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## CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT<sup>①</sup>—ITS MEANING, ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES

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Consumer involvement is an important mediator of consumer behaviour. The level of consumer involvement affects the nature and complexity of consumer decision making process in terms of its sequencing and extensiveness. As consumer involvement moves from low to high, the decision making process varies from habitual/limited to extensive problem solving. But the term involvement has nuances in its meaning as different researchers have defined it differently to suit their own domains of researches. This paper provides dichotomous views on involvement i.e., mentalistic and behavioural views. Adopting the mentalistic view, the authors posit the involvement as an inner state mental variable and examine its antecedents and consequences.

Effective marketing strategy formulation calls for recognition of differences in both nature and complexity of consumers' decision making process for different products. Various personal, socio-cultural and product related factors influence, shape and activate these processes. But the influence of these factors on consumer decision process is not direct. Consumer involvement, i.e., perceived personal relevance of the product, mediates the effects, and determines the nature and complexity of the process in terms of its sequencing and extensiveness. As consumer involvement moves from low to high, the process becomes more complex, and varies from habitual, limited to extended problem solving. Differences in the consumer decision making process get manifested in the nature and extent of information search and processing as well as in purchase and post-purchase behaviours. As a mediator of consumer behaviour, it holds immense importance and entails several significant policy implications for the marketers.

The present paper makes an attempt to discuss as to what consumer involvement is, and what its possible antecedents are and how it affects consumer decision making process. The paper, side by side, spells out its implications for marketing strategy formulation.

So far as the outline of this paper is concerned, it first discusses the definitional aspect of involvement. Analysis of different views concerning contents and contextual position of involvement is attempted so as to evolve a consumer involvement concept which is separate from its causes and effects. A discussion of various antecedents and consequences follows

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along with the types of involvement. This provides a base to generate a model of consumer involvement and identify its marketing implications.

### **Consumer Involvement: Meaning and Nature**

Research on consumer involvement goes back to "Social Judgement Theory" developed by Sherif and his colleagues (e.g. Sherif and Cantril 1947; Sherif and Hovland 1961; Sherif et al. 1965). According to this theory, attitude is assumed to be reflected by latitudes of acceptance, rejection and non-commitment. The probability of attitude change as a result of persuasive communications depends upon the width of three attitude latitudes, which is assumed to be affected by the individual's level of ego involvement with the issue. Ego involvement, a central concept of this theory, refers to the relationship between an individual's values (domain of ego) and an issue or object under consideration. Involvement is posited to increase the latitudes of rejection and, therefore, the major consequence of heightened involvement is increased resistance to persuasion.

Herbert E. Krugman (1965) was the pioneer researcher who applied the involvement concept to the field of consumer behaviour. He analysed the mediating role and effects of personal involvement on the temporal pattern of processing of incoming information message. He determined personal involvement as conscious "bridging experiences" or connections or personal references per minute that the viewer makes between his own life and the stimulus. He hypothesized that the level of personal involvement affects the nature of information processing and it differs under the conditions of low and high involvement. Under low involvement conditions, one experiences gradual shifts in perceptual structure, aided by repetition and followed at time by attitude change. Under high involvement, on the other hand, one goes through the classic, more dramatic, and more familiar conflict of ideas at the level of conscious opinion and attitude that precedes changes in the overt behaviour.

These ideas proposed by Krugman about differences in information processing dynamics under different involvement levels received considerable attention in the area of consumer behaviour. A number of researches were initiated that focused on the differences in information processing or brand choice development at the distinct levels of involvement. But the diverse nature and domain of these researches (e.g. Zaichkowsky 1984; Mitchell 1979; Antil 1984; Stone 1984) led to the nuances in the meaning of the term involvement. With the result that even today there exists no generally agreed upon definition of the term. Every researcher has tried to introduce his or her own definition of the term involvement which differs to varying degrees from those previously evolved. Diversity of the terms used such as involvement, consumer involvement, product involvement, ego involvement, enduring involvement and response involvement further adds to the confusion. A pot-pouri approach as adopted by some researchers by

combining different previously used definitions or part of them under single heading has been of little help in concept clarification.

