptual manner. Rather, more promotion focused players would have the tendency to get engaged in perceptual processing of visual stimuli available in the gaming environment which included embedded brand elements. On the
other hand, it was hypothesized that more prevention focused players would be primarily concerned with safety, security, and responsibility and would maintain a strategic inclination to avoid mismatches between current actual state and desired end state. Accordingly, they would be more vigilant over repeated advergame trials so as not to erode their performances any further. Therefore, more prevention focused players would exhibit the tendency of processing available information in a conceptual and elaborative manner. These differences primarily reflected strategic inclinations of each of the two self-regulatory states, promotion and prevention. While more promotion focused players tried to achieve better performances with each advergame trial, more prevention focused players focused on avoiding any further abatement in their performances over repeated trials. Eventually, these differences in strategic inclinations were hypothesized to dissimilarly affect players’ implicit and explicit memory. By deriving the conceptual foundation from transfer appropriate processing framework, it was empirically validated that perceptual processing of brand stimuli led to an enhancement in implicit memory for brands rather than explicit memory, whereas conceptual processing of brand elements enhanced players’ explicit memory, rather than implicit memory. In other words, results demonstrated that players induced with more promotion focus had higher implicit memory for embedded brands as compared to players induce with more prevention focus. Conversely, the second category of players exhibited higher explicit memory for brands as compared to the first category of players.

Following this, the research threw light on the effects of players’ regulatory focus on their attitude toward the advergame and brands embedded in the advergame. It was hypothesized that players repeatedly winning the advergame or receiving positively framed feedback would not only be induced with more promotion focus but also would be in more positive mood as
compared to players repeatedly losing the advergame or receiving negatively framed feedback and therefore being induced with more prevention focus. More positive mood was hypothesized to have an effect on players’ evaluation of the advergame and brands embedded within it. Results showed that players in a more promotion focused state exhibited more favourable attitude toward the advergame and embedded brands as compared to players in the more prevention focused state. In simple terms, players induced with more promotion focus were found to evaluate the advergame and the embedded brands more positively as compared to players induced with more prevention focus.

Finally, this research sought to explore the relationship between changes in players’ performance in the advergame over repeated trials and their changes in emotions. Based on the theoretical structure of the regulatory focus theory, it was hypothesized that players induced with more promotion focus would exhibit changes in dejection-related emotions (disappointed, sad, discouraged) due to changes in their performance over repeated trials in the advergame. As compared to this, players induced with more prevention focus would reflect changes in agitation-related emotions (worried, tense, uneasy) due to changes in their performance over repeated advergame trials. In accordance to this, players’ performances and emotions in all three trials were measured in both the studies. However, much contrary to our expectations, empirical results failed to confirm any change in players’ emotions (either dejection- or agitation-related) leading to rejection of the hypothesized relationship. There could be multiple reasons behind such an empirical finding. First, players’ dejection-related and agitation-related emotions were measured within very short time intervals ranging from 3.5 minutes to 5 minutes. We argue that this time lag might not have been sufficient for changes in emotions to take place. Although the time lag was directly dependent on the duration of the advergame, it could be the case that
changes in emotions due to changes in performance in the advergame take more time to develop within individuals. Second, as noticed while conducting the experiment in both Study 1 and Study 2, players could not comprehend reasons for filling up the same emotions questionnaire in the second and third advergame trials. This might have forced them to respond in a similar fashion to the emotions questionnaire in all three measurement scenarios.

