CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

7.1 OVERVIEW

A number of research questions were proposed to be answered by this dissertation. This chapter highlights the answers to these questions. It also discusses the contributions made by this work to theory and practice. This chapter ends with the limitations of the research and proposes future directions for research.

7.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 1: EFFECT OF SITUATIONAL AND ENDURING INVOLVEMENT ON ATTITUDES AND PURCHASE INTENTION

In answer to the major research question, the results showed that situational involvement significantly improved attitudes towards the advertisement. Attitude towards the advertisement significantly predicted attitude towards the brand which in turn predicted purchase intentions in all the three experiments. H14, H15 and H16 were supported in all the three experiments.

In all the three experiments message involvement significantly predicted attitude towards the advertisement. This finding confirms earlier research on situational involvement and message involvement (Richins & Bloch 1986; Petty & Cacioppo 1986; Celsi & Olson 1988; Muehling et al
1990; Andrews & Durvasula 1991; Lacziak & Muehling 1993; Sengupta et al 1997; Kokkinaki & Lunt 1999; Baker & Lutz 2000; Cox &Cox 2001; Cauberghea et al 2009) which indicate the effect of these variables on attitudes and intentions. The results therefore show that situational involvement is a significant predictor of attitudes in the context of green advertising.

According to ELM, issue involvement is an important antecedent of message processing (Petty & Cacioppo 1983, 1986). Hypotheses 13a, 13b and 13c were used to test this proposition. Conversely, the results yielded inconsistent results as Experiment 1 and Experiment 3 showed that environmental concern (enduring involvement with the environment) was not significantly related to message involvement, attitudes or intentions. Only in Experiment 2 did environmental concern significantly predict attitude and message involvement. In Experiment 1, environmental concern significantly predicted only message involvement and not the attitude towards advertisement for the mobile phone stimuli. For the watch stimuli environmental concern did not predict either involvement or attitude. These contradictory results are found in existing literature also. Tucker et al (2012) find that environmental concern did not significantly predict advertisement involvement. Some researchers (Newell et al 1998; Pickett-Baker & Ozaki 2008; Thøgersen et al 2012) also report that environmental concern was not related to purchase intentions. One reason could be that most consumers report environmental concern as a socially desirable response (Bord et al 1998; Ewert & Baker 2001; Ewert & Galloway 2009) and these responses cannot be taken at face value. This implies that more meaningful measures are needed to understand environmental concern as proposed by Nisbet et al (2008).
7.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 2: EFFECT OF COGNITIVE HEALTH THREATS ON SITUATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

The second objective was to evaluate if the cognitive threats created using the PMT framework effectively influenced involvement. H10a, H10b, H10c, H10d and H10e explored this hypothesis and the results showed that when the health threat was framed using temporal and geographical proximity, only perceived vulnerability had a significant effect on message involvement. This conclusion shows that affective appeals like fear may not create message involvement when using temporal and geographical proximity of environmental threats. Instead, the personal relevance of the situation increased message involvement. This result is similar to a study by O’Neill & Nicholson-Cole (2009) who show that fear might desensitize individuals towards environmental issues and issues that are personally relevant might be sufficient to gain consumer engagement. Hence when framing using temporal and geographical proximity, personal relevance alone seems to increase situational involvement.

While using varying threat levels and goal framing, fear consistently had an effect on message involvement in both Experiment 2 and Experiment 3. When the watch stimulus was used all the threat appraisal components namely perceived severity, perceived vulnerability and fear significantly predicted message involvement. In the case of mobile phone stimulus, only fear significantly predicted message involvement. This effect confirms the results of other green advertising studies that have used fear appeals (Meijnders et al 2001).

H10d and H10e investigated if response-efficacy and self-efficacy influenced message involvement. Across all the three experiments response efficacy significantly influenced involvement while self-efficacy did not. The
results contradict the findings of Cauberghe et al (2009) who found that both self efficacy and response efficacy influenced message involvement. Despite this contradiction, the results support Lewis et al’s (2010) argument that response efficacy is a key to message elaboration and acceptance. Response efficacy needs to be investigated along with “perceived consumer effectiveness” (PCE) as it is related to consumer’s environmental behaviour (Gilg et al 2005; Tucker et al 2012). While using goal framing fear and response efficacy emerge as the key variables among PMT variables in influencing involvement. In the case of framing using temporal proximity and geographical proximity of threat only response efficacy was the major variable influencing involvement. Hence, it can be concluded that response efficacy and fear are important variables in influencing involvement.