Table 1 lists some of the definitions that have been proposed by different authors/researchers at different points of time. As can be observed, these definitions vary in terms of not only their conceptual level, but also scope of reference and time perspective included. While some definitions are theoretical, others are quite operational in nature and also situation specific, and hence are suitable only for restricted research problems.

TABLE 1 : Definitions of Involvement

Researcher (§)	Definition
Krugman (1966)	Personal involvement is the number of "connections", conscious bridging experiences or personal references per minute that the subject makes between the content of the persuasive stimulus and the content of his own life.
Day (1970)	Involvement may be thought of as the general level of interest in the object, or the centrality of the object to the person's ego structure.
Mitchell (1979)	Involvement is an individual level internal state variable that indicates the amount of arousal, interest or drive evoked by a particular stimulus or situation.
Bloch (1989)	Involvement is an unobservable state reflecting the amount of interest, arousal or emotional attachment evoked by a product in a particular individual.
Petty and Cacioppo (1981)	In high involvement situation, the persuasive message under consideration has a high degree of personal relevance to the recipient, in low involvement situations, the personal relevance of the message is rather trivial.
Zaichkowsky (1984)	Involvement is a person's perceived relevance of the object based on their interest, needs or values.
Antil (1984)	Involvement is the level of perceived personal importance and/or interest evoked by a stimulus (or stimuli) within a specific situation.
Hupfer and Gardner (1971)	The degree of ego involvement can be determined by the relative importance of an attitude that the individual holds regarding the object or activity.
Houston and Rothschild (1978)	Situational involvement- the ability of a situation to elicit from individuals concern for their behaviour in that situation. Enduring involvement- reflects the strength of the pre-existing relationship between an individual and the situation in which behaviour will occur. Response involvement- the complexity or extensiveness of cognitive and behavioural processes characterising the overall consumer decision process.
Mittal (1982)	Involvement is a motivational state of mind of a person with regard to an object or activity. It reveals itself as the level of interest in that object or activity.

Notwithstanding this heterogeneity, these definitions for the sake of understanding can be classified into two broad groups, viz., mentalistic and behavioural views.<sup>1</sup> Let us discuss each one of them in some details.

**(i) Mentalistic/Attitudinal View**

Related with thinking, the mentalistic or attitudinal view of involvement treats involvement as a cognitive based inner state mental variable and defines it as 'perceived personal relevance' of an object. This view finds its support in the definitions of Day (1970), Mitchell (1979), Bloch (1981), Hupfer and Gardner (1971), Houston and Rothschild (1978), Mittal (1982) and Zaichkowsky (1984). Involvement as personal relevance is seen to refer to the strength of psychological linkage between an individual and a stimulus object (Laaksonen 1994). The strength or intensity of involvement depends upon the centrality, dimensionality and relatedness of consumer's needs and values with the object related knowledge. More related the product knowledge is with the higher level mental constellations, higher is considered to be the consumer involvement with the product.

When viewed in terms of mentalistic approach, consumer involvement can be thought of as constituted of 'enduring' as well as 'evoked' involvement. Involvement based upon linkages of object with cognitive structure of individual is interactive and enduring in nature which reflects preliminary relationship between product and individual. This affects predisposition to respond. Evoked involvement, on the other hand, is situation specific and is more of temporal nature. When evoked by a stimulus or stimuli in specific situation, involvement refers to motivational state of an individual - also described as 'felt involvement'. This is determined in terms of the amount or state of perceived importance, interest, (emotional) attachment, arousal, drive, activation and/or motivation. The motivational state of involvement, a temporal description, is rather reactive in nature, created by exposure to a specific stimuli and has behaviour inducing capacity.

In nutshell, consumer involvement as per the mentalistic view is the base level of enduring relationship with the object plus the level of evoked involvement in a particular situation. Laaksonen (1994) posits that during high involvement towards products, behaviour is determined more by intra-individual product related cognition, i.e., psychological linkage between an individual and the product. On the other hand, during low involvement towards products, other determinants are supposed to be more dominant, i.e., situational and environmental characteristics.

**(ii) Behavioural View**

According to behavioural or process or response based conceptualization of involvement, it is not 'thinking' but 'doing' that constitutes involvement. Involvement as a characteristic of response pattern finds its support in the researches of Krugman (1965), Petty and Cacioppo (1981), Houston and Rothschild (1978), and Stone (1984). It refers to or is characterized by the nature of actualized response pattern specified in terms of either extensive-

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1. For an alternative classification approach, see Laaksonen (1994).

ness 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.

