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# Does explicit comparative advertising affect Indian consumers' attitudes towards low and high-involvement product?

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – With increasing use of explicit comparative advertisement to get share of consumers' mind and influence their purchase decision in western context, the same is now used extensively in emerging markets like India. However, there has not been sufficient research to understand the effectiveness of explicit comparative advertisement in low and high-involvement product categories. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to attempt to understand the effectiveness of explicit comparative advertising on consumers' attitude and purchase intention (PI) towards high and low-involvement products.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study carried out experimental treatments with  $2 \times 2$  factorial design among 200 Indian young consumers who were in the age group 18-25. The independent variables were product categories and type of advertising (comparative and non-comparative) and dependent variables were consumer attitude and PIs.

**Findings** – It was found that the comparative form of advertisement developed favourable response towards the advertisement, rather than towards the brand or PI.

**Research limitations/implications** – The study found that comparative advertising is effective for high as well as low-involvement product category in changing the consumer's attitude towards the advertisement. The research has used print media for conducting the experiment.

**Practical implications** – It can be inferred that comparisons should be supplemented with additional information in the form of the unique features and associated emotions and feeling of the product in order to develop favourable attitude towards the brand and PI.

**Originality/value** – Comparative advertising is a growing domain and there has been very little contribution by the researchers specially on high and low-involvement product categories.

**Keywords** India, Youth, Advertising and marketing

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

With the increasing competition, comparative advertising has gained much needed attention from academicians and practitioners (Shao *et al.*, 2004). However, various research studies have found that comparative advertising yielded mixed results. Some researchers have found that comparative advertising is more effective than non-comparison advertising (Demirdijan, 1983; Earl and Pride, 1980) while others do not agree with it (Droge, 1989; Villarreal-Camacho, 1985). In comparative



advertisement, a marketer uses either implicit or explicit mode of comparison, where, implicit advertisement generally referred to the attributes of the competing brands indirectly, on the other hand, explicit advertisement used the approach of direct comparison between the competing brands (Barone *et al.*, 1999).

The various studies of comparative advertising have extensively explored the effect of comparative advertising in relation to generating attention, message, brand awareness, level of message processing, purchase intention (PI) and behaviour (Grewal *et al.*, 1997; Pechmann and Stewart, 1990; Muehling and Kangan, 1985), hedonic and utilitarian products (Kalro *et al.*, 2010), high-involvement product (Neese and Taylor, 1994), gender (Chang, 2007), product class knowledge (Villarreal-Camacho, 1985), message recall (Prasad, 1976), market positions (McDougall, 1976), consumer involvement, familiarity and cognitive ability (Dasgupta and Donthu, 1994), low and high context communication (Shao *et al.*, 2004) and so on.

However, it was found that studying effectiveness of comparative advertising in context of low and high-involvement product category is a potential area that is yet to be explored and to arrive at some valid conclusion empirically. It is expected that this would give an in-depth understanding to the practitioners and academicians about the use of comparative advertising as a tool to build the brand image or influence purchase decision of target consumers for different product categories. Moreover, this will also help in understanding the attitude of consumers towards such a comparison and to know whether the attitude differs in context to high or low-involvement product or not.

Comparative advertising have been extensively used (Dahlén *et al.*, 2010) in emerging market such as India after liberalization in 1990s. Initially, advertisers used indirect comparative advertisements where the name of the competitor was not disclosed in the campaign (Mcdougall, 1976). Indian consumers belonged to high context culture (Ulijn and Kumar, 1999) and preferred indirect messages (Miracle *et al.*, 1992). After late-90s, the opinion about high context culture changed and advertisers started using direct, explicit, bold and assertive comparative advertisements. This transition happened because of high western influence on Indian consumers and the shift from high to low context culture occurred (Chella, 2007). From 2004 to 2006, comparative advertisements have increased by 43 per cent (report by Adex India) in different product category. The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) also supported the usage of explicit and direct comparison in the advertisement (Kalro *et al.*, 2010).

Therefore, the main objective of the study is to test the effectiveness of explicit comparative advertising on consumer's attitude towards the advertisement (AAD), brand and purchase decision in context to high and low-involvement product categories in India. For this, first of all, the literature pertaining to comparative advertising, explicit comparative advertising and its effectiveness was analysed in the background of the Indian scenario. The methodology in terms of the design and data collection was highlighted. This would be followed by the analysis of the data and the findings, with the main focus on the difference between consumer response to comparative and non-comparative advertising. Finally, on the basis of the findings, the relevant conclusions are arrived at and the vital implications are provided, followed by the direction for further research.

