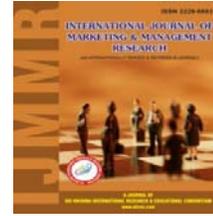




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## IDENTIFYING, ANALYZING AND MEASURING IMPACT OF CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT FOR PRODUCT SELECTION

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### ABSTRACT

*In consumer oriented markets, marketers study target consumers' behaviour with a view to understand and influence it by developing appropriate marketing strategies. Consumers are studied and differentiated on the basis of various environmental and personal (both psychological and non-psychological factors as affecting their purchase and communication behaviours. Though these factors are non-controllable, yet these must be taken care of by the marketers while designing marketing strategies and thereby enhancing the acceptability of their product as a need satisfier in the target market. Involvement has various cognitive manifestations too. Consumers of highly involved products are more likely to process information by going through the stages of awareness, comprehension, attitude and behaviour. As a result of cognitive processing, behaviour in the case of higher involvement products is, therefore, preceded by attitude formation whereas in the case of low involvement products attitudes have not much role to play. This paper examines attitude for involvement product and consumer psychological behavior which impact purchasing of products. The present study had its focus upon product related factors only whereas the impact of personal and situation related factors is included indirectly.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Product, consumer behavior, purchasing decisions.*

### INTRODUCTION

Consumer involvement with the product or product involvement can be at any or all levels of product, i.e., product class, form, brand or model, and may either be enduring or situational type. Where situational involvement occurs in specific situations such as purchase, enduring

involvement, on the other hand, is an on going concern with the product that transcends situational influences.

But the influence of these factors on need satisfying behavior is not direct. Consumer involvement, i.e., perceived personal relevance of the product, mediates these

effects and acts as another important directive factor, motivating consumer to act with deliberation to maximize benefits and minimize risk involved in purchase and use of the product. The product is perceived to be personally relevant to the extent it is self related or instrumental in achieving one's needs, goals and values. More important are the needs, values and goals to the consumer, higher becomes the involvement in product category as a need satisfier. Therefore, depending upon linkage between individual's motivating influences, i.e., needs etc. and benefits offered by the product, it forms a continuum ranging from very high to very low levels of involvement. In a specific situation when these motivational influences are confronted with certain stimulus or stimuli, involvement is activated and is referred to as 'felt involvement'. Involvement as such is a situation specific variable and for the same physical object, person's felt involvement might differ from situation to situation.

When consumers are involved they get engaged in number of behaviours concerning product purchase and information processing – termed as behavioural consequences of involvement. As such they tend to become information seekers, actively looking for information from alternative sources. Moreover, they have been found spending more time in searching for information and making right choice when their involvement with purchase activity is on higher side. They also compare and evaluate number of brands for multiple attributes. But these consumers tend to be narrow categorizers, i.e., having narrow latitude of acceptance and wide latitude of rejection, which results into greater commitment and, therefore, loyalty to a brand. On the other hand, in low involvement situation loyalty tends to be spurious. Behaviour in such a situation precedes attitude formation as

brand familiarity becomes a guiding factor. In high involvement case, consumers instead try to buy such brands as can express their lifestyles and personal characteristics.

### **MARKETING IMPLICATIONS**

Many managerial and strategic implications follow from consumer involvement analysis. Depending upon the level and type of involvement, marketers may decide about various operational variables such as type of media, degree of repetition, length of message, tone of message and quantity of information. To boost the involvement in their product category, marketers may adopt point of sale sampling, in-store display, couponing, packing, annual clearance sale, premiums, special price strategies, etc. However, it is equally important to retain high involvement in the product category by maintaining quality standards and innovations.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

With a move towards globalization and competition in the Indian markets, a thorough understanding of the target consumers has become necessary for effective market segmentation and product positioning. It is, however, yet to be ascertained as to how the consumer involvement theory like its application in other countries can be gainfully employed by the Indian marketers in gaining better understanding of their consumers and devising appropriate marketing strategies. It is against this backdrop that the present study is being undertaken to understand the application and the relevance of consumer involvement concept in the context of Indian consumers. More specifically, the study aims at :

- Measuring consumer involvement for select products.
- Identifying and analyzing various product related factors that determine level of consumer involvement.
- Examining consequences of involvement on consumer behaviour, and
- Finding implications of consumer involvement for Indian marketers.

### REVIEW LITERATURE

Depending upon the domain of research, every researcher has tried to introduce his or her own definition of the term which differs to varying degrees from those previously evolved. As an evidence to it, the different domains of researches have been, e.g., high/low involvement products (Bowen and Chaffee 1974; Bloch 1981), high/low involvement issues (Petty and Cacioppo 1979; Swinyard and Coney 1979), high/low involvement consumers (Newman and Dolich 1979; Kassarian 1981), high/low involvement media (Krugman 1966), high and low involvement learning (Smith and Swinyard 1982; Gardner, Mitchell and Ruso 1978; Finn 1982), high/low involvement situations (Belk 1981) and high/low involvement cognitive structures (Lastovicka and Gardner 1978).

