**Consumer Involvement**

Imagine this conversation between two shoppers at a car dealership:

**Consumer #1:** I want the one I read about in the latest issue of *Car and Driver* magazine. It has a six-cylinder turbo engine, a double-clutch transmission, a 90 stroke bore, and 10:1 compression ratio.

**Consumer #2:** I want a red one.

**Involvement** is “a person’s perceived relevance of the object based on their inherent needs, values, and interests.” Figure 5.3 shows that different factors may create involvement. These factors can be something about the person, something about the object, or something about the situation.
Figure 5.3 CONCEPTUALIZING INVOLVEMENT

**Antecedents of Involvement**
- **Person Factors**
  - needs
  - importance
  - interest
  - values
- **Object or Stimulus Factors**
  - differentiation of alternatives
  - source of communication
  - content of communication
- **Situational Factors**
  - purchase/use
  - occasion

**Involvement**
- with advertisements
- with products
- with purchase decisions

**Possible Results of Involvement**
- elicitation of counter arguments to ads
- effectiveness of ad to induce purchase
- relative importance of the product class
- perceived differences in product attributes
- preference for a particular brand
- influence of price on brand choice
- amount of information search
- time spent deliberating alternatives
- type of decision rule used in choice

**Involvement = f (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.
Our motivation to attain a goal increases our desire to acquire the products or services that we believe will satisfy it. However, as we see in the case of Consumer #2 at the car dealership, not everyone is motivated to the same extent. Involvement reflects our level of motivation to process information about a product or service we believe will help us to solve a problem or reach a goal.\textsuperscript{47} Think of a person’s degree of involvement as a continuum that ranges from absolute lack of interest in a marketing stimulus at one end to obsession at the other. \textit{Inertia} describes consumption at the low end of involvement, where we make decisions out of habit because we lack the motivation to consider alternatives. Table 5.1 shows one of the most widely used scales to assess level of involvement.

Depending on whether the need we want to satisfy is utilitarian or hedonic (see Chapter 1), as our involvement increases we think more about the product ("I’ve spent the last three days researching mortgage interest rates") or we experience a strong emotional response ("I get goose bumps when I imagine what my daughter will look like in that bridal gown").\textsuperscript{48} Not surprisingly, we tend to find higher levels of involvement in product categories that demand a big investment of money (like houses) or self-esteem (like clothing) and lower levels for mundane categories like household cleaners or hardware.\textsuperscript{49} Still, bear in mind that virtually anything can qualify as highly involving to some people—just ask a “tool guy” to talk about his passion for hammers or plumbing supplies.

When Apple put its first iPhone on sale, thousands of adoring iCultists around the country (including the mayor of Philadelphia) waited in front of Apple stores for days to be one of the first to buy the device—even though they could order the phone online and have it delivered in 3 days. Somehow that was too long to wait for a cell phone with a touchscreen. As one loyal consumer admitted, “If Apple made sliced bread, yeah, I’d buy it.”\textsuperscript{50}

\textbf{Cult products} such as Apple—or Hydrox, Harley-Davidson, Jones Soda, Chick-Fil-A, Manolo Blahnik designer shoes (think Carrie on \textit{Sex and the City}), and the Boston Red Sox—command fierce consumer loyalty, devotion, and maybe even worship by consumers.\textsuperscript{51} A large majority of consumers agree that they are willing to pay more for a brand when they feel a personal connection to the company.\textsuperscript{52}
### TABLE 5.1  A Scale to Measure Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To Me [Object to Be Judged] Is</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. important</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>unimportant*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. boring</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. relevant</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>irrelevant*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. exciting</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>unexciting*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. means nothing</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>means a lot to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. appealing</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>unappealing*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. fascinating</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>mundane*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. worthless</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>valuable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. involving</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>uninvolved*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. not needed</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>needed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Types of Involvement

A freelance software programmer named Winter is on a mission to visit every Starbucks in the world. To date he’s been to more than 12,000 outlets in numerous countries. When he learned that a Starbucks store in British Columbia was scheduled to close the next day, he spent $1,400 to fly there immediately just to order a cup of coffee in the nick of time. He chronicles his odyssey on his Web site, starbucks everywhere.net.  

