3. Conceptual Framework & Proposed Hypotheses

The primary objective of the study is to investigate and establish the relationship among the online advertising constructs such as ad context congruity and persuasion. Also the mediating role of felt involvement and moderating role of motives and argument strength has been tested in the conceptual model. Chapter 3 is structured in two main sections. First, the chapter follows the gaps and the objective of the research to explore and develop the major three research objectives. Second, it is followed by the theoretical background and formulation of hypotheses using the above said constructs.

3.1. Gaps in Literature

Research Gap 1

Even though, several studies emphasized the critical role of ad context congruity in online magazine context (eg Yi, 1990; Moorman et al., 2002; Yaveroglu & Donthu, 2008), very few studies have tried to understand this at the level of reader’s motives (Zanjani et. al, 2011, Heinz, Hug, Nugaeva, & Opwis, K., 2013). That is, When individuals (here readers) possess a particular motive while reading an article from an online magazine, how does that affect their information processing and subsequent attitudes and behaviors? Answering this question is important, because if the motive behind the use of the internet is well understood, the
attitude and behavior of the users related to the web can be predicted better (Rodgers & Thorson, 2000).

**Research Gap 2**

As mentioned before, studies show that congruity or incongruity of the ad with the context influences ad effectiveness. However, advertising literature is yet to answer a question that: What is the mechanism through which the reader processes the information and creates the persuasion effect? Answering this question is important as consumers’ often form elaboration and it leads to persuasion through their involvement with the message itself, called as felt involvement (Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010), and this process creates effectiveness of the message (Segev et al., 2014; Myers et al., 2014). Hence, the role of felt involvement as an intervening mechanism between ad-context congruity and ad persuasiveness needs to be investigated.

**Research Gap 3**

As proposed before, if persuasion takes place through felt involvement, we need to find out what elements of advertising could affect this process. So in addition to the role of motives of the user as mentioned above, it is also important to answer a question: Does the argument presented in the ad affect the reader’s persuasion? The argument presented in the ad message is an important study area, as it can impact the effectiveness of the advertisements (Pornpitakpan, 2004). It has been stated that when a strong message is presented in the ad, persuasion is improved; on the other hand, when the message is weak, persuasion is reduced (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). Hence, from the view point of ad-context congruity, a study is required to assess whether the strength of argument presented in the ad has an effect on the reader’s
susceptibility or imperviousness to persuasion once the consumer experiences felt involvement with the ad.

### 3.2. Research Objectives

On the basis of the research questions identified in the previous section, three research objectives are formulated:

Even though, many studies have looked at the role of ad context congruity in online magazine context, much less attention has been given to understand this at the level of reader’s motives. If the motive behind the use of the internet is well understood, the attitude and behavior of the users related to the web can be predicted better. Since we are looking at how ad-context congruity as well as the motives of the user affect the way the consumers’ perceive the ads, hence the objective:

**Objective 1:** To examine the proposition that ad-context congruity and reader’s motive interact to determine ad persuasiveness.

Past studies in the advertising literature have not looked at the way or mechanism through which the reader processes the information and the persuasion effect takes place. Consumers’ often form elaboration which leads to persuasion through their involvement with the message itself, called as felt involvement. This process creates effectiveness of the message. Hence, the role of felt involvement as an intervening mechanism between ad-context congruity and ad persuasiveness needs to be investigated. Thus the objective:

**Objective 2:** To examine the proposition that ad-context congruity and reader’s motive interact to determine ad persuasiveness through felt involvement with the ad.
In addition to the role of motives of the user as mentioned above, it is also important to know whether the argument presented in the ad affect the perceived level of congruity and thereby influence reader’s persuasion? The argument presented in the ad message is an important study area, as it can impact the effectiveness of the advertisements. Hence, a study is required to assess what effect the strength of argument presented in the ad has on the reader’s susceptibility or imperviousness to persuasion. Thus, the objective:

**Objective 3:** To investigate the proposition that ad-context congruity, reader’s motives and argument strength interact to determine ad persuasiveness through consumers’ felt involvement with the ad.

### 3.3. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

In this section, the proposed study presents the theoretical framework and hypotheses in a hierarchical manner.