The literature suggests that consumers differ not only in their levels of involvement, but also in terms of type of involvement. Although involvement focuses upon personal relevance, yet for different domain of researchers, it has always been conceived with some qualifier giving rise to various types of involvement, such as product involvements, media involvement, or message involvement.

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The present research work is an empirical one based on both primary and secondary data. The source of secondary data is literature survey, and the primary data are collected from the sample survey of Indian consumers belonging to the metropolitan city of Delhi. Using quota sampling technique, a sample of 584 respondents from five different professions, viz., lecturers, doctors, bank officers, chartered accountants and engineers, was approached during the time period of seven months to collect the necessary primary data.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Some of the limitations of the study are as follows:

- The study is confined to only select strata of the society, i.e., upper-middle and upper-class people with relatively higher education level.
- The study has its focus on only product involvement whereas literature talks about various other types of consumer involvement too.
- The respondents included in the study were not qualified as a user or purchaser of the product.
- The study has analysed only product related antecedents of involvement with the impact of personal and situation specific factors included indirectly.
- Concerning analysis techniques, the study has used one-way ANOVA analysis and, therefore, interaction effects of various

antecedents on involvement have not been analyzed.

### **BEHAVIORAL VIEW**

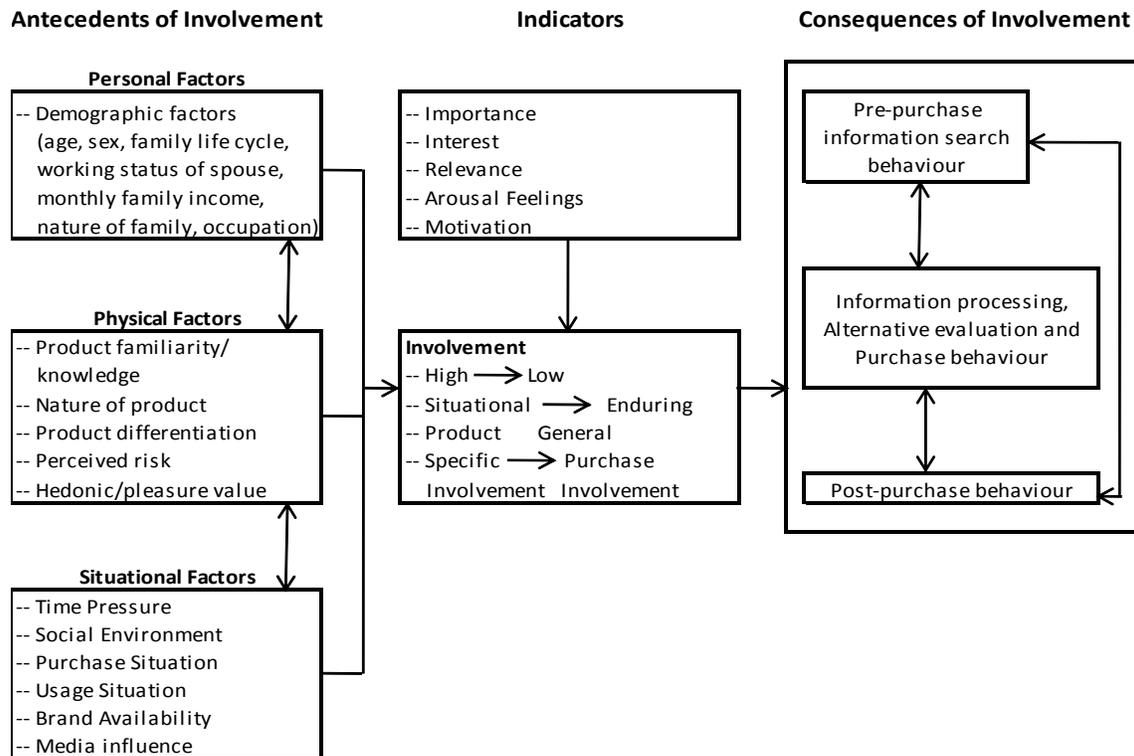
According to behavioural or process or response based conceptualization of involvement, it is not 'thinking' but 'doing' that constitutes involvements. Involvement as a characteristic of response pattern finds its support in the researches by Houston and Rothschild (1978), Calder (1979), Greenwald and Leavitt (1984), Stone (1984), ray (19730 and Rothschild (1975). It refers to or is characterized by the nature of actualized response pattern specified in terms of either extensiveness or temporality of processing (Laaksonen 1994).

