

# CONCEPTUALIZING INVOLVEMENT



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## ABSTRACT

A state-of-the-art review paper for the construct of involvement is presented. This paper outlines prior studies which show the antecedents of involvement to be due to personal characteristics, object characteristics and/or situational characteristics. One or more of these factors is proposed to influence the consumer's level of involvement in various research areas of involvement with advertising, involvement with products and involvement with purchase decisions.

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## INTRODUCTION

### History of Involvement

In applying learning theory to TV copy testing, Krugman (19, 20, 21) found that when a series of ads were presented, those ads presented first and last were remembered better than those ads in the middle of the series. This finding showed the same primacy and recency effects found by Ebbinghaus,

at the turn of the century, in the learning of nonsense syllables and by Hovland (13) in the learning of non-ego-involving material. Krugman (20) hypothesized that what advertising and nonsense or non-ego-involving material had in common were low levels of involvement. He defined this as the degree of personal involvement, and operationalized it as the number of "bridging experiences," connections or personal references per minute that the viewer made between his own life and the advertisement. Therefore, personal involvement impacted on response to advertising.

Since then, the construct of involvement has emerged as an important factor in studying the effectiveness of advertising (9, 21, 22, 27, 28, 29, 31, 33, 43). In these studies, involvement generally refers to a mediating variable in determining if the advertisement is effectively relevant to the receiver. Besides the focus on involvement with advertising, other researchers have used the term involvement to refer to the relationship between a person and a product (7). In this area of research the focus is on how relevant or important the person perceives the product category (15, 16). A third area of involvement in the consumer behavior/marketing domain is the involvement with purchase decisions or the "act" of purchase (2, 5). The research in this application of involvement focuses on information search variables such as time spent searching or number of shops visited.

These three research streams contain commonalities which allow a comprehensive framework to be suggested. This paper reviews the involvement literature and links various research approaches for advertising, products and purchase decisions. First, a common view of involvement is proposed from the literature (35). Second, the various antecedent factors or causes of involvement are identified as person factors, stimulus or object factors, and/or situation factors. Examples of these factors are extracted from previous empirical studies. Finally, a summary of the state-of-the-art of involvement and advertising is provided outlining what use the involvement construct might have for researchers and advertising practitioners.

### The Focus of Involvement

Although there does not seem to be a single precise definition of involvement, there is an underlying theme focusing on personal relevance found in the literature (9, 21, 25, 35). In the advertising domain, involvement is manipulated by making the



ad "relevant" to the receiver in terms of being personally affected and hence motivated to respond to the ad (27). In product class research, the concern is with the "relevance" of the product to the needs and values of the consumer and hence interest for product information (7). In purchase decision research, the concern is that the decision is "relevant," and hence the consumer will be motivated to make a careful purchase decision (5). Although each is a different domain of research, some parallelism is found between involvement and personal relevance (9).

## THE ANTECEDENTS OF INVOLVEMENT

The variables proposed to precede involvement may be categorized into three factors. The first factor relates to the characteristics of the person. A person's inherent value system, along with his or her unique experiences, determines whether the person is involved with a particular object. The second factor relates to the physical characteristics of the stimulus. The physical differences might pertain to the differences in type of media (e.g., TV, radio or print), or in content of the communication, or even the variation found in the product classes being advertised. The third factor impacting on the involvement is the varying situation. For example, one may attend to advertisements for Volvos with greater involvement if one is thinking of buying that particular car. However if one is not in the market for a new car, then involvement with car advertisements, in general, might be low.

This particular framework of involvement being affected by person, stimulus physical factors and/or situation has conceptual roots in work by Houston and Rothschild (12) and more recently by Bloch and Richins (3). The evidence for all three factors influencing the consumer's level of involvement or the way the consumer responds to advertising, products and purchase decisions are found in the literature. For example, Zaichkowsky (46) demonstrated that different people perceive the same product differently and have inherently different levels of involvement for the same product (person factor), Wright (43) found that variation in the type of media (print versus audio, a physical characteristic) influenced the response given to the same message, and Petty and Cacioppo (26, 27) commonly manipulate involvement by leading subjects to believe they will or will not be affected by the stimulus (situational factor).

This conceptualization of the involvement construct is found in Figure 1, and several behaviors proposed to result from involvement with advertising, products or purchase decisions are shown on the right hand side. The following literature review

articulates that the antecedents of involvement might be classified into these three areas.