## 2. Literature review

Comparative advertising has been defined as: first, the comparison of two or more particularly specified brands that belong to similar product or service categories and second, the comparison of more than one specific attribute of the product or service

(Wilkie and Farris, 1975). There has been an increasing focus on the impact of comparative advertising as the interest turns to the differential effects vs traditional ones. It was found that comparative advertising provided brand-competitive environment and improved the consumers' information process. Comparative advertising had the strength of communicating a greater volume of cues by their basic layout of comparison, although the cues may be based on the few attributes (Harmon *et al.*, 1983). Comparative advertising basically compared the price, value, quality or other merits of comparable products, enhanced the awareness of the consumer (Shukla, 2006) and provided more information that could enable the consumers to make efficient choices (Miskolczi-Bodnar, 2004). Rogers and Williams (1989) highlighted the findings of other researchers who stated that comparative advertising could reduce entry barriers, improve product quality, encourage competition, reduce prices and provide better information for the consumers. Direct comparative advertising enhances the position of the brand by differentiating it from the competition or by integrating it with well liked comparative brand (Droge and Darmon, 1987; Gorn and Weinberg, 1984; Pechmann and Ratneshwar, 1991; Sujana and Dekleva, 1987; Walker *et al.*, 1985).

### 2.1 *Hierarchy of effects (HOE) model*

One of the major questions in context to comparative advertising is its effectiveness. Substantial amount of work has been carried out by many researchers who have tried to look at the effectiveness of comparative advertising by incorporating the HOE model (e.g. Neese and Taylor, 1994; Barry, 1993; Ash and Wee, 1983; Wilkie and Farris, 1975). The HOE model has existed in the literature of marketing for over a century and has received broad attention as it measured advertising effectiveness. The model viewed the consumers as moving along different stages, starting from product unawareness and moving on to awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction and purchase. The model suggested that advertising could fulfill the final goal of sales by building the intermediate effects based on this hierarchy. It also operated as a conceptual tool to foretell the consumer behaviour (Tucker and Massad, 2005) and identified the variables that were important to understand the consumer response (Smith *et al.*, 2008). The HOE model also highlighted three functions of advertising in its successive steps starting from awareness to purchase. The first two steps (awareness and knowledge) were related to information or ideas, the second two steps (liking and preference) were associated to creating more favourable attitudes or feelings and the final two steps (conviction and purchase) were referred to provoke the desire and motivated the purchase action. These functions of advertising were further divided into cognition, affect and conation. Cognition was linked with intellectual, mental or rational states; affect related to emotion or feeling states and conation referred to striving or behavioural states (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961).

Moreover, research in the field of comparative advertising has devoted attention to cognitive, affect and conation variables. Different results were found, with some studies being in favour of comparative advertising format while some produced undesirable outcomes. In the cognitive advertising function, Prasad (1976) suggested that the direct brand comparison advertisement improved the recall of the claim, but not that of the brand, as it lowered the advertisement's perceived credibility. Conversely, Grewal *et al.* (1997) meta-analysis found that comparative advertising usually elicited message and brand awareness and increased the information processing among the consumers.

Similarly, Harmon *et al.* (1983) found that comparative advertising actually contained more objective information cues and content than their non-comparative counterparts. The authors had also focused on: first, informativeness as perceived by the message audience (that was evaluated on the effect of intensity and directionality) and second, informativeness as measured by objectively evaluating the content of information-related cues against a uniform set of criteria (Resnik and Stern, 1977). The authors further examined the product group that had the highest information content and concluded that the advertisements for durable products emphasized on the greatest number of information cues. This was because the durable products were relatively complex and had a greater scope for objective comparison of numerous features and benefits. In contrast, for the food and drink related products, the comparative advertising highlighted the fewest cues and were found to be least informative.