OK, maybe Winter needs to get a life. Still, his passion demonstrates that involvement takes many forms. It can be cognitive, as when a “gearhead” is motivated to learn all he or she can about the latest specs of a new tablet, or emotional, as when the thought of a new Armani suit gives a clotheshorse the chills. What’s more, the act of buying the Armani may be highly involving for people who are passionately devoted to shopping.

To further complicate matters, advertisements such as those Nike or Adidas produce may themselves be involving for some reason (e.g., because they make us laugh or cry or inspire us to exercise harder). So, it seems that involvement is a fuzzy concept because it overlaps with other things and means different things to different people. Indeed, the
consensus is that there are actually several broad types of involvement we can relate to the product, the message, or the perceiver.57

Product Involvement

Product involvement is a consumer’s level of interest in a particular product. The more closely marketers can tie a brand to an individual, the higher the involvement they will create.

As a rule, product decisions are likely to be highly involving if the consumer believes there is a lot of perceived risk. This means the person believes there may be negative consequences if he or she chooses the wrong option. Risk is greater when a product is expensive or complicated. In some cases perceived risk also is a factor when others can see what we choose, and we may be embarrassed if we make the wrong choice.58 Remember that a product does not necessarily have to cost a fortune or be hard to use to be risky—for example, a college senior who is going to a job interview may obsess about sweating too much and give a lot of thought to the brand of deodorant he or she uses that morning.

Figure 5.4 lists five kinds of risk—including objective (e.g., physical danger) and subjective (e.g., social embarrassment) factors—as well as the products each type tends to affect. Perceived risk is less of a problem for consumers who have greater “risk capital,” because they have less to lose from a poor choice. For example, a highly self-confident person might worry less than a vulnerable, insecure person who chooses a brand that peers think isn’t cool.

Mass customization describes the personalization of products and services for individual customers at a mass-production price.59 This product involvement strategy applies to a wide range of products and services, from newspaper Web sites that allow readers to choose which sections of the paper they want to see, to Dell computers that you can configure, to Levi’s blue jeans that have a right leg one inch shorter than a left leg to fit an asymmetrical body (this is more common than you think).60 Mars Snackfood USA
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>MONETARY RISK</strong></th>
<th><strong>BUYERS MOST SENSITIVE TO RISK</strong></th>
<th><strong>PURCHASES MOST SUBJECT TO RISK</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Risk capital consists of money and property. Those with relatively little income and wealth are most vulnerable.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FUNCTIONAL RISK</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk capital consists of alternative means of performing the function or meeting the need. Practical consumers are most sensitive.</td>
<td>Products or services whose purchase and use requires the buyer's exclusive commitment are most sensitive.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PHYSICAL RISK</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk capital consists of physical vigor, health, and vitality. Those who are elderly, frail, or in ill health are most vulnerable.</td>
<td>Mechanical or electrical goods (such as vehicles or flammables), drugs and medical treatment, and food and beverages are most sensitive.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOCIAL RISK</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk capital consists of self-esteem and self-confidence. Those who are insecure and uncertain are most sensitive.</td>
<td>Socially visible or symbolic goods, such as clothes, jewelry, cars, homes, or sports equipment are most subject to social risk.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PSYCHOLOGICAL RISK</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk capital consists of affiliations and status. Those lacking self-respect or attractiveness to peers are most sensitive.</td>
<td>Expensive personal luxuries that may engender guilt, durables, and services whose use demands self-discipline or sacrifice are most sensitive.</td>
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introduced M&M’s Faces to encourage consumers to bond with its chocolates: At mymms.com, you can upload a photo and order a batch of M&Ms with a face and personal message printed on the candy shell.