## THE ADVERTISING DOMAIN

### Situation and Stimulus Factors

Early research by Wright (43, 44) manipulated the personal relevance of the product being advertised and the source of the communication (print versus audio) in investigating the attitudinal acceptance of messages. The high personal involvement condition was created by telling subjects they would have to make a decision about soybeans after viewing the ads, whereas low-involvement subjects would make no decision. The results showed for print ads, personal relevance was important; more counter-arguments and less source derogations were observed for high personal involvement. Support arguments were higher under the print presentation regardless of degree of personal involvement.

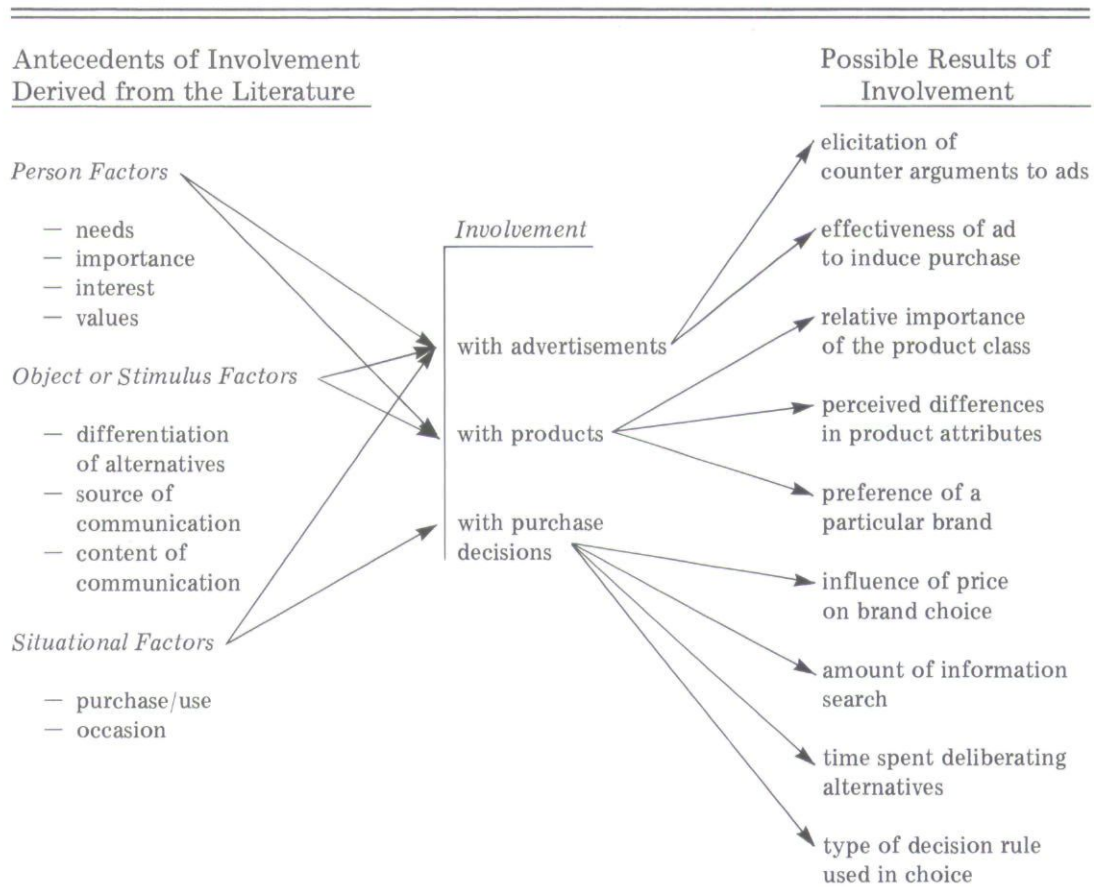
Rothschild and Ray (33) performed a laboratory experiment in which test advertisements for candidates in the presidential (high involvement), congressional (medium involvement) and state assembly (low involvement) races were repetitively exposed. The results of the study showed subjects had more "personal connections" to the presidential ads, than the congressional ads or ads for the state assembly race. However, the effectiveness of these ads in influencing voter behavior was in exactly the opposite order. The higher the personal involvement with the political race, the less effective the ad was in influencing the voter behavior.

These findings were confirmed in the field during an election campaign (37). The results of the study showed advertising response in the race representing high personal involvement (senatorial race) was strong on recall of the ad, but advertising had no effect on attitudes and voting intentions. Advertising response in the low-involvement race (county treasurer) was strong for recall and also voting intentions, but not for attitudes. Therefore, advertising was thought to actually influence behavior when the subject of the communication was of low involvement to the receiver.