Thus, according to behaviouristic view, the degree of mental/physical effort devoted to advertising information processing or brand choice development indicates the level of involvement. Stone (1984) proposed measures such as the amount of time people put into shopping activity itself, and the amount of money budgeted for purchase as indicators of involvement. Similarly, as per Krugman's (1965) view, involvement level is measured by number of conscious mental connections made between stimulus object and individual. Simply speaking, the behaviouristic view implies that only when more extensive decision process and heightened information processing takes place can a high involvement situation exist. But the person having well developed knowledge structure about a product and committed to a brand may not go for extensive search and evaluation of information at the time of purchase. Does it then indicate low level of consumer involvement with the product? Besides, involvement is not a dichotomous but a continuous variable, ranging from low to high. Therefore, the idea that there would be a specific point which shifts the sequence of information processing seems arbitrary. It should also be noted that the usefulness of this view is restricted by the fact that the level of involvement cannot be determined before hand but only after the response has been actualized.

Not only that, positing involvement as an actualized response is in sharp contrast with the content and position initially given to involvement in the area of social psychology where it has always been viewed as predispositional state. Thus, mental and/or physical response pattern characterized by the response based definitions should be more properly treated as assumed effects of involvement and not as involvement itself (Laaksonen 1994). In Response - Response (R-R) research paradigm, it implies that involvement is an initial response (i.e., the first R) to the external stimulus such as product or advertisement which affects subsequent response (i.e., the latter R) in terms of intensity and extensiveness of mental or physical effort made by an individual in purchase process. Involvement is thus seen as an intervening response variable (rather than individual's internal process (o) in S-O-R paradigm) mediating the impact of stimulus on consumer choice process. Tyebjee (1979) and Sherrel and Shimp (1982) draw a distinction between

consumer involvement in a product and his/her involvement in those activities that relate to this product such as information search and acquisition.

From the above discussion, it is thus clear that consumer involvement is an inner state mediating variable which describes the nature of relationship between the object (say product) and the consumer. It has both intensity and direction. It is the state of motivation, interest or arousal, driven by both external stimulus (environmental and situational characteristics) and internal variables (needs, value, goals). Its consequences or outcomes are types of information searching (internal vs. external), processing and decision making.

### **Types of Consumer Involvement**

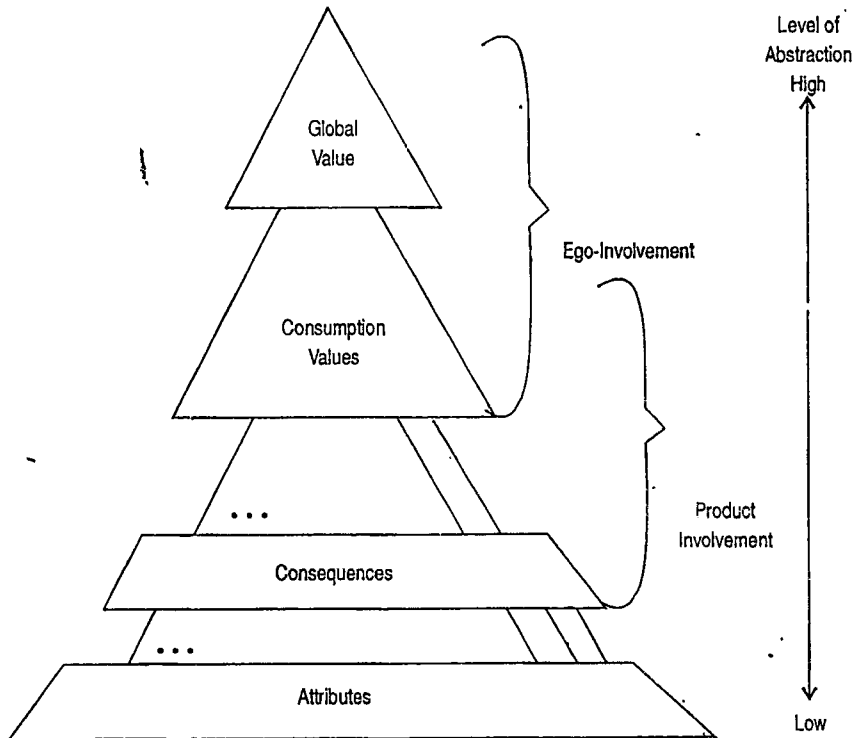
Involvement always has some direction. We talk about involvement in something, called as an object of involvement. Consumers differ not only in terms of the level of involvement (low vs. high), but also in terms of the type of involvement. Based on the object of involvement and other considerations, the literature review reveals several types of involvement like media involvement, message involvement, product involvement, and purchasing involvement for studying different facets of choice situation. Let's now discuss these types of involvement to make our understanding of the concept clearer and more concrete.