The affect advertising function showed attitudes as one of the consequences of the information that was processed while viewing an advertisement. These attitudes included the consumer's feelings and preferences for the advertisement and the brand. The comparative advertising augmented the consumers' attitudes towards the advertisement and significantly improved the brand attitudes (Neese and Taylor, 1994). Conversely, Droge (1989) found that comparative advertisements generated fewer favourable attitude responses and suggested that comparative advertisements were impersonal, less pleasant, more aggressive, intense, less believable and honest. Presumably, consumers' attitudinal responses of comparative advertising could vary depending on the product involvement level.

The third advertising function, that is, conation, was found to be successful in enhancing the consumer purchase behaviour. Demirdijan (1983) and Grewal *et al.* (1997) found that comparative advertising increased the PIs and purchase behaviour. Conversely, some studies have found no significant difference in buying intentions between comparative and non-comparative advertising (Villarreal-Camacho, 1985). However, there is still a strong indication that comparative advertising had an effect on intended or actual purchase. Comparative advertising was found to have a higher effectiveness than non-comparative advertising under certain situations, especially for competitive brand positioning and initial brand trial (Rogers and Williams, 1989).

## 2.2 Product involvement

Involvement is an individual's internal state of arousal with a proper guidance (Greenwald and Leavitt, 1984). The objective of the involvement is on the individual consumer, as the internal stage of arousal decides the response to the stimuli that can be the product or the advertisement (Mitchell, 1981). The consequences of involvement are search behaviour, information processing (Petty and Cacioppo, 1979), message processing (Celsi and Olson, 1988; Zaichkowsky, 1985) and persuasion which include attitudinal change (Andrews and Shimp, 1990).

This concept can be applied in comparative advertising as construction motivated involvement inspires the individual towards the advertisement who does not have a prior PI but is keen to develop a new PI for the brand. Putrevu and Lord (1994) conducted a study to compare the effectiveness of comparative and non-comparative advertising for different products categorised at various level of cognitive and affective involvement. It was found that comparative advertisements positively affected attitude towards the brand (AB) while reducing the cognitive and affective motives

concurrently. However, non-comparative ads positively influence the AAD when high affective involvement existed.

### *2.3 Elaboration likelihood model (ELM) and comparative advertisement*

ELM model was developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) and was used by Droge (1989) in comparative advertising. It was found that in comparative advertising the information is processed centrally (purposefully) whereas in non-comparative advertisement it is processed in a peripheral manner. This happens because the direct brand comparisons affect the brand attitude while processing the information centrally. It may not happen if there are other competing motivations. This situation arises when high-cognitive involvement is associated with high-affective involvement. It can also be argued that information for some products can be processed centrally while for others the processing can be peripheral. Therefore, it can be noted that comparative advertisement can positively influence those products where the central processing of the information takes place or the sponsor is very clear. However, when the information is processed in the peripheral way than non-comparative ads were preferred. Thus, the involvement literature mentioned that products may have cognitive or affective level of involvement that can lead to central or peripheral processing of information (Putrevu and Lord, 1994).

AAD is more preferred under the peripheral processing (Droge, 1989). These researches have focused on AAD under the cognitive involvement and very little emphasis was given on affective involvement. When peripheral processing is taken by the central processing because of the cognitive involvement of comparative message than the role of AAD in persuasion becomes minimal for the brand attitude alteration. However, when peripheral processing is high than AAD remains to be dominant. Thus, it can be inferred that AAD have very high impact in affecting the persuasion of the consumer (Putrevu and Lord, 1994).

Product specific cognitive and affective involvement has a significant impact on the effectiveness of comparative and non-comparative advertisements. Comparative advertisements can be used for those products where both type of involvement is maximum thereby insisting the consumer to use the central route of processing the information. According to Lavidge and Steiner (1961) there are three determinants that has an impact on the effectiveness of the advertisement namely AAD, AB and PI. It can also be noted that AB works with the central processing and AAD is basically for the peripheral processing of information takes place (Putrevu and Lord, 1994).

### *2.4 Comparative advertisement in India*

According to Brown (2009) out of 57,000 advertisements, 4 per cent were categorized as comparative advertisements. The major countries that have used comparative advertisements were US, India and Philippines. In USA comparative advertising is being researched and used since many decades (Barry, 1993) but it has gained a large portion in the advertising arena in the emerging markets such as India. The growth of comparative advertising has increased in India as the markets have saturated and fragmented. Brand expands their business by alluring the customers of the competitive brands. The private players have expanded their market share by using direct comparative advertisement as the market is very competitive (Kalro *et al.*, 2009). A study was conducted by Kalro *et al.* (2009) on comparative advertising and it was found that in India 65 per cent of direct comparative advertisements were used. Indian consumers prefer comparative advertising as it is not dicey for them. Direct

comparisons are considered to be unique than the non-comparisons in Indian market as it facilitate the brand to break the clutter.