#### 3.3.1. Ad Context Congruity: Moderating Role of Consumer Motives

Motives can be defined as “an inner desire to actively fulfill a need or want” (pp. 45) (Rodgers & Thorson, 2000). Past studies have shown that people with different motives respond differently to marketing activity (Bettman 1979; Punj & Stewart 1983) and in the internet context too, the motives of the user influence the user behavior on the internet. Studies have recently started focusing on the motivations for the use of web affecting its use (e.g., Danaher & Mullarkey 2003; Zanjani et al., 2011; Li & Bukovac, 1999). Hoffman and Novak (1996) divided the user motives into two types: goal-directed and experiential. This is similar to the two types of task orientations proposed by Bloch, Sherrell, and Ridgway (1986) and Janiszewski (1998). Goal-directed motive of the individual during internet use explains that user make use of the internet such that
it is selective and intentional, and he/she shows a purposive exposure to a particular content. Experiential motive explains that users employ the internet for escape, distraction and/or relaxation, meaning that the purpose to the session is not a particular result-oriented one (Sheehan, 2002). Further, Novak et al. (2003) made distinctions between the two main types of users: goal-directed and experiential. The authors made the distinction between the two by pointing out the characteristics of both. According to authors, behavior that is goal-directed is extrinsically motivated, has orientation that is instrumental, benefits that are utilitarian, with search that is directed, goal-oriented choice, cognitive, work and planned purchase, whereas experiential behavior is intrinsically motivated, with orientation that is ritualized, benefits that are hedonic, non-directed search, choice that is navigational, affective, fun and compulsive purchase (Novak et al., 2003).

Past research in advertising shows indirect evidence pointing to a relation between ad-context congruity, motives and consumers’ processing of the information. Zanjani et al. (2010) found that ad-context congruity increased memory for information seekers (goal-oriented motive) but it had no effect on surfers (experiential motive) in e-magazine context. Ha and McCann (2008) found that surfer’s (experiential motive) attention to ads is based on their attention capturing properties and so congruity between ad and context would be unlikely to increase a surfer’s attention and persuasiveness.

Here the proposed study uses Elaboration Likelihood Model given by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) as well as the heuristic-systematic model of Chaiken, Liberman, and Eagly (1989) to explain how goal oriented/experientially oriented consumers would become more persuaded by the ad when they see it congruent/incongruent with the context. Based on past literature, it can be argued that when the goal oriented users see the incongruent ad, they would respond less
positively to the ad (Broverman & Lazarus, 1958) as it is not related to their goals and have reduced elaboration leading to reduced persuasiveness. However, when the ads are congruent with the context, they will have higher elaboration and effective persuasion. On the other hand, the users with experiential motive are less involved in the context compared to goal-oriented users, they would respond less positively to the congruent ads and when they see an ad in a context which is incongruent, then it will capture their attention and they will have increased cognitive elaboration (e.g., Smith & Petty, 1996). The argument is that when an experientially oriented consumer is exposed to a magazine ad which is incongruent with the context, it will capture their attention and augment their cognitive elaboration. This higher cognitive elaboration will increase their persuasion (Miniard et al., 1991). Hence, the study hypothesizes that:

**H1: Consumers’ motives moderate the effect of ad-context congruity on ad-persuasion, such that for experiential consumers (goal oriented consumers) low ad-context congruity has greater (lower) impact on ad persuasion than high ad-context congruity.**

3.3.2. Context Congruity, Consumer Motives and Felt Involvement: A Mediated Moderation

As per to Celsi and Olson (1988) felt involvement is a motivational state which points to a consumers’ feeling of personal relevance. Similarly, Martin and Marshall (1999) defined consumer’s felt involvement as “the level of involvement a consumer feels” (pp. 208). The felt involvement of a consumer has two antecedents, such as intrinsic sources of personal relevance (ISPR), and situational sources of personal relevance (SSPR) (Celsi & Olson, 1988).