A more complex stream of research into message response involvement was undertaken by psychologists Petty and Cacioppo (26, 27, 28, 29). Experiments were conducted to test the hypothesis that high involvement enhances thinking about the content of the communication. In these studies, subjects in both high- and low-involvement groups received the same communication, but high-involvement subjects were led to believe the communication affected them, while low-involvement subjects did



**FIGURE 1**  
**CONCEPTUALIZING INVOLVEMENT**



$$\text{INVOLVEMENT} = f(\text{Person, Situation, Object})$$

The level of involvement may be influenced by one or more of these three factors. Interactions among persons, situation and object factors are likely to occur.

not believe the communication would have personally relevant effects due to different situational instructions.

These experiments (26, 27, 29) suggested that nonmessage cues, such as the expertise or attractiveness of a source, should have maximal impact when a message is of low involvement to the receiver. On the other hand, actual content of the message should have maximal impact under conditions of high involvement. Therefore, increased involvement appears to be associated with increased attention to the message content. This will most likely lead to reduced persuasion when a message presents weak arguments (i.e., arguments open to refutation and counter-argumentation) and to enhanced persuasion when a message presents particularly good arguments for which subjects have no readily available counter-

arguments (and thus favorable thoughts will predominate).

The conclusions from these studies are 1) personal involvement or relevance of the object in the communication is necessary before there is active attention to the communication; 2) where strong personal involvement already exists, the argument presented in the advertisement must contain good quality statements to suppress counter-arguments and convince the receiver; 3) consumers use different types of cues to form evaluations, depending on the level of involvement with the topic. Under high involvement, attitudes are influenced by the quality of the arguments in the message, whereas under low involvement, attitudes were primarily influenced by nonmessage factors such as the expertise or attractiveness of the source. Since neither of the



studies in the political advertising domain investigated the effects of message content, the conclusion of limited effect for advertising in major political campaigns might be tentative, and should be replicated using the same race but different argument quality or message content.

The antecedents of the involvement found in these studies are 1) *Situational Manipulation* (26, 27, 28, 29, 43) for the reason the person is evaluating the ad or the product in the ad, or 2) *Differences in the Stimulus* (33, 37) by using different political races as treatment levels. Therefore, some involvement studies manipulate the situation so that the object of the communication is perceived in a different context. Other studies use different stimuli to tap into different inherent involvement levels.

### Inherent Person Factors and Different Stimuli

In addition to the object of the communication being personally relevant, some effect for response to advertising was found for the type of media carrying the communication (21, 44). When print media was compared to audio, Wright (44) found that print media allowed the receiver to process the content of the communication at the receiver's own pace and hence make more cognitive responses to it.

Closely associated with this work on the different media is the area of right versus left brain processing (10, 22, 41). The implications for advertising is that television viewing is mainly a right-brain activity, whereas print is more a left-brain activity. This premise was investigated by showing right-handed women print ads and television commercials (41) and actually measuring brainwave activity. Using recall of the ad as a dependent measure representing involvement, the magazine ads failed to produce higher levels of recall despite the fact they produced more left-brain activity and higher levels of total *beta*-wave activity. The ads best recalled were the ones which had highest *beta*-wave activity irrespective of media type, perhaps due to an inherent interest in the topic of the ad. Therefore, this research suggests television is not necessarily a less involving medium. The level of audience involvement also depends on the message. The more personally interested the consumer is in the topic of the ad, the more attention is given to the ad regardless of the medium carrying the communication.

Besides the form of the communication affecting how people respond to the message, Preston (30) proposed that the content of the various media had

inherent differences which also affected how people responded. The argument was presented that television contains more ads than magazines for product categories in which only minimal differentiation exists among competing brands. These hypotheses were tested by coding TV ads and magazine ads into the following three categories:

- 1) Advertisements for brands difficult to differentiate within the product category (e.g., beer, gasoline, soap, margarine, cigarettes);
- 2) Advertisements for brands relatively easy to differentiate within their product category, but nonetheless highly substitutable (e.g., automobiles, appliances, furniture);
- 3) Advertisements for brands relatively easy to differentiate within their product category and less substitutable than category two (e.g., books, records, movies, vacation areas).

The results of Preston's analyses showed that brands advertised on TV might be relatively low involving due to the concentration of ads which discriminate advertised items only as brands of a given product. The magazine advertising might induce a relatively high involvement response due to its relatively greater number of ads which discriminate advertised items on distinct product attributes. Therefore this study suggests 1) differentiation of alternatives or product types is heavily confounded with type of media, and 2) the amount of product differentiation is important for eliciting high involvement. This focus on product differentiation is echoed by DeBruicker (6).