However, there are very few research papers pertaining to comparative advertising domain in India. Pathak (2005) has explored comparative advertising with the special reference to the regulations used in India and found that liberalization alone cannot sustain the competition; under consumer protection act safety against unfair trade practices have been available. Another study was also conducted by Gokhale and Datta (2011) to understand the regulatory framework of comparative advertising in India. Kalro *et al.* (2010) undertook content analysis of print advertisements in India and found that direct comparisons were extensively used. Therefore, it can be stated that no studies are conducted to understand the effect of direct comparative advertisements on the Indian consumer attitude though it is widely used by the companies and accepted by the consumers.

The effectiveness of advertisements can be measured with major constructs such as awareness, attitude and conviction-to-purchase states of HOE model (Li, 2007). Therefore the present study focuses on the attitude and PI which are the affective and conation stage of the HOE model respectively:

*H1.* Comparative advertisement will be more effective on the consumers' attitudes namely AAD, AB and PI than non-comparative advertisement for the low-involvement product category.

*H1a.* Comparative advertisement will be more effective on AAD than non-comparative advertisement for the low-involvement product category.

*H1b.* Comparative advertisement will be more effective on AB than non-comparative advertisement for the low-involvement product category.

*H1c.* Comparative advertisement will be more effective on PI than non-comparative advertisement for the low-involvement product category.

*H2.* Comparative advertisement will be more effective on AAD, AB, PI than non-comparative advertisement for the high-involvement product category.

*H2a.* Comparative advertisement will be more effective on AAD than non-comparative advertisement for the high-involvement product category.

*H2b.* Comparative advertisement will be more effective on AB than non-comparative advertisement for the high-involvement product category.

*H2c.* Comparative advertisement will be more effective on PI than non-comparative advertisement for the high-involvement product category.

### 3. Objectives of the study

- (1) to examine the effectiveness of comparative vs non-comparative advertising on consumers' attitudes and PI; and
- (2) to identify whether the effectiveness varies for different type of product categories, namely the low and high-involvement categories.



**4. Methodology**

*4.1 Research design*

The experimental design was 2×2 full factorial design (refer Table I) with the two product categories as low-involvement and high-involvement and the two types of advertisements namely comparative and non-comparative advertisements.

*4.2 Variables and measures*

In the current study, the independent variables were the type of advertisements and the product categories and the dependent variables were AAD, AB and PI.

*4.3 Pre-test*

A pre-test was conducted on 56 youth in the age group 18-25 years in order to select the preferred products for comparative advertising (refer Tables II and III). This study focused on this segment of young respondents as almost 50 per cent of India’s current population is below the age of 25 years (“India’s Population 2011”, 2011). This segment is very brand conscious and prefers those brands that last longer and look better. They are the fastest segment in Asia who are connected with the digital world and multiple community (“India: Country Pulse”, 2011). They are highly exposed to different types of media as well as advertisement and are aware about the fact of what they are exactly looking for. For this study, researchers selected this consumer segment considering the above mentioned traits.

An opening brief was given to the respondents and were provided with a questionnaire that had two questions. First question was related to low-involvement product and second was about high-involvement product category. Along with each

**Table I.**

The experimental design

Product category/type of advertisement	Comparative advertisement	Non-comparative advertisement
Low involvement	Treatment 1	Treatment 2
High involvement	Treatment 3	Treatment 4

**Table II.**

Division of respondent demographics used for the pre-test

Age (years)	No. of respondents	Percentage
18-19	17	30.36
20-22	15	26.79
23-25	24	42.86
Total	56	100

**Table III.**

Division of respondents according to gender

Gender	No. of respondents	Percentage
Male	29	51.79
Female	27	48.21
Total	56	100.00

question they were provided with the separate list of product categories. This list was developed on the basis of the usage of comparative advertising in the last three years for both the product categories. For this, researchers prepared a list of products for which comparative advertisements were used in Indian print media for the period of 2007-2010. In this, primarily two leading English newspapers were scrutinized for last three years. Then the frequency was calculated for appearance of print ad in a specific product category. This resulted into a list of 14 products for which the comparative ads were used more frequently.