According to Celsi and Olson (1988), “a wide variety of specific stimuli, cues, and contingencies in a consumer's immediate environment may function as situational sources of personal relevance (SSPR)” (pp. 211). These situational sources shape consumer’s
consequences, values and goals. Many stimuli in the surroundings may function as SSPR but they will be sources of felt involvement if these situational factors trigger self-relevant goals and their depiction is seen as directly related with important goals. For example, while sitting and waiting for a doctor’s appointment in a hospital, the individual accidently reads a magazine, and he/she notices an ad stating the benefits of insurance. This advertisement might influence the consumer and work as a SSPR and activate goals that are personally relevant and values like, “risk cover”, “tax saving” and “planning for life stage needs”. This would prompt the felt involvement of the consumer with the product/service in that situation.

Intrinsic sources of personal relevance (ISPR) are “relatively stable, enduring structures of personally relevant knowledge, derived from past experience and stored in long-term memory” (Celsi & Olson, 1988, pp. 211). For example, an individual who likes to know more about bikes and cars tends to read and give more attention to those ads in a magazine which are personally relevant (such as cars and bikes). These individuals experience more involvement with those ads which are personally relevant in many situations. Past work on marketing clearly stated the role of consumers’ felt involvement on comprehension and attention (e.g., Celsi & Olson, 1988). The authors in their study stated that consumers’ felt involvement affected the effort, comprehension, attention, and the quantity and kind of meanings formed by comprehension.

If a consumer is viewing or approaching the task as a goal directed one, for example reading an article in Harvard Business Review, it will reduce the impact of attention on peripheral materials, specifically which are unrelated to the task (e.g., advertising which is dissimilar with the context) (Danaher & Mullarkey, 2003). Therefore, their elaboration with the unrelated advertisement will be low. Conversely, if he/she finds that there is an advertisement in
the magazine which is related to the task, he/he will elaborate more to it and result in more persuasion (e.g., Miniard et al., 1991; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty et al., 1983). On the other hand, experiential users are not result-oriented (Sheehan, 2002), i.e., they have no particular goal in mind, and they normally browse content, including peripheral advertisement which is interesting and surprising. In this scenario, advertisements that are dissimilar to the context are likely to stand out, as it increases their elaboration and the experiential users would perceive them as more interesting and personally relevant. Studies have shown substantial evidence that consumers who are goal directed give less attention to things which are incongruent and peripheral and experiential consumers give more attention to things which are incongruent and peripheral (Danaher & Mullarkey, 2003).

However, it has been stated the congruent and incongruent elaboration will not lead to direct persuasion; rather it will lead to persuasion through felt involvement (Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010). The logic is that experiential consumers are oriented more towards surprising things, therefore they prefer to look at incongruent and surprising things and provide more elaboration for incongruent aspects. This increased elaboration leads to more persuasion through felt involvement (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Chaiken et al., 1989).

How does the interaction between ad-context congruity and motives lead to persuasion through felt involvement? Here the proposed study approaches the issue from the perspective ELM. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) defined elaboration in persuasion context as “the extent to which a person thinks about the issue relevant arguments contained in a message” (pp. 128). According to ELM when the condition fosters the individual’s ability and motivation to employ in thinking that is issue relevant, the elaboration likelihood is high (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). For a goal oriented user when the ad in the magazine is similar to the context, it will foster the
reader’s ability and motivation to employ in thinking that is issue relevant (here similar ad) as it acts as ISPR, and hence elaboration with the similar ads will be high. This increased elaboration driven by ISPR creates greater felt involvement leading to higher persuasion (Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010).

On the other hand, for an experiential user, when the ad in the magazine is dissimilar to the context, it will attract the user’s attention and the user will be motivated and will engage in issue relevant thinking (here dissimilar ad) as in this situation, it acts as SSPR, and hence elaboration with the similar ads will be high. This increased elaboration driven by SSPR will create greater felt involvement and will lead to higher persuasion (Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010).

Hence, the study proposes:

**H2:** Felt involvement mediates the effect of ad-context congruity on ad-persuasion.

**H2a:** Ad-context congruity has a positive impact on ad-persuasion.

**H2b:** Ad-context congruity has a positive impact on felt involvement.

**H2c:** Felt involvement has a positive impact on ad-persuasion.

**H3:** Consumers’ felt involvement with the ad mediates the interaction of ad-context congruity and consumer motives on ad-persuasion.