7.4 RESEARCH QUESTION 3: EFFECT OF COPING APPRAISAL VARIABLES ON ATTITUDES AND INTENTIONS

The third research objective explored the effects of the coping appraisal variables on attitudes and intentions. There were no clear conclusions to be drawn from the influence of the coping variables on attitudes and intentions based on H11a, H11b, H11c and H11d. In Experiment 1, response efficacy significantly predicted attitude towards the advertisement and purchase intention for the mobile phone stimulus. For the watch stimulus, only self-efficacy significantly predicted attitude towards the advertisement and purchase intention. In the case of Experiment 2, both response efficacy and self-efficacy significantly predicted attitudes but not intentions. In Experiment 3, both response efficacy and self-efficacy were not related to either intentions or attitudes.
7.5 RESEARCH QUESTION 4: EFFECT OF ENVIRONMENTAL KNOWLEDGE ON INVOLVEMENT AND THREAT APPRAISAL VARIABLES

In answer to the fourth research question, the results showed that objective environmental knowledge was not related to message involvement in all the three experiments. Objective environmental knowledge was negatively related to fear as hypothesised only in Experiment 3. This shows a conflicting view to Rucker & Petty’s (2006) observation that ability increases message processing. Maybe subjective environmental knowledge would have shown better results. For instance, earlier research by Manrai et al (1997) confirmed the effects of subjective environmental knowledge on purchase intentions.

7.6 RESEARCH QUESTION 5: EFFECT OF FRAMING ON HEALTH THREAT PERCEPTION

There were no clear cut effects of framing on the perception of health threats (H1-H8). Temporal proximity had significant effect only on the perceived severity in the case of mobile phone stimulus. None of the manipulations had an effect on the threat appraisal variables in the other scenarios. As already reported, the participants reported high levels of threat appraisal variables in all the scenarios, indicating that they were fearful by default. This shows that these consumers are extremely concerned with the environmental threats affecting their health. This is not surprising as popular news reports this issue regularly in the Indian media. Only in the case of goal framing (Experiment 2 and Experiment 3) did perceived severity and vulnerability cause fear.
The analysis also showed that a socio-demographic variable like gender and personality variable like CFC were more significant in predicting PMT variables.

7.7 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings have many important theoretical implications and contribute to extant literature especially to the growing body of literature on green advertising in developing countries (Mostafa 2007; Dai et al 2011; Saabar et al 2011).

- Firstly, the research found that there is prolific greenwashing in the absence of regulation as more than 50% of green advertisements in India for the period 2011 and 2010 were misleading. This confirms the observations proposed by Delmas & Burbano (2011) and Polonsky et al (2011). It also confirms Nair & Menon’s (2008) observation that most green advertising claims in India are not supported by scientific evidence. This research also adds to advertising regulation studies in Asia as most advertising regulation studies are about western countries (Gao 2008). This research confirms that expert opinion on greenwashing coincides with stakeholder views on greenwashing.

- Secondly, very few green advertising studies have investigated the effect of affective appeals in green advertisements (Meijnders et al 2001; Jimenez & Yang 2010; Chang 2012). This research extends studies that use fear appeals in green advertising (Burn & Oskamp 1986; Hine & Gifford 1991; Meijnders et al 2001) and other environmental communication (Brouwer et al 2008; Aitken 2011; Myers et al 2012; Carmi
2012) to promote attitude and behaviour change. The study confirms that fear appeal is suitable for improving attitudes and intentions of young consumers towards green advertisements. While certain studies reject the use of fear appeals in climate change communication (O’Neill & Nicholson-Cole 2009), this research shows that it is suitable for promoting green advertising. Although it can be argued that sustained behaviour should be measured over time, Thøgersen et al (2012) theorize that such one-off purchase can turn into repeat purchase behaviour over time.

- Thirdly, most green advertising studies have scrutinized the effect of environmental concern or the enduring involvement with the environment (Schuhwerk & Lefkoff-Hagius 1995; Kim et al 1997; Newell et al 1998; D’Souza & Taghian 2005; Mostafa 2007; Pickett-Baker & Ozaki 2008; Bickart & Ruth 2012) and have largely ignored other categories of involvement. Of late, few studies have started to look beyond environmental concern to motivate green purchase intentions (Chang 2011; Chang 2012; Tangari & Smith 2012; Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez 2012) as the link between concern and intention is tenuous. Researchers have also started to look at other categories of involvement. Tucker et al (2012) have investigated the effect of advertisement message involvement on credibility in green advertising. This research adds to this line of research by demonstrating the importance of advertisement message involvement on attitudes and purchase intention towards green advertisement.
Fourthly, this research adds to the new line of thought that argues for including “self-interest” based appeals to target all consumers and not restrict marketing only to the green consumer niche (Lindenberg & Steg 2007). It is better to improve situation specific cognitions by increasing personal relevance (Stafford et al 1996; Ottman et al 2006; Myers et al 2012) and appealing to consumer’s self interest while promoting environmental benefits (Bamberg 2003; Ginsberg & Bloom 2004; Pickett-Baker & Ozaki 2008; Ramayah et al 2010) rather than focusing on environmental concern alone. This research corroborates these findings by showing that stressing health threats caused by the environment produce high message involvement.