6.1 Academic and Managerial Implications

The academic implications of this research are summarized below.

i. Extant literature dealing with information processing in advergames have mostly focused on aspects like limited capacity model of attention, processing fluency of brand related information, and engagement in a virtual gaming world. This research contributes to academic literature dealing with product placement in advergames by exploring an under-investigated yet primary facet of advergaming, i.e., wins and losses. It also explains the role of advergame messages and their effects on players’ nature of motivation explored in terms of regulatory focus.

ii. This research has been able to investigate the role of memory processes in an advergaming context. While the role of explicit memory is a relatively known facet, the role of implicit memory remains under-investigated. In a task dependent and cue driven environment such as advergames, implicit memory plays a critical role. This research contributes to the body of knowledge where advergaming and memory processes combine to form differential outcomes on advergame players.

iii. Prior literature has investigated the role of information processing in advergames and its subsequent impacts on gamers’ attitude toward embedded brands and commercial
messages. No study has looked into players’ motivation in terms of regulatory focus and its effect on information processing which is bound to have a significant impact on gamers’ attitude. This study contributes in its own unique way to this new stream of literature in advergaming contexts.

The managerial implications of this research are summarized below.

i. Very few studies exist, if any, in the Indian context in the realm of advergames. This slow pace is not matched by the growing popularity of advergames in India and the investments that marketing managers are currently committing and will commit in future. (Parker, 2009). This research will suitably enrich managerial knowledge about game players, their motivation, their responses to message feedback, and finally their attitude toward commercial messages and embedded brands.

ii. With increasing clutter in traditional media there is a growing demand for increasing presence of brands and commercial messages in the virtual space. Advergames provide a unique opportunity to marketers to place their messages and brand communications as well as create a positive environment wherein brand recall rates are higher as traditional media reaches saturation point in terms of effectiveness. Knowledge of advergames and an in-depth understanding of consumers’ habits in an advergaming environment will help managers take decisions on budgetary allocations into non-traditional channels and enhance the effectiveness of the overall media portfolio.

iii. Traditional research has repeatedly pointed out the limited attention span that consumers possess toward marketing communications. Marketing dollars continue to soar year after year whereas effectiveness of these spends is always a mystery to managers. Fortunately an advergaming environment provides a unique window of opportunity where targeted
consumers spend significant part of their available time in a gaming environment. Needless to say, marketers look forward to longer attention spans from consumers. This research through the use of regulatory focus theory, clearly indicates that smartly designed advergames can ensure longer attention spans of game players thereby, positively impacting marketing investments.

6.2 Limitations and Scope

This research has its limitations. First, the context of the overall research framework was restrained by the condition that the same advergame was played over and over again. Though advergames are smaller in length than usual PC based offline games and promote repeated trials, whether a game is repeatedly played or not could not be manipulated totally in real life situation and is therefore left for the players to decide. Future research may be conducted to determine how players’ regulatory focus are induced when they themselves decide the number of times they would play the advergame.

Second, our research examined the influence of advergame outcomes in the form of wins and losses on the nature of information processing of gamers. While these outcomes had been found to have significant effects on players’ emotions, memory and brand attitudes, we had restricted ourselves from investigating change or switch between players’ one self-regulatory state to the other, i.e., promotion focus to prevention focus and vice versa, as they continue winning or losing over repeated game trials. Future research may tap in this area and examine how changes in advergame outcomes lead to nature of change of players’ regulatory focus. As players develop idiosyncratic skill sets while playing different types of advergames or computer games in general, it is not difficult to assume that they would tend to apply their gaming skills to improve
their performances. Thus future research may address change of players’ regulatory focus as their advergame performances also change over a period of time.

Third, this research have examined the role of motivation while playing advergames among a young, student population. Though it is a known fact that advergames are more popular among young audiences (eMarketer, 2012), this research did not consider effectiveness of advergames across heterogeneous age groups. Future research may be conducted to investigate the effect of game outcomes and advergame messages on advergames players belonging from different age groups.

Finally, this research used only car-racing game to validate the hypothesized relationships. Though it was based on the logic that car-racing advergames were most popular destinations for product placement, it is important to understand that different types of computer games are available to marketers to help embed their brand messages within, e.g., action, first person shooter, action adventure, construction or management simulation, role playing games, strategy and real time strategy games. This wide genre of games not only differs in terms of their design but also differ in terms of the intended goals and objectives of the game players. Future research may explore effects of advergame outcomes on players’ motivation and its subsequent effects on information processing in other genres of advergame to increase generalizability of the research.