The temporality of processing treats involvement as a dichotomous variable and assumes that it shifts the sequence of communication impact or that of brand choice development. The most common form of high involvement processing is assumed to follow the cognitive-affective-conative learning

sequence. Low involvement, on the other hand, reveals itself in modes of processing where affective development follows conative response. In terms of extensiveness of response, low involvement is said to be present when consumer has only a few attributes in mind and simplified choice heuristics are used. Habitual purchases are considered to be indicators of low involvement, whereas brand loyalty as well as affective commitment to that brand signify high involvement.

The consumer involvement with media and message seems to be affected by factors such as type of media used (i.e., print versus audio visual), tone of message, contents of message, frequency of message and length of message. Since print media is considered high involvement media and television low involvement media, the message in order to be effective on television should be short and frequent with impressive spokesperson as well as tone of message.

### **PROPOSED MODEL OF CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT**



## INFORMATION SEARCH BEHAVIOUR

Decision making calls for information search of both internal and external types. Following needs recognition, internal search is merely a memory scan for the knowledge stored in long term memory. In case sufficient knowledge or information could not be retrieved, consumers undertake external search from the alternative sources. The active audience view suggests that the consumers actively seek product related information from marketer dominated and consumer dominated channels (Bauer 1964| Cox 1963), but the available research evidences suggest non-active search behaviour to be prevailing in most of the cases (Robertson 1976; Clarke and Belk 1979). As such pre-purchase information seeking is relatively rare, rather more of passive nature, primarily based upon product trial. Considering

involvement a key intervening variable. Laurent and Kapferer (1985) state that as against high involvement situations, there prevails a relative lack of active information search in the low involvement situation on the part of the consumers as they show lesser tendency to keep themselves informed about the product and reading of special consumer reports. Instead they receive the information in passive manner from the repeated exposures to television advertising which in fact leads to gradual shifts in their perceptual constructs (Krugman 1965). Moreover, consumers spend lesser effort in terms of number of visits to retail stores and actual time spent in search. While adding another dimension to search behaviour, the researchers like Clarke and Belk (1979) and Gronbaug (1972) have proposed that consumers for higher levels of product and task involvement tend to seek more advice from dealers and others, and study more brochures.

**DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION****SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS**

Demographics	Percentage of respondents
<b>Profession</b>	
Lecturer	26.2
Doctor	16.6
Bank Officer	20.5
Engineer	16.6
Chartered Accountant	20.0
<b>Nature of Profession</b>	
Service	79.9
Own practice/profession	20.1
<b>Age (in years)</b>	
25-35	44.6
36-45	33.8
46-60	20.1
Above 60	1.5
<b>Sex</b>	
Male	74.4
Female	25.5
<b>Monthly Family Income (Rs.)</b>	
Below 10,000	27.0
10,000 to 20,000	51.6
20,000 and above	21.4

Product wise, the sample comprised of ten commonly used products selected from the extant literature. These were grouped into five pairs, viz., furniture-washing soap, washing machine-cold drinks, refrigerator-cosmetics, watches-bathing soap and dresses (daily wear) dresses (special occasion), assumed to be representing low and high involved

products. On rotation basis, each respondent was interviewed for one of these five pairs of products. Excepting the product class 'dresses' being contrasted over usage situations, rest of the products in pair include on 'durable infrequently purchased' and one 'non-durable frequently purchased' product.

**RELIABILITY ANALYSIS FOR SCALES MEASURING ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF INVOLVEMENT**

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Scale	No. of Items	Cronbach Alpha Value
<b>Antecedents</b>		
.Risk probability	2	.5601
.Risk importance	1	--
.Financial risk	1	--
.Functional risk	1	--
.Psychological risk	2	.6721
.Physical risk	1	--
.Social risk	1	--
.Hedonic Value	1	--
.Frequency of use	1	--
.Frequency of purchase	1	--
.Perceived knowledge	3	.4639
.Amount of information at hand	1	--
.Brand awareness	1	--
.Brand dissimilarity	1	--
.Difficulty of choice	1	--
<b>Consequences</b>		
.Pre-purchase information search	1	--
.On-going information search	1	--
.Information processing	1	--
.Information use	1	--
.Shopping effort	6	.7287
.Repeat purchase behaviour	1	--
.Post-purchase product evaluation	2	.6636
.Product care	3	.8265
.Opinion leadership	1	--

Rest of the antecedents/correlates, viz., frequency of purchase, frequency of product use, various types of risk, hedonic value and amount of information at hand about the product, were at the outset measured with the help of single item scales.