A study by Bowen and Chaffee (4) suggests there is some difference between the effectiveness of ads containing different levels of information within products classified as low or high involvement. Examples of the products categorized as low-involvement products were cigarettes, suntan lotions, camera flashcubes and car tires. By contrast, high-involvement products were foreign economy cars, diamond rings, stereo phonographs and electric wristwatches. Print ads for both high- and low-involvement products were selected and classified as either informational or non-informational. The results of the study showed non-informational ads had no differentiating effect between high-involvement products and low-involvement products on either evaluation of the ad or willingness to buy the advertised product. On the other hand, informational appeals were found to be much more effective for high-involvement products than low-involvement products, perhaps indicating people know when the information provided is useful for evaluating the product and when it is not.

The antecedents of involvement found in these studies can be divided into the following:



- 1) *Differences in the stimulus* (4, 30). For example Bowen and Chaffee's definition of a product's relation to personal involvement was also closely tied to the characteristic of product differences, namely substitutability of brands, number of available brands, styling differences, product performance, price and dealer-brand specialization.
- 2) *Inherent interest the subject has in the stimulus* (41). This personal characteristic also was measured by importance of purchase by Bowen and Chaffee.

In summary, 1) television advertising might be just as involving as print for a person highly interested in the topic of communication, 2) one may be just as involved in differing appeals (i.e., informational or non-informational) for a product in which they have high interest, and 3) the dimension of product differentiation seems to be confounded with the type of media. A message about a product that is easily differentiated, on various attributes, among brands is advertised more in print than on TV.

The argument is offered (43) that information content is really the major source of receiver involvement, and experienced advertisers realize that when their product carries little potential for naturally involving the receiver, its appearance in print makes it highly probable that it will be ignored. Therefore the degree of actual product differentiation or created product differentiation pointed out by the advertiser might be critical to evoking a high-involvement processing mode.

## PRODUCT CLASS INVOLVEMENT

At this point it is important to review the studies dealing with involvement and product categories since different products are usually at the heart of the advertising message. Within the literature on involvement and products, we again find the antecedent factors of personal characteristics and the differentiation of alternatives (6). The person factor covers the needs and values of the person. The differentiation refers to the degree of cognitive overlap the person perceives in the stimulus. This differentiation creates involvement because the closer the alternatives are to one another in functional character, the more substitutable they are, and hence the evaluation of alternatives is low in involvement.

### Inherent Person Factors

The term product class involvement stems from the writings of Howard and Sheth (15:73) and is used interchangeably with the term "importance of purchase." They define involvement as being

product-class specific and include the criteria by which the buyer orders a range of product classes in terms of his needs. Although Howard and Sheth (15) refer to needs as influencing the order of the product classes in a person's life, Hupfer and Gardner (16) refer to this same idea as ego involvement. They chose to operationalize this ordering of products by simply asking 44 students how important 20 products were in relation to 20 issues on an eight-point concentric scale. The results of the study showed issues were more involving than products, and support was not given to the intuitive feeling that the more expensive a product is, the more important it is to the individual. For example, beer, milk and news magazines were rated as more important than bicycles, typewriters and color televisions to the students (16). This ordering of products is not surprising given the particular nature of the group ranking the products. One product's importance in relation to another product really depends on the individual's personal values and needs at a particular time.

This variation in involvement for any product across individuals was demonstrated by Lastovicka and Gardner (24) and Zaichkowsky (45, 46). Using a scale developed to measure personal involvement levels, Zaichkowsky (44) found different students perceived breakfast cereals, 35mm cameras and red wine as either having low or high involvement for them. Using three-mode factor analysis, Lastovicka and Gardner (24) analyzed responses from 40 students across 14 products on 22 rating scales. The results of the analysis showed four distinct subject groups that viewed three product clusters with varying levels of normative importance, familiarity and commitment. The only systematic similarity among the four subject groups was that low-involvement products were always rated as having less normative importance than the high-involvement products. Commitment and familiarity did not always follow.

### Differences in Stimuli

The factor of differentiation of alternatives was used by Korgaonkar and Moschis (18) as a primary discriminator of high- and low-involvement products. Questions such as degree of substitution with brands and differences in performance were used to identify soft drinks as a low-involving product class and radios as a high-involving product class. The question under investigation was whether high- or low-involvement products were evaluated differently after receiving positive or negative information about the product. The results showed that the high-involvement product was less susceptible to changes in evaluation after discrepant information than the low-involvement product. The rationale behind this finding is that



high involvement implies that beliefs about product attributes are firmly held and only influenced by strong quality arguments, whereas under low involvement, beliefs are not strongly held and hence are easily influenced. This finding is consistent with Petty and Cacioppo's work in advertising quality and attitude change.