When a consumer is highly involved with a specific product, this is the Holy Grail for marketers because it means he or she exhibits **brand loyalty**: Repeat purchasing behavior that reflects a conscious decision to continue buying the same brand.\(^\text{62}\) Note that this definition states that the consumer not only buys the brand on a regular basis, but that he or she also has a strong positive attitude toward it rather than simply buying it out of habit. In fact, we often find that a brand-loyal consumer has more than simply a positive attitude; frequently he or she is passionate about the product. “True-blue” users react more vehemently when a company alters, redesigns, or (God forbid) eliminates a favorite brand. One simple test to find out if you’re brand loyal: If the store is temporarily out of your favorite brand, will you buy a different product or hold off until you can get your first choice?

Although everyone wants to cultivate brand-loyal customers, there is a wrinkle that sometimes confounds even the most effective marketers. We often engage in **brand switching**, even if our current brand satisfies our needs. When researchers for British brewer Bass Export studied the U.S. beer market, they discovered that many drinkers have a repertoire of two to six favorite brands rather than one clear favorite.\(^\text{63}\)

Although consumers’ involvement levels with a product message vary, marketers do not have to simply sit back and hope for the best. If they are aware of some basic factors that increase or decrease attention, they can take steps to increase the likelihood that product information will get through. A marketer can boost a person’s motivation to process relevant information via one or more of the following techniques: \(^\text{71}\)

- **Use novel stimuli, such as unusual cinematography, sudden silences, or unexpected movements, in commercials.** When a British firm called Egg Banking introduced a credit card to the French market, its ad agency created unusual commercials to make people question their assumptions. One ad stated, “Cats always land on their paws,” and then two researchers in white lab coats dropped a kitten off a rooftop—never to see it again (animal rights activists were not amused).\(^\text{72}\)

- **Use prominent stimuli, such as loud music and fast action, to capture attention.** In print formats, larger ads increase attention. Also, viewers look longer at colored pictures than at black-and-white ones.

- **Include celebrity endorsers.** As we’ll see in Chapter 8, people process more information when it comes from someone they admire or at least know about, whether Michael Jordan, Bill Gates, or maybe even Kim Kardashian.
Encourage viewers to think about actually using the product. If a person can imagine this, he or she is more likely to want to obtain the real thing. Research shows that even subtle cues in an advertisement can encourage this mental rehearsal. One simple example is orienting an image of a cup with its handle to the right so that (for a right-handed person) it matches the dominant hand and facilitates mental stimulation.

Create spectacles where the message is itself a form of entertainment. In the early days of radio and television, ads literally were performances; show hosts integrated marketing messages into the episodes. Today live advertising that features attention-grabbing events called spectacles is making a comeback as marketers try harder and harder to captivate jaded consumers. Axe body products sponsored a posh Hamptons (New York) nightclub for the whole season; it became The Axe Lounge, sporting branding on the DJ booth and menu and Axe products in the restrooms.

Situational involvement
Situational involvement describes engagement with a store, Web site, or a location where people consume a product or service. One way to increase this kind of involvement is to personalize the messages shoppers receive at the time of purchase. For example, a few marketers tailor the recommendations they give shoppers in a store based on what they picked up from a shelf. At some Dunkin’ Donuts locations, a person who orders a morning coffee sees an ad at the cash register that pushes hash browns or breakfast sandwiches. Many retailers and event planners today focus on enhancing customers’ experiences in stores, dealerships, and stadiums. Industry insiders refer to this as a “butts-in-seats” strategy. That’s why some fans who attend Atlanta Falcons football games get visited by a cheerleader in the stands for a photo op, and also why Chrysler is ramping up its efforts to get people to test drive cars at dealerships and auto shows. As the head of the car company’s “experiential marketing unit” explained, “We know a physical experience with a vehicle is a great way to allow people to try it out and move up on their consideration list.”

Provide value that customers appreciate. Charmin bathroom tissue set up public toilets in Times Square that hordes of grateful visitors used. Thousands more people (evidently with time on their hands) visited the brand’s Web site to view the display.

Invent new media platforms to grab attention. Procter & Gamble printed trivia questions and answers on its Pringles snack chips with ink made of blue or red food coloring, and a company called Speaking Roses International patented a technology to laser-print words, images, or logos on flower petals. An Australian firm creates hand stamps that nightclubs use to identify paying customers; the stamps include logos or ad messages so partiers’ hands become an advertising platform.