Fifthly, the current research also extended the application of PMT to a commercial context as suggested in recent research (Janssens 2010). This framework has been found to be suitable in promoting environmental communication (Nelson et al 2011; Kim et al 2012; Mankad et al 2013; Horng 2013) and this research also supports this view. The research also shows that gender and CFC play a role in activating the PMT threat and coping appraisal variables. This is a new contribution to research on PMT.

Sixthly, this study also contributes to a rising body of research that is concerned with the inconsistency related to framing studies and show that framing is not related to perceived risk (van ’t Riet et al 2014). While some studies advocate applying framing to environmental communication research (Spence & Pidgeon 2010; Morton et al 2011), this observation was not
supported by this research. The research also confirmed the relationship between gender and goal frames (Putrevu 2010).

- Lastly, this study confirms that temporal orientation seems to be a significant predictor of the effect of temporal framing similar to extant research (Strathman et al 1994; Joireman et al 2004; Corral-Verdugo et al 2006; Milfont et al 2012; Carmi 2012).

### 7.8 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The content analysis study shows that there is a growing interest among Indian companies in the use of environmental claims in advertisements especially in the manufacturing and the real estate sectors. Unfortunately the results also show that most environmental claims in these green advertisements are vague or “shallow” and greenwashed. Advertisers therefore should focus on using valid, specific and acceptable environmental claims in their advertisements to obtain strategic advantage. As Indian companies are in the initial stages of going green, they should be encouraged. Apart from this due to supply side consumer pressure, many manufacturing companies are acquiring certifications and credentials to trade with other international companies (Sandhu et al 2012).

In the absence of regulation and a congenial environment for using green marketing claims, companies should make efforts to calibrate consumer knowledge through green advertisements that educate the consumer (Ottman, Stafford, & Hartman 2006). Apart from targeting this green niche, advertisers should also work on creating message involvement to improve consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. The experiments showed that fear and response efficacy were the key variables that predicted message involvement. Advertisers should therefore accentuate these components to gain consumer
attention and involvement. Moderate fear appeals highlighting health threats clubbed with response efficacy can promote green consumerism.

Advertising engagement has been shown to be another antecedent to message involvement (Wang 2006). Using various other drivers of advertising engagement through affective appeals would be suitable to generate interest in green advertising. Using celebrities is another way to create message involvement as source credibility is an important factor that influences message involvement (Homer & Kahle 1990). However, most green advertising studies have not investigated the use of a spokesperson or celebrity. Celebrities like sportsmen (cricketing heroes) and actors are widely used in the Indian green advertising arena. For instance, Aamir Khan promotes Godrej green products and India’s cricket captain Dhoni was part of Aircel’s “Save Tiger” campaign. The impact of using such spokespersons should be assessed.

In low involvement scenarios, typically a non-green consumer’s attitude accessibility is increased with this automatic, unconscious attitude activation through message involvement (Kokkinaki & Lunt 1999). The effect of advertising message involvement is known to last over a period of time (Muehling & Lacznjiak 1988) and therefore advertisers can use this benefit to capture mind share.

7.9 POLICY SUGGESTIONS

The content analysis study pointed out the lapses in the advertising regulatory environment as it permits greenwashed claims in India. Consumer protection policy should ensure that awareness is created among consumers regarding greenwashing. Low consumer awareness of environmental issues in India (Sinha-Khetriwal et al 2005) is a major deterrent of green marketing. One of the reasons attributed to the failure of the “EcoMark” scheme in India
has been attributed to the low awareness among Indian consumers (Mehta 2007). Consumer education is necessary for sensitising the Indian consumer towards environmental concerns (Das 2007). This view is supported by the evidence in research in another developing country i.e. Malaysia (Rashid 2009).

Environmental communication for promoting waste management, energy conservation and climate change is needed to engage Indian public about the dangers of environmental deterioration. Government and other non governmental organisations can use fear appeals and message involvement to create attention and engage the public in a better way.

7.10 FUTURE RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS

Perceived risk was considered as a significant antecedent to message involvement in this study. Other antecedents like personal relevance can be used to increase message involvement. Since message involvement was shown to be a key variable, other studies can investigate if affective appeals like humour appeals can influence message involvement.

Framing was examined with young adult population in this study. Replicating this study with older adults might produce different responses (Thomas & Millar 2012). Other individual differences like regulatory focus (Kim 2006), need for cognition (Putrevu 2010) and autonomy (Churchill & Pavey 2013) can also be investigated to see if the framing effects vary. Role of sceptism and credibility can also be measured to check if they influence involvement, attitudes and purchase intentions.

This study has its own limitations. It is conducted with a young adult population in a developing country. Replicating this study with field experiments would show if the results can be extended to an older population.