It was found that chocolate was preferred in the low-involvement product category and car was preferred for the high-involvement product category as suitable products for comparative advertising (refer Table IV).

#### 4.4 Treatment

Four treatments were operationalized with the selected products and print advertisements were developed with an artificial brand name and the punch line (Appendix). In this case, print advertisements were found to be the most feasible because it was difficult to develop a television advertisement as the expenditure would have increased and there would have been problems in the creation of the comparative advertisement as well. Moreover, it was also opportune to develop print advertisements as they could be enclosed conveniently with the questionnaire when the data would be collected. Furthermore, these fictitious advertisements were exposed to three professionals in the field of advertising to ensure that they appeared realistic.

#### 4.5 Questionnaire design

Four distinct questionnaires were developed for the final experiment. The fundamental outline of the questionnaire was the same though some minor changes were made according to the treatment. The questionnaire started with opening brief about the advertising group that wanted to use advertising for its products. The brief also included the brand name for which advertisement needed to be used. Participants were asked about their AAD, AB and PI. The scales to measure these three attitudes were the adapted forms of the scales of previous studies (Ohanian, 1990; Henthorne *et al.*, 1993; Pecheux and Derbaix, 1999; Goldsmith *et al.*, 2000).

#### 4.6 Data collection and sample

A list of 18 English medium under graduate and postgraduate institutes was prepared from the western India. These institutes were selected because the advertisement (stimuli) and the questionnaire were developed in English language. These institutes were approached and briefed about the research project. There were eight institutes that showed their consent for the research project and actively got involved in the study. Under graduate and postgraduate student of these institutes were consulted as they were in the age of 18-25 years. These students were from the various streams such as arts, commerce, science, management and mass media. There

Serial no.	Product category	Respondent preference
1.	Low involvement	Chocolate
2.	High involvement	Car

**Table IV.**  
Results of pre-test

were 220 respondents who actively participated in the project. The questionnaire was administered on these respondents by the stratified sampling method. The strata were developed on the basis of the age and gender (refer Tables V and VI). The questionnaire was administered on 220 respondents but 200 responses were used for the study as they were in the usable form. The respondents were divided in four groups as the study involved four different treatments. For each treatment a total of 52 respondents were administered. The effective response rate was 90 per cent from 105 males and 95 females.

4.7 Experiment

Researcher gave a brief about the study to the respondent. After the brief, questionnaire was given to the respondents with the advertisement. The researcher had ensured that each respondent spent five minutes to observe the advertisement and 20 minutes to mark the questionnaire. Each respondent were given five minutes because the name of the brands created for the study were completely new for the respondent and it was assumed that consumer will take some time to get familiarized with new brand. The respondents were informed before handling over questionnaire to them that the brands are new entrant in the market. The researcher also checked that the information provided by the respondent was complete.

4.8 Reliability of the measures

Prior to examining the relationship between the hypothesized variables, the reliability of the measures was calculated by using Cronbach  $\alpha$  (Cronbach, 1991). The  $\alpha$  values (0.800 for AAD, 0.893 for AB and 0.721 for PI) were found to be higher than threshold (Nunnally, 1967; Hair *et al.*, 1998). Normality of the data were examined by using Shapiro-Wilk test and was found to be normally distributed for both the products.

5. Data analysis and results

The experimental design was examined through multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) by using SPSS (version 15). The utilization of MANOVA was justified so as to ensure that the Type I error was minimized. It was also undertaken to assess the differences between the experimental groups (Hair *et al.*, 1998). Before the commencement of the analysis, the dependent variables, namely AAD, AB, PI were

Table V.  
Division of  
respondents  
according to age

Age (years)	No. of respondents	Percentage
18-19	61	30.50
20-22	76	38.00
23-25	63	31.50
Total	200	100

Table VI.  
Division of  
respondents  
according to gender

Gender	No. of respondents	Percentage
Male	105	52.50
Female	95	47.50
Total	200	100.00

first evaluated according to the multi-item scales that were incorporated in the questionnaire. After this, the analysis was carried out for the low and high-involvement product, respectively.

