SYNOPSIS

Extant research that deals with processing of brand related information embedded in an advergame (brand names, logos, messages, etc.) have mostly focused on issues such as limited capacity aspect of attention of game players, persuasion knowledge of gamers and persuasive potency of advergames, information processing fluency of consumers playing the advergames, and the development of flow and arousal among game players. However, one primary facet of computer games (in general) and advergames (in particular) that have least been studied is game outcomes, i.e., wins and losses, and the outcome-induced motivation on information processing. Also, most of the earlier studies have examined the impact of advergames on players’ memory through explicit measures such as brand recall and recognition while ignoring the unconscious measure, i.e., implicit memory.

Accordingly, this research employs an underlying principle of motivation, the Regulatory Focus Theory, to explain the influence of advergame outcome-induced motivation on players’ nature of information processing. Specifically, the objectives of the research are – (a) to examine the influence of advergame outcomes, winning and losing, on players’ regulatory focus, (b) to investigate the effects of advergame messages (feedback) shown to players on their regulatory focus, and (c) to examine the effects of players’ induced regulatory focus on their implicit and explicit memory, attitude toward the advergame and embedded brands, and emotions.

Two studies/experiments were conducted to investigate the hypothesized relationships. Study 1 examined the effects of winning and losing an advergame while Study 2 investigated the effects of positively and negatively framed messages on players’ regulatory foci. Both the studies further examined the effects of induced regulatory foci on players’ nature of information
processing reflected in terms of implicit and explicit memory, emotions, and attitude toward the advergame and embedded brands. A car-racing advergame with eight embedded brands was developed by a professional game developing company in Hyderabad, India. This game was later used as the experimental stimulus in Study 1 and 2 as mentioned above. A sample of 268 student subjects (Study 1 = 124; Study 2 = 144) from a major University in Southern India were employed in the research. These subjects were invited in the IT laboratory to participate in the experiments in lieu of extra course credit and attractive gifts. Data were analyzed primarily using analysis of variance (ANOVA), and paired and independent sample t-test. Few other statistical techniques like factor analysis, and regression analysis were also used at various stages to support main findings.

Results revealed that game outcomes, i.e., winning and losing, differentially affect players’ motivation. Players who won the advergame in repeated trials were induced with more promotion focus (a distinct motivational state in regulatory focus) and were strategically inclined to improve their performances in the advergame they played. On the other hand, players losing the advergame repeatedly were induced with more prevention focus (another distinct motivational state) and were strategically inclined not to worsen their advergame performances. Results also revealed that advergame messages/feedback, positively and negatively framed, differentially influence players’ regulatory focus. Players receiving positively framed messages were more promotion focused while those who received negatively framed messages were more prevention focused. Induced regulatory focus also affected players’ nature of information processing differentially. More promotion focused players possessed higher implicit memory of embedded brands as compared to more prevention focused players. On the other hand, the later exhibited higher explicit memory of embedded brands than the former. Moreover, it was found
that players induced with more promotion focus exhibited more favorable attitude toward the advergame and embedded brands as compared to players who were induced with more prevention focus. However, no significant effect of induced regulatory focus on players’ emotions was found.

This research contributes both academically and managerially. First, it addresses a potential gap in advergame literature by exploring the effects of advergame outcomes and messages on players’ motivation, and the subsequent effects of motivation on information processing. Second, it highlights the importance of studying implicit memory in an advergaming context where players’ attention is divided between playing the advergame and processing embedded brands. For marketers, it becomes extremely important to consider these implicit memory effects because implicit memory is found to play a significant role in consumers’ decision making and purchasing situations. In addition, this research suitably enriches managerial knowledge about game players, their motivation, responses to message feedback, and attitude toward commercial messages and embedded brands. This might enable managers to smartly design advergames and take decisions on budgetary allocations into non-traditional media channels and enhance the effectiveness of the overall media portfolio.

**Keywords:** Advergame, advergame messages, advergame outcomes, brand attitude, emotions, explicit memory, implicit memory, information processing, motivation, regulatory focus.