ABSTRACT

Green marketing is an imperative rather than an option in the face of rising environmental problems. Increasing consumption is causing a devastating effect on the natural environment and marketing can no longer afford to ignore this resource. Green advertising has restricted itself mostly to understanding the green consumer alone, despite researchers pointing out that this would amount to green marketing myopia. Hence, green marketing needs to target all consumers rather than the green niche alone. Enduring involvement with the environment (environment concern) has been the focus of most green advertising studies although it does always translate to purchase intentions. Irrespective of enduring involvement with the environment, situational involvement can create high involvement with the green advertising message. Based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), this research examines the impact of both enduring and situational involvement on responses to green advertising. Perceived risk is an important antecedent of situational involvement and fear appeals are used to increase perceived risk so that the recipient systematically processes a message.

In this research consumers are presented with realistic threats to create awareness about the health risks posed by indiscriminate consumption. The appeal is designed using a framework based on the Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) to heighten message involvement and thus persuade consumers to purchase green products. This study follows a multi method
approach and uses both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Since the literature review indicated that there was sparse research on green advertising in India, an initial exploratory research was undertaken to investigate this. Therefore the research was conducted in two phases - (i) exploratory phase and (ii) quantitative experimental phase. The exploratory phase included two qualitative studies. The first study verified the nature of the current state of Indian green advertisements. Content analysis was used to classify green advertisements in India in qualitative study 1. The second study investigated online stakeholder responses to greenwashing to confirm one of the variables in the coding framework proposed for the content analysis. A software package called Leximancer was used to conduct thematic analysis of online data to determine if there were any major and common themes in greenwashing concerns expressed by different stakeholders in qualitative study 2.

Based on the literature review and exploratory studies, a research model was developed and hypotheses were proposed. The hypotheses required the testing of the effects of various stimuli on consumer attitudes and intentions. Therefore experimental methodology was chosen and factorial experiments were used to test the hypotheses. All the experiments use a full factorial between-subjects design, in which the main effects and the interaction effects were examined.

The results from the thematic analysis showed the emergence of common themes in the stakeholder discussions. One major theme amongst all stakeholders is that of credibility of claims. This study therefore demonstrated
that the stakeholders’ view on green advertising coincided with extant literature on “expert-rated” greenwashed claims. Hence this variable was used to code green advertising in India using predefined expert typologies.

Content analysis of Indian green advertisements showed that manufacturing companies (57.5%) and real estate companies (10.7%) use green advertising more than any other sector in India. Firms were focused on using image (60.3%) related advertisements rather than other categories. Most green claims were also “shallow” (68.4%). There were also a good amount of “moderate” (30%) advertisements and very few “deep” (2.9%) advertisements.

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. This finding confirms earlier research on situational involvement and message involvement. The results therefore show that situational involvement is a significant predictor of attitudes in the context of green advertising. Across all the three experiments response efficacy significantly influenced involvement while self-efficacy did not. When using temporal framing (Experiment 1), fear did not increase message involvement whereas in the case of goal framing - fear consistently had an effect on message involvement in both Experiment 2 and Experiment 3. The analysis also showed that a socio-demographic variable like gender and personality variable like CFC (Consideration for Future Consequences) were more
significant in predicting PMT variables. The findings have many important theoretical implications and contribute to extant literature - especially the growing body of literature on green advertising.

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 2010 and 2011 were misleading. This study extends studies that use fear appeals in green advertising and other environmental communication studies to promote attitude and behaviour change and confirms that fear appeal is suitable for improving attitudes and intentions towards green products. The importance of advertisement message involvement on attitudes towards green advertising was also demonstrated.

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. Apart from targeting the green niche, advertisers should also work on creating message involvement to improve consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. The effect of advertising message involvement is known to last over a period of time and therefore advertisers can use this benefit to capture mind share.