The idea of **media involvement** was evolved by Krugman (1965). He proposed that consumer involvement varies with the type of media used. Television is considered a low involvement medium as unknowingly and quite passively consumers receive nonverbal pictorial information in their right brain. The left brain, on the other hand, is engaged in cognitive processing of verbal information from print media, and is referred to as high involvement media. As a result, attitude change takes place prior to any behavioural change in the consumer in the case of latter.

Most commonly in the researches, the object of involvement has been product. Consumer involvement with product, i.e., **product involvement**, is a recognition that certain product classes may be more or less central to an individual's life, his attitudes about himself, his sense of identity and his relationship with the rest of the world (Traylor 1981). The emphasis is on the product itself and on the value or need satisfaction derived from owning, using or consuming that product (e.g. Bloch and Richins 1983). This type of product involvement is more enduring in nature as it is based upon linkage between product related cognitive structure and higher order mental constellations. In terms of means-end chain structure as presented in Figure-1 the number of dimensions of the cognitive structure is assumed to increase while moving from abstract to more concrete levels of product knowledge. Product involvement thus reflects the extent to which the consumption-related values direct the consequences associated with regard to the consumption-related values, i.e., the degree to which a person connects his ego-related global

values to consumption-related issues and activities.

Figure 1 : The Mean-end Chain Structure



Source: Laaksonen (1994).

Product involvement is less enduring and more of situational type when evoked by a stimulus or stimuli prevailing in the environmental situation. Quite often, it is two or more stimuli that in combination influence the level of involvement. For example, a commercial contains specific message, product/brand, spokesperson, laboratory setting, etc., all of which may affect consumer's level of involvement. But not all aspects of such a situation are the focus of individual's attention and arousal. Direction is an important aspect of involvement as it refers to the specification of focus of individual's attention and is aroused in terms of evoking stimuli. It seems then involvement is selective in nature with regard to its direction. The selectivity of direction of involvement can further be analysed at different levels of abstraction like at the level of product category, or of a specific brand or of purchasing a product for specific reason. It is, however, the specific goals of

an individual at a particular point of time which direct his attention and arousal and thus focus of involvement. These goals are derived from the individual's needs and motives. Once these goals are achieved, the level of involvement diminishes which implies temporal nature of involvement. Apart from product itself, product involvement thus includes the concept of situational involvement also.

Literature also reveals consumer involvement with certain activities and behaviours which are not product or situation specific. Engel and Blackwell (1982) viewed purchase decision and Slama and Taschian (1985) purchasing activities as the object of involvement, called as **purchasing involvement**. Besides, consumers are found involved with other sedentary activities like needle work.

Apart from object based classification, some more types of involvement have been talked about on the basis of their antecedent conditions. According to this notion, different typologies of involvement varying both in degree and nature are assumed to exist in different purchase situations. These typologies are inferred from the presence or absence and intensity of variables/antecedents working behind such situations.

Vaughan (1980), for instance, talked about **emotional involvement** as against **rational involvement** which is devoid of any emotional or pleasure aspect of consumption. **Personal** or **ego involvement** seems to exist when the product choice is perceived as a sign of oneself (Sherif and Cantril 1970). The commitment of a person in search for the right solution to a problem leads to **solution involvement** (Greenwald 1965). In their profiling approach to consumer involvement, Kapferer and Laurent (1986) have shown existence of ten types of product involvement in a market that range from minimal (low) involvement at the one extreme to total (high) involvement on the other extreme. In **minimal involvement**, the degree of various product related antecedents of involvement (i.e., interest, importance, perceived risk, pleasure and sign value) is found at the lowest; in the **total involvement**, the antecedents stand at the highest. In between, the antecedent profile is found to be uneven, i.e., high on some but low on other facets.