In regard to behavioural consequences of involvement either single item or multi item scales were developed to measure the behaviours in the pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase phases of decision making process. The responses were obtained primarily on seven-point 'strongly disagree' to

'strongly agree' Likert scale. In the case of alternative evaluation behaviour, the study used four-point comparative scale of 'much more' to 'less' to measure the behavioural dimensions for each of the product pair. Besides, the importance of alternative information sources being listed in the study has been measured on four-point scale ranging from '1=unimportant' to '4=most important'.

The extent of pre-purchase information search, information processing, shopping behaviour, post-purchase product evaluation, product care and opinion leadership were measured

with the help of multi-item scales. But reliability testing resulted into poor Cronbach alpha values for three of the behavioural dimensions, viz., extent of pre-purchase information search, information processing and opinion leadership. For the extent of information search and information processing behaviour, the scales were split and considered as tapping different aspects of the concerned behaviour was analyzed in terms of pre-purchase and on-going search behaviour, for information processing behaviour the scales measured extent of information processing and extent of information use, for opinion leadership, initially two items scale was used. But for low scale reliability only the item, viz., "others often come to me for seeking advice" was retained as representing this behavioural construct. The other items, viz., "If I am satisfied, I strongly recommend the same to others", was dropped as found to be somewhat confusing and not discriminating for the lowly and highly involved consumers. Consumers' repeat purchase behaviour in regard to the products under consideration was measured with the single item scale.

The present study had its focus upon product related factors only whereas the impact of personal and situation related factors is included indirectly. For the product related characteristics determining the level of consumer involvement, researchers differ in their opinions. However, the study considered nature of product, the degree as well as types of risk perceived, (viz., financial, functional, psychological, social and physical risks), hedonic value, familiarity in terms of frequency of use, frequency of purchase, perceived knowledge and the amount of information at hand, and various brand related factors such as brand awareness, brand dissimilarity and difficulty of choice as determinants of involvement level.

Except the amount of information at hand, the study hypothesized positive relationships of the product related factors with the level of consumer involvement.

The survey results in regard to various hypothesized relationships between consumer involvement and product related antecedents confirm that the nature of product, i.e., durable v/s non-durable, frequently v/s infrequently purchased product, determines consumer involvement. But risk is not always a pre-condition for consumer involvement as there are found other more positive sources of involvement too such as product's hedonic value. Concerning risk itself, instead of risk probability perceptions, risk importance perceptions appear as a source of involvement in terms of ANOVA and correlation analyses. Moreover, it is only the functional and psychological types of risk that lead to consumers' perceptions of personal relevance, and that too mainly in the case of highly involved products. On the other hand, for product's hedonic value and familiarity in terms of frequency of use and perceived knowledge, it can be concluded that perceptions about these variables invariably affect consumer involvement with the product. Among various brand related factors, brand awareness and brand dissimilarity perceptions have been found related with involvement. But in the case of difficulty of choice, the results reveal negative relationship with involvement.

The relationships between consumer involvement level and various product related antecedents are, however, not found uniform across different products. While consumer involvement with refrigerator and other durables is risk based, in the case of non-durables, say cold drinks, other factors such as hedonic value perceptions form the basis of

involvement. For this uneven pattern of relationship, it is observed that different products are differently involving due to different reasons, and the results thus lend support to the idea of different types of involvement. The study thus confirms Kapferer and Laurent's (1986) observations that depending upon the antecedents there exist different types of consumer involvement. But at the same time the study does not approve of measuring the involvement profiles and there from inferring involvement level. Having successfully measured the product involvement level, we rather suggest measuring antecedent profiles of the product, depending upon the relationships between consumers' product involvement level and various product related antecedents. So the product may be more or less risky, but the present study enable one to know precisely whether risk affects involvement or not.

With the understanding that the products differ for their level of consumer involvement, the study also examined the impact of differences in product involvement on various behaviours in pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase phases of decision making process. As expected, level of consumer involvement has positive impact on these behaviours. Consumers of more involved products collect information to greater extent, and use large number of alternative information sources including both personal and non-personal mass media type. But for the less involved products, consumers use non-personal type of information sources such as books and magazines and TV advertising. However, TV advertising in general appeared as an important source of information. Differences are found in respect of consumers' alternative evaluation behaviour also. Highly involved consumers show a tendency to compare a

number of brands for multiple attributes and also require greater amount of time and greater number of people in decision making. Shopping behaviour is also found extensive for the highly involved products. Consumers tend to evaluate the products after purchase, and spend relatively more time and effort in the maintenance of the products perceived relevant. Though the results are favourable for the opinion leadership also, not much salience can be attached to these results in view of lacuna observed in its operationalization.

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