In summary, from the literature on products and involvement, two underlying factors are proposed to influence whether a product is considered high-or low-involving:

- 1) *Personal importance, personal ego or personal relevance.* All these terms are used interchangeably in the literature, but all pertain to personal needs, values and relevance within the individual and how s/he perceives the product.
- 2) *Differentiation of alternatives (i.e., the amount of product distinction within a product class).* The differentiation of alternatives causes involvement due to lack of cognitive overlap. This means the alternatives are not perceived as substitutes, and hence the person will be motivated to compare and evaluate the differences (6).

Research dealing with how product differences affect involvement has not yet separated itself totally from the factor of personal importance or personal relevance of the product to the individual. Part of the problem, as first mentioned by Kassarian (17), lies in using different products to study the phenomena, thereby confounding personal relevance or perceived importance with the differentiation of alternatives. Only by studying varying levels of personal interest in the same product category and by studying varying levels of differentiation of alternatives with the same product class will we be able to investigate the importance of these two factors on consumer involvement.

A second problem in product involvement research seems to lie in the fact that just asking subjects to rank how important a list of products is to them personally ignores the "act of purchase" as having high personal importance or relevance. In addition, just saying that a high-involvement product has a greater number of distinguishing attributes ignores the consumers' willingness to use those attributes in the evaluation of alternatives. Therefore, the next section on purchase-decision involvement is a germane part of the involvement literature.

## PURCHASE-DECISION INVOLVEMENT

Involvement with purchase decisions is conceptualized as a behavior change in decision strategy and

resulting choice that occurs only when the consumer sees the purchase or consumption situation as personally relevant or important (5, 7, 14, 15). The usefulness of defining the act of purchase as involving to the consumer was first seen in the concept of perceived risk, where the value of the product to the consumer was an essential element. When the purchase was seen as important, the consumer would expend effort to obtain information and reduce uncertainty through 1) mere willingness to perceive information s/he is subjected to, and 2) extensive, overt search for relevant information (15).

Involvement with purchase decisions was studied experimentally in the context of selection of a product for a gift (5). The primary hypothesis was that the situation (product as a gift or for oneself) should cause consumers to expend more search effort and spend more money. This hypothesis was tested in a hypothetical shopping question using two products identified as low involvement (bubble bath and blankets), and two products identified as high involvement (records and jeans). The results showed an interaction between the product involvement and the task of purchasing the item for a gift. Subjects reported they would spend more money, shop more stores and spend more time when shopping for a low-involvement product for a gift. The amount of search and money expended for the high-involvement products was the same regardless of whether the product was for themselves or for a gift. Additional work investigated and confirmed the hypothesis that gift-giving situations differ in involvement and that these differences directly influence the amount of effort devoted to the purchase selection process (2). In other words, some gift-giving situations are more important than others. As an explanation of when purchase decisions are involving and when they are not, Houston and Rothschild (12) propose that the situation interacts with personal factors to impact on the purchase decision.

The manipulation of the purchase situation is the main antecedent factor of involvement in purchase-decision studies (2, 5). However, the study by Clarke and Belk also points out the relevance of the different products or differentiation among alternatives in investigating the dependent measures of search time and cost. The amount of differentiation may interact with the personal factor, leading to the greatest search effort under high personal importance and high differentiation of alternatives and high situational importance.