It is thus obvious that involvement is generally used with some qualifier. The knowledge of types of consumer involvement adds richness to the concept and makes it more comprehensive. Depending upon direction, each type of involvement has its own idiosyncratic results of state of being involved with. Besides, the unevenness of variables/antecedents create different types of situations, where each type of involvement level leads the consumer to specific modes of problem solving and communication behaviour.

### **Antecedents of Involvement**

Having discussed the concept of involvement, let us now discuss various factors or antecedents that determine the nature and intensity of involvement in the R-R paradigm. Though researchers differ in the identification of various antecedents and their relationship with involvement, various factors identi-



fied so far can be categorized into three broad groups (Bloch and Richins 1983; Houston and Rothschild 1978; Zaitchikowsky 1985):

- Personal factors : These are inherent needs, values or goals that motivate one towards the object.
- Physical factors : These are the characteristics of the object that cause differentiation and increase interest.
- Situational factors: : These are something that temporarily increase the relevance of or interest in the object.

The level of consumer involvement is derived from the complexity of consumer cognitive structure, i.e., the number of needs and values engaged (called dimensionality) and their importance (called centrality) to the consumer. More important are the needs and values for the product, higher is expected to be the consumer involvement with the product. Though this is true, the actual level of consumer involvement with the object (say product) is determined by its relatedness to an individual's cognitive structure. This is similar to the views held by Peter and Olson (1987) who observed: "the more closely connected product knowledge about attributes and functional consequences is to more abstract psychological and value consequences, the more involved the consumer is with the product or brand".

It is, therefore, necessary to point out here that the object itself is not involving, rather its characteristics or attributes being related to cognitive structure that make the product involving or uninvolving. Different researchers have identified different product related characteristics that determine the level of consumer involvement. The degree and type of risk perceived in the product, cost of the product, nature of the product, frequency of purchase and use of the product, familiarity with the product, perception of differences in the product, and pleasure and sign value of the product are some of the characteristics which have been suggested as the determinants of involvement. Some researchers consider even interest and importance of the product as important determinants. In this regard Kapferer and Laurent (1986), however, observe that the interest, perceived risk (with two sub-components; importance and probability), sign and pleasure value are the major factors that mediate the effects of a number of variables on involvement.

There exist differences among researchers in their opinion regarding the relationship of involvement with other concepts — here referred to as antecedents. For example, in some researches familiarity is viewed as an independent factor affecting consumer behaviour. While others view it as one of the antecedents affecting consumer's level of involvement directly in the form of product use and expertise knowledge about the product. Similarly, there is confusion regarding perceived differentiation of alternatives to be treated as antecedents or possible consequence of involvement. Despite the differences of opinion and confusion, it has, however, been held that consumers are highly involved in a purchase when it is expensive,

bought infrequently, risky and highly self-expressive. Typically the consumer does not know much about the product category and has much to learn (Kotler 1991).

Consumer involvement with media and message seems to be affected by the 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. As already mentioned, print media is considered high involvement media and television is described as a low involvement media. To be effective, message on television should be short and frequent with impressive spokesperson for and tone of message.

With the inclusion of the impact of situational factors, consumer involvement becomes a situation specific variable. The characteristics of situations like absence or presence of significant others, availability of products, usage situation, promotion and time pressure determine the level of consumer involvement. These situational influences create exigency for the consumer which temporarily increases the relevance of the product. This, however, fades out once the situation is over.