3.3.3. Context Congruity, Consumer Motives, Argument Strength and Felt Involvement: A Mediated Moderation

Past research in consumer marketing stated the role of argument strength to create strong elaboration and subsequent persuasion (e.g., Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Karmarkar and Tormala (2010) in their study argued that elaboration would boost or undermine persuasion depending on argument strength. For high argument strength, stronger elaboration will augment the speed of persuasion (Karmarkar & Tormala, 2010). In advertising
context, argument strength is related to the importance of the product/service claims in the ad. The strength of the arguments in ad messages can impact the effectiveness of the advertisements (Pornpitakpan, 2004).

How the interaction between ad-context congruity and motives would lead to persuasion through felt involvement moderated by argument strength? Applying the basic AIDA (Awareness, Interest, Desire and Action) model given by Barry, T. E. (1987) in our case, the interaction of motives and congruity would mean consumers look at the ad i.e. they would become aware of it. After that felt involvement would take place which means they will generate interest. The right argument strength would mean desire for the product and lastly persuasion would indicate action.

ELM also states that greater elaboration improves persuasion when the message is strong and reduces persuasion when the message is weak (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). It also stated that when the message has arguments that are weak, however, higher involvement would reduce, eliminate or reverse the effect (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Following the above said arguments, it is theorized that when a goal oriented user is exposed to a magazine ad, which is similar to the context (context congruity is high), the user is motivated for higher processing and higher elaboration since it is related to the goal. The level of persuasion now is conditional upon the strength of the arguments presented in the ad, because in the condition of greater elaboration, strong argument will improve persuasion whereas weak ad with reduce persuasion. When the ad is dissimilar to the context and presents a strong argument, the goal oriented user would not go for higher processing as the dissimilar ad is not related to his goal or purpose and hence there is no motivation for him. In this case, the felt involvement would be low and elaboration would be less leading to reduced persuasiveness in spite of strong arguments, because the discrimination
between strong and weak arguments will be reduced (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Following the same logic, for experiential users, under incongruent conditions i.e. when the magazine ad is dissimilar to the context, they find it more surprising. This will increase the speed of information processing, lead to higher elaboration and greater felt involvement resulting in greater persuasion. However, the above said persuasion will be high when the argument in the ad is strong, because strong arguments provide more favorable thoughts compared to weak arguments. Therefore, when an experiential reader is presented an incongruent magazine ad the created elaboration would be strengthened and thereby generate higher felt involvement leading to higher persuasion when arguments are strong. A weak argument in this case could reduce, remove or reverse the effect (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). However, under congruent conditions, i.e. when the magazine ad is similar to the context, the ad do not surprise the experiential user or capture his attention, therefore it will result in low elaboration and inhibition of felt involvement and weaken the persuasion. Therefore, it hypothesizes that:

H4: Argument strength of the ad moderates the mediating effect of felt involvement in the relationship between ad-context congruity and consumer motives interaction on ad-persuasion.

H4a: Consumers’ felt involvement with the ad mediates the effect of ad-context congruity on ad-persuasion.

H4b: Consumers’ felt involvement with the ad mediates the effect of ad-context congruity and consumer motives interaction on ad-persuasion.

H4c: Argument strength of the ad moderates the mediating effect of felt involvement on ad-context congruity and ad-persuasion.
Figure 3.1. Hypothesized Study 1 Model

Figure 3.2. Hypothesized Study 2 Model

Figure 3.3. Hypothesized Study 3 Model
3.4. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, based on the gaps identified from literature, the research objectives have been framed. The next section of this chapter presented the theoretical framework and in relation to it, presented the hypotheses in a hierarchical manner. Hence, this research was divided into three studies where each study linked to one hypothesis. This step-by-step approach allows us to understand the phenomenon better as well as test the hypothesis and build on the previous study while validating the previous studies. For each of the studies, a theoretical model was developed incorporating the three hypotheses of the studies. Hence this chapter built on the previous chapters by arriving at the proposed models as well the hypotheses which will be tested in further chapters.