## SUMMARY

From the review of these applications of the term



**TABLE 1**  
**SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL INVOLVEMENT STUDIES**

Study	Context	Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	Operationalization	Findings
<i>Belk (1982)</i>	Purchase Decisions	1. Costs less than \$10 2. Quality 3. Can be bought quickly 4. Costs more than \$20 5. Spur-of-moment purchase 6. Is inexpensive	1. Situational Involvement High vs. Low	1. a) Birthday (Your Age) (HI) a) Wedding (HI) b) Birthday (Older) (LI) b) Thank You (LI)	Main effect was significant for each dependent variable. However, responses in the LI were similar (Birthday Older and Thank You), but not in the HI condition (Birthday and Wedding).
<i>Clarke &amp; Belk (1978)</i>	Purchase Decisions	1. Amount spent on purchase 2. Number of stores visited 3. Time spent in deciding	1. Situational Involvement High vs. Low 2. Product Involvement High vs. Low	1. a) Purchase for self (LI) b) Purchase as gift (HI) 2. a) Bubble bath, blankets (LI) b) Records, jeans (HI)	Interaction between product and situation. Difference in dependent variables not significant for HI product in either LI or HI situational purchases, but differences found for LI product.
<i>Bowen &amp; Chaffee (1974)</i>	Products Advertising	1. Willingness to buy 2. Ad evaluation	1. Product Involvement High vs. Low 2. Pertinence of Advertisements Not pertinent vs. pertinent	1. Seven measures for product involvement: —number of brands —styling differences —product performance —price —importance of purchase —dealer brand specialization —substitutability of brands 2. a) mention of rival brands b) provide objective attribute information	Interaction Effect: Pertinent appeals always better for HI products. However, nonpertinent appeals have the same effect for HI and LI products.
<i>Hupfer &amp; Gardner (1971)</i>	Products	1. Importance measured on a series of eight concentric circles.	1. 20 Products 2. 20 Issues		Issues more important than products. —Facial tissues least important —Automobiles most important
<i>Korgaonkar &amp; Moschis (1982)</i>	Products	1. Product evaluation	1. High- or Low-Involvement Products 2. Performance 3. Expectation	1. HI product was radios LI product was soft drink 2. a) Good or bad sound b) Diluted or undiluted drink 3. Good versus bad message	Interaction Effect: For the HI product the performance evaluation is in line with prior expectations (assimilation). For the LI product the effects are exactly opposite (contrast).
<i>Krugman (1962)</i>	Advertising	1. Recall of ad	1. Position of ad in a series		Ads presented first and last were remembered better than those in a middle position.
<i>Krugman (1967)</i>	Advertising	1. Kinds of thoughts that came to mind (Scale 1-5)	1. Involvement: High or Low	1. —Medium: TV or print —Product: margarine vs airline —Expensiveness of print —Interest value —personalities vs. dollars —TV —variety show —press interview —Instructions —editorial purpose —advertising purpose	Involvement with advertising tends to be higher for magazines than for television with high-involvement products. No difference with low-involvement products.
<i>Lastovicka (1979)</i>	Products Situations	1. Acquisition Behavior (Scale 1-5)	1. Products in situations 2. Individual differences	1. —Wine for self or family —Wine for gift —Toothpaste for self —Auto for self —Bread for self or family —Lightbulbs for home —Stereo for home 2. —Demographic characteristics —Experience, knowledge	Most people reported some extended problem-solving behavior for most product-situation scenarios. Prior experience explains some variance in acquisition behavior.
<i>Petty &amp; Cacioppo (1979)</i>	Communication	1. Cognitive responses 2. Attitudes	1. Message direction —proattitudinal —counterattitudinal 2. Issue involvement —personally affected —not personally affected 2nd Experiment 1. Argument quality 2. Issue involvement	2. Communication concerning coed visitation hours a) own school vs. b) other school  1. a) Strong version b) Weak version 2. As above	—Involvement and message interaction. Under HI, subjects generated more favourable thoughts and fewer counter arguments to the proattitudinal advocacy than to the counterattitudinal advocacy. Under LI, neither the number of favourable thoughts nor the number of counterarguments was affected by message direction. —Significant interactions between involvement and argument quality —HI subjects generated more favourable thoughts and fewer counter arguments to the strong rather than weak arguments; under LI, neither favourable