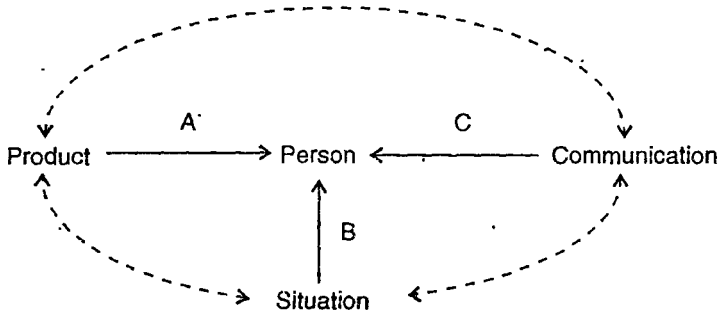
Though the involvement is created by exposure to a stimulus (product, communication or situation), it is the person's interpretation of the characteristics of the stimulus object which determine the level of involvement. Therefore, it is not the product per se that is involving, but the personal meaning or significance the person attributes to the characteristics of that product that results in involvement. The linkage 'A' with thick lines in Figure-2 represents the directional flow between product and person. Similarly, linkages 'B' and 'C' show relationships between person and specific circumstances (e.g. situation and communication). The latter includes both message and media. The dotted lines show the inter-relationships among the three stimuli as it is two or more stimuli that in combination influence the level of involvement. But it may once again be mentioned that it is the person's perception of interaction of stimuli rather than the characteristics of stimuli themselves that determine the level of involvement. It means that people might vary in the level of involvement they associate with a given stimulus.

### **Consequences of Involvement**

In this section, we shall concentrate on the behavioural indicators of involvement — labelled as consequences of involvement. Though different researchers have differently theorized about its effects, the fact remains that involvement affects the consumer's information seeking and processing, shopping efforts and post-purchase behaviours as related to a particular purchase decision. Table 2 exhibits several behavioural effects of low and high involvement situations.

In the case of personally important decision, consumers tend to engage in extensive search for information, thus causing their media/message

Figure 2 : The Inter-relationship of Stimuli



Source :Antil (1979)

involvement to go high. It means they become active seekers of information from alternative sources. As regards information processing behaviour, consumers follow the hierarchy of cognitive, affective and conative effects (i.e., high involvement hierarchy of think, feel and do). Whereas opposite is true in the low involvement situation where behaviour affects attitudes (i.e., low involvement learning hierarchy of think, do and feel). This happens because consumers passively or unknowingly receive information mainly from active media sources that bring about behaviour changes prior to any change in attitude.

TABLE 2 : Consumer Decision Process for High and Low Involvement Purchase Decisions

Stage	Low Involvement Purchase Decision	High Involvement Purchase Decision
Problem recognition	Trivial to minor	Important and personally meaningful
Information Search	Internal to limited search	External search
Alternative evaluation	Few alternatives evaluated	Few alternatives considered using many performance criteria
Store choice & purchase	One stop shopping where substitution is possible	Multiple store visits with substitution less likely
Post-purchase activities	Simple evaluation of performance	Extensive evaluation of performance, use and disposal.

Source : Hawkins, Best and Coney (1992).

At the time of purchase decision making, highly involved consumers compare and evaluate few brands but on multiple choice criteria. Also, they spend time in comparing various brands. As a result, consumers tend to differentiate among brands and develop an attitude for a brand, called brand commitment, which is later reflected in their brand loyalty behaviour. But the brand loyalty does not always precede the commitment to brand in the low

involvement case. Here brand loyalty is based upon brand familiarity which is in fact a spurious loyalty having tendency to change over time. Obviously, brand switching behaviour becomes a common phenomenon in the low involvement situation. Quite contrarily, the loyalty for a brand compels the highly involved consumer to visit a number of shops in search for the favoured brand. Not only that, consumers even after making purchases tend to have extensive evaluations of product performance, its uses and disposal. They also exhibit a tendency to care for the product and become opinion leaders for others.

In comparison to high involvement situation, though the decision processes are less elaborate and less complex in the case of low involvement, yet they are not altogether absent. What actually happens is that the level of involvement shifts the sequencing of communication impact or brand choice development. The consumers, therefore, do think about their purchases, but the reasons may not be that elaborate. Actually there are very few products which consumers buy stochastically — having no prior thought about them. Moreover, most products elicit moderate involvement from the consumers that makes extensive/limited problem solving dichotomy of Engel and Blackwell (1982) inapplicable in its true sense.

### **The Model of Consumer Involvement**

A model of consumer involvement for product purchase is presented in Figure-3. The model positions involvement in the middle as a reactive variable which mediates between its antecedents and consequences. In the R-R paradigm, involvement is evoked by the interaction of various variables grouped as personal, physical and situational factors. In the high involvement situation, the interacting effects of situational factors are supposed to be less because rich cognitive structures underlie such high involvement products. On the other hand, when involvement is on the lower side, a consumer may more readily rely on extrinsic characteristics produced by various situational factors other than product itself. In each case, however, the object (both product and situation) itself is not involving. It is rather the consumer's interpretation of object's characteristics that determine the level of consumer involvement with the products. Consumer's interpretations are based upon their needs, values and goals. Because of the difficulties involved in their direct measurement, the model proposes the use of consumer demographics and lifestyle characteristics, as surrogates for consumer's needs, values and goals.