5.1 Evidence for H1

5.1.1 *Testing of H1a.* The multivariate tests for the intercept effect showed that the type of the advertisement and the type of the product, had a significant influence on the consumers' AAD for this type or product (Pillai's trace=0.166,  $F=3.749$ , Sig. = 0.004). Thus, H1a was accepted (refer Table VII).

5.1.2 *Testing of H1b.* The type of the product and the type of the advertisement did not have an effect on the consumers' AB for this type of product (refer Table VIII). Therefore, H1b was rejected (Hotelling's trace: critical  $F=9$ , obtained  $F=1.918$ ).

5.1.3 *Testing of H1c.* The tests showed that the type of the advertisement and the type of the product did not have an influence on the consumers' PI (refer Table IX). Therefore, H1c was rejected (Hotelling's trace: critical  $F=3$ , obtained  $F=0.829$ ).

5.2 Evidence for H2

5.2.1 *Testing of H2a.* The multivariate tests indicated that the type of advertisement and the type of the product had an influence on the consumers' AAD (Pillai's trace = 0.151,  $F=3.334$ , Sig. = 0.008). Thus, H2a was accepted (refer Table X).

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
<i>Intercept</i>					
Pillai's trace	0.924	2.301E2	5.000	94.000	0.000
Wilks' lambda	0.076	2.301E2	5.000	94.000	0.000
Hotelling's trace	12.241	2.301E2	5.000	94.000	0.000
Roy's largest root	12.241	2.301E2	5.000	94.000	0.000
<i>TypeAd</i>					
Pillai's trace	0.166	3.749	5.000	94.000	0.004
Wilks' lambda	0.834	3.749	5.000	94.000	0.004
Hotelling's trace	0.199	3.749	5.000	94.000	0.004
Roy's largest root	0.199	3.749	5.000	94.000	0.004

**Table VII.**  
Multivariate tests for AAD

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
<i>Intercept</i>					
Pillai's trace	0.942	1.629E2	9.000	90.000	0.000
Wilks' lambda	0.058	1.629E2	9.000	90.000	0.000
Hotelling's trace	16.294	1.629E2	9.000	90.000	0.000
Roy's largest root	16.294	1.629E2	9.000	90.000	0.000
<i>TypeAd</i>					
Pillai's trace	0.161	1.918	9.000	90.000	0.059
Wilks' lambda	0.839	1.918	9.000	90.000	0.059
Hotelling's trace	0.192	1.918	9.000	90.000	0.059
Roy's largest root	0.192	1.918	9.000	90.000	0.059

**Table VIII.**  
Multivariate tests for AB

**Table IX.**  
Multivariate tests for  
purchase intention

Effect	Value	<i>F</i>	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
<i>Intercept</i>					
Pillai's trace	0.906	3.077E2	3.000	96.000	0.000
Wilks' lambda	0.094	3.077E2	3.000	96.000	0.000
Hotelling's trace	9.616	3.077E2	3.000	96.000	0.000
Roy's largest root	9.616	3.077E2	3.000	96.000	0.000
<i>TypeAd</i>					
Pillai's trace	0.025	0.829	3.000	96.000	0.481
Wilks' lambda	0.975	0.829	3.000	96.000	0.481
Hotelling's trace	0.026	0.829	3.000	96.000	0.481
Roy's largest root	0.026	0.829	3.000	96.000	0.481

**Table X.**  
Multivariate  
tests for AAD

Effect	Value	<i>F</i>	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
<i>Intercept</i>					
Pillai's trace	0.931	2.519E2	5.000	94.000	0.000
Wilks' lambda	0.069	2.519E2	5.000	94.000	0.000
Hotelling's trace	13.399	2.519E2	5.000	94.000	0.000
Roy's largest root	13.399	2.519E2	5.000	94.000	0.000
<i>TypeAd</i>					
Pillai's trace	0.151	3.334	5.000	94.000	0.008
Wilks' lambda	0.849	3.334	5.000	94.000	0.008
Hotelling's trace	0.177	3.334	5.000	94.000	0.008
Roy's largest root	0.177	3.334	5.000	94.000	0.008

5.2.2 *Testing of H2b.* For AB, the type of the advertisement and the type of product did not have an influence on the consumers' AB (refer Table XD). Therefore, *H2b* was not accepted (Hotelling's trace: critical  $F = 10$ , obtained  $F = 1.433$ ).

