

Consumer Involvement

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Abstract:

Involvement is a motivational variable in consumer behavior. It can be used to describe the level of consumer interest, search, or complex decision making in the marketplace. This article presents a brief history of the origins of involvement and different views on its measurement in the marketing literature.

Keywords: Involvement, measuring involvement, motivation, enduring involvement, ego involvement, consumer interest

Consumer Involvement

Involvement is a motivational variable in consumer behavior and can be defined as “A person’s perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values and interests” (Zaichkowsky 1985, 1986). Involvement is used to describe the level of consumer interest, search, or complex decision making toward an object. The object of involvement may be a product, service, a situation, or an advertisement. Low involvement implies inertia, and high involvement implies a great deal of activation and it is found to influence consumer decision making and interactive communications. A consumer’s level of involvement can be used as a segmenting variable to further target the market by marketing managers.

The history of the term involvement in the marketing literature has two major roots: one in the advertising research literature (Krugman 1965, 1967) and the other in the consumer behavior literature (Howard and Sheth 1969). In applying learning theory to TV copy testing, Krugman (1965) found that when a series of ads were presented, those presented first and last were better remembered than those ads in the middle of the series. This finding showed the same primacy and recency effects found by Hoveland (1957) in the learning of non-ego involving material. Krugman hypothesized what advertising and non-ego involving material had in common were low levels of 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.

Consumer involvement in the marketing and consumer behavior literature grew out of the realization that a great deal of consumer behavior does not involve extensive search for information or a comprehensive evaluation of choice alternatives (Olshavsky and Granbois 1979). The consumer makes dozens of mundane decisions and choices each day and it is inappropriate to assume consumers actively process and think about each decision (Kassarjian 1978). In this

domain, many studies looked at the act of purchase, in addition to the product category itself, and determined the situations of purchase were highly influential in determining the level of consumer decision making activity (Clarke and Belk 1978).

Because involvement was discussed in terms of products, advertisements, and purchase situations, early quantitative studies used various manipulations or single item measures and outcomes to represent and capture the concept. In a response to the plethora of definitions and measures, Zaichkowsky (1985) proposed a single definition and semantic differential scale to be used across all domains to capture the abstract concept of involvement on one dimension. Laurent and Kapferer (1985), on the other hand, proposed a measurement of product involvement which captured five facets or dimensions of product involvement: personal interest, importance of negative consequences, subjective probability of mispurchase, pleasure value and sign value. These two studies represented the beginning of a long debate on how best to measure involvement.

It was clear that involvement was not only cognitive, but could be emotional in nature (see central and peripheral routes to persuasion: this volume entry XXXXX) (Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann 1983). The original Zaichkowsky Personal Involvement Inventory (PII) was later reduced to 10 items (Zaichkowsky 1994) which better represented a balance of cognitive and emotional involvement items. This Revised PII fitted in well with the idea that there are four quadrants in consumer behavior research: low and high involvement on one axis and emotional and cognitive involvement on the other (Vaughn 1988).

In recent years the research literature indicates the concept of consumer involvement is widely embraced across a multiple of disciplines from agriculture (e.g., Verbeke and Vackier 2004) to information systems (e.g., Koufaris 2002). The role of involvement in consumer behavior has been so well accepted that it has been completely incorporated in the field and no textbook in consumer behavior seems complete without a discussion of the topic.

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