The interaction of various antecedents affects consumer involvement which is expressed in terms of interest, motivation, relevance or aroused feelings. This motivated state of an individual in turn affects his/her decision processes from pre-purchase to post-purchase behaviours, though differently for different involvement situations.

## **Marketing Implications**

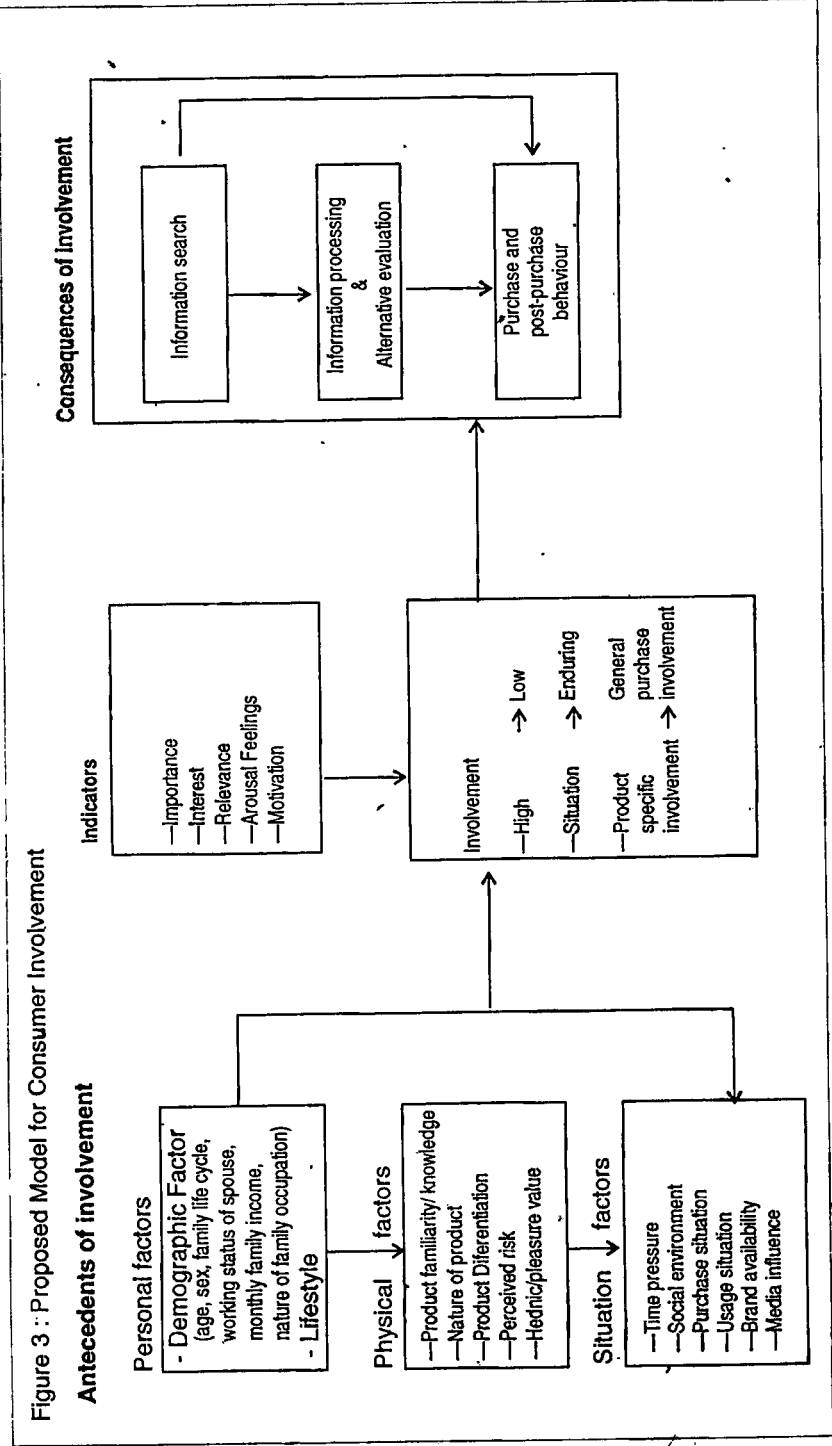
Many strategic and managerial implications follow from consumer involvement analysis. Communication is one area where knowledge about level of consumer involvement can be of great use in deciding about the media type and tone as well as about the length and degree of repetition of message. Since the consumers in low involvement situation are reactive and not active in information search, the repeated short duration commercials emphasizing key points in visual symbols can help to generate the desired consumer response. The copy of message for the high involvement product, on the other hand, should emphasize upon various attributes of the product so as to facilitate consumers' learning of the product.