5.2.3 *Testing of H2c.* In the case of PI, the type of the advertisement and the type of the product did not have an influence on the consumers' PI for this product (refer Table XII). Therefore, *H2c* was not accepted (Hotelling's trace: critical  $F = 3$ , obtained  $F = 0.141$ ).

## 6. Discussion

A prominent result of the study was that in both low and high-involvement product categories comparative advertising was significant in influencing AAD, but it did not

**Table XI.**  
Multivariate  
tests for AB

Effect	Value	<i>F</i>	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
<i>Intercept</i>					
Pillai's trace	0.953	1.790E2	10.000	89.000	0.000
Wilks' lambda	0.047	1.790E2	10.000	89.000	0.000
Hotelling's trace	20.116	1.790E2	10.000	89.000	0.000
Roy's largest root	20.116	1.790E2	10.000	89.000	0.000
<i>TypeAd</i>					
Pillai's trace	0.139	1.433	10.000	89.000	0.179
Wilks' lambda	0.861	1.433	10.000	89.000	0.179
Hotelling's trace	0.161	1.433	10.000	89.000	0.179
Roy's largest root	0.161	1.433	10.000	89.000	0.179

Effect	Value	<i>F</i>	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Explicit comparative advertising affect
<i>Intercept</i>						
Pillai's trace	0.941	5.067E2	3.000	96.000	0.000	
Wilks' lambda	0.059	5.067E2	3.000	96.000	0.000	
Hotelling's trace	15.835	5.067E2	3.000	96.000	0.000	
Roy's largest root	15.835	5.067E2	3.000	96.000	0.000	
<i>TypeAd</i>						
Pillai's trace	0.004	0.141	3.000	96.000	0.935	
Wilks' lambda	0.996	0.141	3.000	96.000	0.935	
Hotelling's trace	0.004	0.141	3.000	96.000	0.935	
Roy's largest root	0.004	0.141	3.000	96.000	0.935	

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**Table XII.**  
Multivariate tests for purchase intention

affect AB and PI. This was similar to the findings of previous studies which found that comparative advertising improved the consumer's awareness level, thereby shaping AAD (Shukla, 2006). However, the result also differed from other studies that showed that the comparative advertising improved attitudes towards the brand and PI as well (Neese and Taylor, 1994; Demirdijan, 1983; Grewal *et al.*, 1997). It was speculated that because of the comparative information provided by the advertisements, the consumers processed the information differently even for the different categories, namely, the low-involvement and the durable products. This led to the lower effectiveness of comparative advertising for the low-involvement products, as compared with the durable products (Harmon *et al.*, 1983). However, this was not supported in the current study as it was discovered that even for the high-involvement product, the consumers did not infer enough information to develop favourable AB and PI. The comparative advertisements were viewed as being forceful and less reliable (Droge, 1989). As a result, the hypotheses were rejected. Because of the sole impact on AAD, even the HOE model (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961) was not fully applicable. The model consisted of three advertising functions: cognition, affect and conation; however, only cognition was impactful as it appealed to the rational thoughts of the consumers, thereby moulding AAD. For influential advertising, all the three stages would have been followed. The affect stage would have influenced the emotions and enabled sensitization of the consumers towards the product, thereby enhancing AB. It would be especially important in India, as Indians are known to be dependent on the emotional appeal to influence their thinking process (Mukherjee-Das, 2007). The conation stage would have impacted the behaviour of the consumers by informing them about the inherent features of the product, thus developing PI. However, this was not shown in the present study as AB and PI were not influenced by the comparative advertising. Therefore, the advertisements should focus on a holistic approach based on rational and emotional associations, and highlight the products intrinsic attributes, rather than pure comparisons to mould the consumers' attitudes towards the brand and PIs.