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Study	Context	Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	Operationalization	Findings
					thoughts nor counter arguments were affected by the argument quality manipulation.
Petty, Cacioppo & Goldman (1981)	Communication	1. Attitudes	1. Personal involvement 2. Source expertise 3. Argument quality	1. a) HI changes affect them b) LI changes do not affect them 2. a) Low expertise report prepared by high school student b) High expertise report prepared by professor of education 3. a) Strong — statistical data b) Weak — opinions	Interactions of the personal involvement manipulation with argument quality & expertise manipulation revealed that under high relevance, attitudes were influenced primarily by the quality of the arguments in the message, whereas under low relevance, attitudes were influenced primarily by the expertise of the source.
Preston (1970)	Advertising	1. Degree of brand differentiation 2. Brand substitutability	TV ads Magazine ads		TV presents more ads for products which have brands that are <i>difficult</i> to differentiate and are highly substitutable, whereas magazines carry ads for brands that are <i>easy</i> to differentiate and are highly substitutable.
Swinyard & Coney (1978)	Advertising	1. Recall 2. Voting intentions 3. Attitudes	1. Involvement 2. Personal contact — Yes — No 3. Number of direct mailings 0, 1, 2, 4	1. a) HI — U.S. Senate race b) LI — local race for county treasurer	Interaction between involvement and number of mailings for voting intentions. — Responses to advertising were observed in this study to be powerful for the low-level race and insignificant for the high-level race.
Traylor (1981)	Products	1. Correlation between commitment and product involvement.	1. Product involvement 2. Brand commitment	1. Degree to which product was important to purchaser 2. How committed are you to purchasing your favourite brand of each product. (10 point scales)	Tendency for the products rated as LI to show a + relationship and the product rated as HI to show no relationship between involvement and brand commitment.
Tyebjee (1979)	Products	1. Choice time	1. Product class involvement 2. Brand attitudes 3. Brand preference	1. Seven questions: — Consumption levels — Perceived product differentiation — Perceived image — Knowledge level — Interest in information — Attitude toward consumption — Brand awareness (unaided recall) 2. Evaluation of brand Confidence in evaluation Familiarity with brand (scales) 3. Brand preference (scales)	Involvement in the decision did not significantly influence choice time.
Weinstein, Appel & Weinstein (1980)	Advertising	1. Beta-wave activity in brain 2. Brand recall	Type of Media: Magazines Television		— Magazine ads generate more brain-wave activity in the <i>beta</i> -range than the television ads. — Relative to TV, magazine ads generate more left-brain activity. — Advertising that produces more brain-wave activity produces more recall, regardless of media.
Wright (1973)	Advertising	1. Cognitive responses 2. Attitudinal acceptance of message 3. Retention 4. Importance of thoughts 5. Perceived origin of thoughts 6. Buying intentions	1. Type of media 2. Involvement	1. a) Print b) Audio 2. a) High — going to make a decision about product b) Low — no decision to be made	— High involvement increases number of counter arguments, especially for print ads. — Low involvement elicits more source derogation. — The print HI women were significantly more positive in their buying intentions than those in either broadcast groups ( $p < .05$ ), but not significantly different from the print, low-involvement group.
Zaichkowsky (1985)	Products	Score obtained	PII Scale	20-item bipolar adjective scale	Involvement scores for any product vary greatly for a demographically homogeneous group.



involvement, the conceptualization of the involvement construct as offered in Figure 1 is derived. The empirical studies are summarized in Table 1 with respect to the context of the study, the dependent and independent variables, operationalizations of involvement and major findings. The structure of the antecedents of involvement as inherent person factors, different physical characteristics or situational factors, allows researchers a format for manipulating involvement, especially in experimental designs, through changing situations or changing stimulus factors. Furthermore, the personal factors might be measured, and the different resulting involvement levels for any stimulus may be used as blocking factors or covariates to research questions on behaviors resulting from involvement (46).

### What We Know About Involvement

Involvement is a general construct which is more than just importance. Involvement also implies the emotional or ego aspects of the early work of Sherif and Cantril (36). The involvement construct is motivating in nature. When we are involved, we pay attention, perceive importance and behave in a different manner than when we are not involved. With respect to advertising, 1) consumers respond differently to the same message due to their inherent characteristics (19, 20), 2) when consumers are more involved with a message they give more counter-arguments (43), and 3) consumers use different message cues to form evaluations depending upon how involved they are with the topic. Under high involvement, attitudes were influenced by the quality of the arguments in the message, whereas under low involvement, attitudes were primarily influenced by the expertise of the source (26, 27). With respect to products, consumers perceive the same product differently (24, 45, 46). Finally, important purchase situations can raise the level of involvement with the act of purchase for a low-involvement product (5).

### What We Think We Know About Involvement

While the antecedents of involvement might be identified, many studies suffer from confounding effects. For example, certain types of advertising appeals (e.g., informational versus non-informational) seem to be confounded with different types of products. Therefore, before we can definitely say that certain types of appeals are better for certain types of products, the same product must be tested under different appeals. Many other research findings need to be replicated or expanded.

- 1) Informational advertising appeals are more effective for highly differentiated products (30). This study confounds the individual's

inherent perceived importance of the product class with inherent characteristics of the product. Therefore we do not know if results were due to the person characteristics or the product characteristics. A replication is needed where the products are categorized only on the basis of degree of actual differentiation among brands.

- 2) More expensive products are not necessarily more involving (16). While this may be true in the specific case, there might be an overall positive correlation between price of a product and involvement. The price might also be related to degree of product complexity or differentiation and hence involvement. A study across various products and various people is needed to address this issue.
- 3) There is no systematic relationship between product involvement and brand commitment or brand loyalty (38). This study found a positive relationship for some products and not for others. The positive correlations seem to be found in frequently purchased brand goods but not for durable products. A replication is needed which refines the measures of product involvement and brand commitment.
- 4) Negative information is more impactful when one has low involvement with a product than when one is highly involved (18). Involvement is manipulated by different products. A replication is needed using the same product and different messages.
- 5) There is no relationship between decision time and involvement with the product category (39). This study might be replicated outside of the laboratory in a field setting. The factors of brand loyalty, product use and objective knowledge might be measured, along with involvement, and used as covariates to the study.