Keeping in view the consumers' media habits in different involvement situations, marketer can decide as to which type of media would be the most suitable for a given product. The active media like television and radio are the suggested carriers of information for low involvement products. For providing detailed information in the case of high involvement products, print media like magazines and newspapers are the most appropriate modes.

Further, the knowledge of antecedent conditions affecting consumer involvement with the product can be utilized by the marketers in determining the tone and length of the message. As the different products are differently involved for different reasons, nature of relationship between a target and a product category differs from product to product. The consumer involvement profiles as developed for different products by Kapferer and Laurent (1986) reveal that excepting the extreme cases of low and high involvements, most products have involvement profiles with uneven levels of various variables. The unevenness of variables means that consumers' perceptions are low on some but high on other variables, thus creating specific buying situations for the consumer. The study by Kapferer and Laurent (1986), for instance, showed greater perceptions of pleasure and sign value existing in the purchase of perfumes as against high performance expectations underlying the purchase of dishwashing liquid and detergents. It is, therefore, suggested that marketers and advertisers develop consumer involvement profiles for their products so as to be able to identify promotion appeals. This can also help in enhancing consumer involvement in the respective product categories.

Brand switching behaviour is the wide-spread phenomenon in low involvement products. Marketers in such situations should use gift coupons, bargain sales etc., as a part of their promotion strategy. They should take all possible care to avoid out of stock position and try to capture shelf space. The worries of the marketers of high involvement products are also not less serious. They need to go in for innovations and maintain high quality standards so as to ensure high levels of consumer involvement in their products even in the changed situations.

Consumer involvement — a relatively new concept — has very gainfully



Adapted from Engel and Blackwell (1982), Peter and Olson (1987).

been employed by the marketers in other countries for acquiring better understanding of their consumers in relation to their products and devising appropriate marketing strategies. It is, however, yet to be seen as to how far consumer involvement theory finds its acceptance and applications among Indian marketers in developing marketing strategies to combat the challenges of liberalization and globalisation.

### Conclusions

This paper has been an attempt to provide a conceptual view of consumer involvement in terms of its nature, antecedents and consequences. Consumer involvement has been proposed as perceived personal relevance of an object to the consumers based upon their needs, values and goals. Besides intensity (i.e., high or low involvement), direction of involvement is an important aspect as consumers are found involved with product, message, media, situation or some activity.

Unlike 'issue involvement' proposed in social judgement theory, consumer involvement with most of the objects is less of enduring nature and more of situational type. Situational factors appear to play an important role and their inclusion in the conceptualization of involvement provides a much wider perspective to the construct. Depending upon the weightage assigned to the situational factors, consumer involvement is determined either as an interaction between person and product specific factors, or as an interaction between person, product and situation specific factors.

In any case, involvement is a consumer defined phenomenon and not object (say product) defined. It is the consumer's interpretation of various object related characteristics that determine involvement. Various object related characteristics only provide the stimulus or reasons for being involved with the object. So when we talk of high or low involvement products, we mean homogeneous perceptions of the consumers about that product which make them high/low involving and not the product itself.

When evoked by stimulus or stimuli, consumer involvement affects various aspects of consumer decision process such as information search and processing, decision making, and purchase and post-purchase behaviours at both the cognitive and overt levels. Theoretically as well as empirically, these effects have been found to be different in terms of their sequencing and extensiveness for different involvement situations. These behavioural differences entail useful implications for adjustments in marketing strategies to elicit desired consumer responses.

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