## 7. Implications

The first important implication of this study is that the use of comparisons may acclimatize the consumers towards the advertisement, but may not influence their deeper instincts about the brand. Therefore, a balance of rational facts that provide comparison as well as emotional association would work well to induce the consumers to develop favourable AB and PI for the product. This would enable the consumers to process the information through their intellectual and emotional capabilities. Second,

along with the comparative information, pictures, colour and sizes of the brands can be equally emphasised to grab consumer attention. Moreover, the comparative information in the advertisement may also defer on the basis of the product categories. The provision of the unique features of the advertised product would formulate an urge among the consumers to purchase the product. These features should be especially highlighted for the high-involvement product category as more information is required about the brand and strong emotional bond is also important for the consumer to make the final purchase. Comparative advertisements in such cases provide healthy qualified information easily and efficiently to the consumer. Lastly, the brands can be portrayed as very vibrant, enthusiastic and energetic in the advertisement as the youngster very actively participates in the buying process.

### 8. Scope for future research

The future studies may also focus on the consumers of different age groups to investigate whether any differences exist between the attitudes. Furthermore, some variables can be undertaken as the moderators such as personality, gender of the consumer and product familiarity may affect consumer attitudes towards comparative advertising. Additionally, even cross-cultural studies can be carried out to understand consumers' cultural differences pertaining to comparative advertising.

### 9. Conclusion and limitations

The present study showed that the AB and the PI were not significantly impacted by the comparative advertising. This was applicable to low and high-involvement categories. From this, it can be concluded that it is essential to emphasize on the distinctive attributes of the advertised product, in order to illicit a strong reaction from the consumers. Mere comparisons do not focus on the exclusivity of the product, and thereby the advertisements should provide the various aspects of the product from an all-rounded perspective.

In the current study, only the print medium of advertisement was studied. It is possible that the comparative advertising in the other media such as television may have a different impact on AAD, AB and PI. Therefore, different media could also be explored while examining the impact of comparative advertising.

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**Figure A1.**  
Comparative  
Advertisement for  
the low-involvement  
product category  
(chocolate)



**Figure A2.**  
Non comparative  
advertisement for  
the low-involvement  
product category

Introducing URBANA

	URBANA	Scorpio	New Saller	Ro	Innova	Xylo	Terros Neo
Fuel Economy (litres/100km)	11	10.8	9.8	10	9.8	10	10
Euro 5 Compliant	YES	€URO 5	€URO 5	€URO 5	€URO 5	€URO 5	€URO 5
Airbag (SRS)	6	4	4	4	4	4	4
Service Network	3,100	1,100	1,100	1,100	1,100	1,100	1,100
Price (excl. taxes)	7.8	7.2	7.8	8.8	7.8	6.8	7.8

Contact your nearest dealer today!

MUMBAI: Vicky Motors PH: 9833135448, KOLHAPUR: Pijayka Cars PH: 9028331246, PUNE: Vireo Motors PH: 8760135448, THANE: Vashu Motors PH: 9320412241, NAGPUR: Dinesh Motors PH: 9324704744, AURANGABAD: Satish Motors PH: 9920035448, DELHI: Revu Cars PH: 9321112245, KOLKATA: Anil Motors PH: 9320734350, CHENNAI: Dipak Motors PH: 9330035448, BANGALORE: Ashish Motors PH: 9893590464, HYDERABAD: Deepak Cars PH: 9820154886, GOA: Shalini Cars PH: 9833321617, AHMEDABAD: Hitesh Motors PH: 9099811841

URBANA mind over matter.

Explicit comparative advertising affect

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**Figure A3.** Comparative advertisement for the high-involvement product category (car)

Introducing URBANA

- + Fuel Economy - 11
- + EURO 5 compliant
- + Dual tone SRS Airbags
- + 3 years service warranty

At only ₹7.5 lacs\*

\*Basic Model - Freshness Mantal

Contact your nearest dealer today!

MUMBAI: Vicky Motors PH: 9833135448, KOLHAPUR: Pijayka Cars PH: 9028331246, PUNE: Vireo Motors PH: 8760135448, THANE: Vashu Motors PH: 9320412241, NAGPUR: Dinesh Motors PH: 9324704744, AURANGABAD: Satish Motors PH: 9920035448, DELHI: Revu Cars PH: 9321112245, KOLKATA: Anil Motors PH: 9320734350, CHENNAI: Dipak Motors PH: 9330035448, BANGALORE: Ashish Motors PH: 9893590464, HYDERABAD: Deepak Cars PH: 9820154886, GOA: Shalini Cars PH: 9833321617, AHMEDABAD: Hitesh Motors PH: 9099811841

URBANA mind over matter.

**Figure A4.** Noncomparative advertisement for the high-involvement product category

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