Another interesting approach to the study of involvement with advertisements, products or purchase decisions might be in-depth interviews. On a one-to-one basis, why is a person highly involved with a particular product or purchase situation? What reasons are overtly given for the value a certain product holds? Are these elicited reasons similar across individuals? Can we take these given reasons and transform them into advertising copy which becomes relevant to a wider group of people and hence increases involvement?

### Implications for Theory

While this review has captured the antecedents of involvement, very little is learned about the *why* or



the processes underlying involvement. Researchers need to answer complex questions such as:

- 1) If one has high interest in a product category, does that mean that one will automatically be involved with all messages for that product category? The selective perception of advertising due to involvement has not yet been investigated.

Perhaps a study which *a priori* measures base involvement levels then exposes subjects to various ads, in various media, and measures not only recall of ads but recall of content over time would be a reasonable indicator of the relationship of product involvement and ad perception.

- 2) Is trial really the main source of information when one has low involvement with a product class (32)? This proposition has interesting implications when coupled with the findings that advertising shows stronger influences for low-involvement states (33).

Perhaps the advertising is essential for new brands and/or to create awareness among new customers. This advertising could induce the desired behavior for the first purchase. After the first purchase, the actual product experience might overpower any effects from advertising. This scenario may or may not hold over various product classes. It would be interesting to investigate differences in advertising effectiveness between product categories having many or few attribute distinctions. Conversely, the product could be held constant, but we could look at differences in ad effectiveness and effect of product trial between subjects perceiving few and subjects perceiving many product distinctions.

A more sophisticated model and theoretical framework might be needed, as the presented one is very limited. Perhaps a causal modeling approach to theory development might be applied which depicts the antecedent factors, involvement as the intervening latent variable and the consequent resulting behaviors as dependent variables (1). A separate model for advertising, products and purchase decisions could be developed outlining the structural relations among the constructs.

Elaborated involvement theories such as Greenwald and Leavitt (9), Gardner, Mitchell and Russo (8), or Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann (29), which focus on internal processes that occur during exposure to the ad, perhaps offer greater insight as to why certain messages are more effective than others under certain conditions. Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann (29) proposed the peripheral route to persuasion or the low-involvement model as marked by a low amount of processing attention. Thus, attitudes are changed

without active thinking about the object and its attributes. More recently, Gardner, Mitchell and Russo (8) suggested a two-factor model of attention and strategy to study involvement processes. The low-involvement model implies low attention and nonbrand evaluation strategy, whereas high involvement implies high attention and brand-based evaluation. Other researchers (11, 40) offer the framework for an affective versus cognitive orientation which expands on the low- versus high-involvement model. In these models, some products are more conducive to emotional advertising appeals than others.

### Implications for Advertising Practitioners

Involvement with advertising varies across people, products and situations (34). The goal of the advertiser is to structure the message so the receiver will attend, comprehend and yield to the message. The importance of understanding the involvement concept for advertisers lies in their ability to understand 1) why and when an ad might be effective for those individuals who *have* low involvement with the product they are promoting, 2) how to best advertise to consumers who have high involvement with their product class and 3) how to tailor their advertising message for different product categories.

To effectively deal with these issues, advertisers should determine 1) whether their product is perceived to be an overall high- or low-involvement product class as determined by inherent personal factors of the consumer, 2) decide how much their brand differs from competitors (ability to create higher involvement) and 3) decide whether their product can be subjected to situational factors (ability to temporarily increase involvement).

If the product scores low on all these points, perhaps the transformational advertising appeals (42) are better suited to the product. We might expect beer and colas to fall into this category. On the other hand, if the product can be truly distinguished from its competitors by distinct product attributes and/or situational influences, then the advertiser might be better off to capitalize on these to raise the level of involvement. The distinguishing features should be real and verifiable so as not to induce counter-arguments by the consumer. Products as mundane as tissues are subject to situational and product differences (i.e., advertising three-ply versus two-ply tissues for extra use and strength, especially when one has a cold). The product differences are real, easy to understand and the situation certainly lends itself to the product category. Here we may be able to increase involvement with the product so that the consumer actively searches for three-ply tissues, especially when under the influence of a cold.



In summary, the construct of involvement is of interest to academicians and practitioners alike. A systematic research stream which isolates and measures the impact of the antecedents on involvement levels would be a major step in clearly understanding how advertisers might use this concept for more effective communication strategies.

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