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# The Involvement-Commitment Model: Theory and Implications

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An involvement-commitment model is proposed and empirically assessed with LISREL. The results are consistent with the theoretical predictions that ego involvement influences purchase involvement, which influences brand commitment. The model proposed and the composites representing the three stages appear reasonably valid. Managerial implications are derived from this model.

## Introduction

The concept of involvement has had a major impact on the study of consumer behavior. From its beginnings [40, 54] it has been incorporated into all or most consumer-behavior texts as an important new theory or perspective [20, 27, 63]. A number of researchers have been attempting to explicate the concept with a good deal of success [11, 43, 45, 56, 57, 60, 62]. There are still, however, some inconsistencies and ambiguities in the conceptualization of involvement theory, along with a sparsity of empirical work in the area. Further, the usefulness of this body of knowledge to managers has received little attention. For example, what are effects of greater involvement on brand commitment? If greater involvement leads to greater commitment, then marketers may wish to induce greater levels of involvement in consumers. What are the segmentation implications for individuals with differing levels of involvement, and how might this affect communication decisions? These and other questions await greater understanding of involvement theory.

The goals of this article include the following: 1) presentation of an involvement model, which is an extension and integration of the previous body of involvement theory, 2) incorporation of brand commitment within this conceptualization, 3)

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empirical assessment of the trait and nomological validity of the proposed model using longitudinal data on a frequently purchased product category, and 4) consideration of the managerial implications of the model.

### The Concept of Involvement

The number of popular terms to modify involvement is large: ego, product, brand, enduring, response, situation, low, high, and purchase. In our conceptualization, which is similar to others [27, 29, 50], we distinguish between two types of involvement: ego involvement and purchase involvement. Ego involvement may be defined as the importance of the product to the individual and to the individual's self-concept, values, and ego, while purchase involvement relates to the level of concern for, or interest in, the purchase process triggered by the need to consider a particular purchase [27, p. 536]. Both ego involvement and purchase involvement address forms of arousal or drive activation [45], and thus can be considered motivating variables [6].

Ego involvement is conceptually similar to enduring involvement that has been defined by Houston and Rothschild [29] and others [12, 50] as an ongoing concern for a product class. Richins and Bloch [50, p. 280] suggest that enduring involvement "is independent of purchase situations and is motivated by the degree to which the product relates to the self and/or the hedonic pleasure received from the product."

The concept of enduring involvement clearly has its roots in the work of Sherif and his associates on ego involvement [53, 54]. They defined the ego as a constellation of attitudes that form toward objects, persons, situations and groups. When any stimulus is related to the domain of the ego, ego involvement is said to exist. This view is similar to Greenwald's [26] definition of ego involvement, emphasizing self-concern and personal importance. Given the previous historical foundations of ego involvement and given its greater implicit clarity regarding the source of involvement, a return to this term seems useful and reasonable.

Our purchase involvement is similar to but more narrowly focused than Houston and Rothschild's [29] situational involvement, which deals with concern with a specific situation such as a purchase. Situational involvement seems a somewhat problematic term given that situational aspects have been narrowly defined [7], and they do not include physical aspects of the object [62]. Additionally, use of the term purchase involvement clearly differentiates our concept from message-response involvement [3], which addresses the involvement surrounding the processing of messages.

Purchase involvement is the outcome of an individual's interaction with the product and the purchase situation. Punj and Stewart [49] suggest that the most impressive consideration of involvement may evolve where involvement is viewed as an interaction of the task and the individual. This interaction need not be statistical interaction but could involve a dynamic model that stresses an interwoven structure [44].

Our conceptualization of involvement theory is drawn from the previously cited researchers but includes some divergent perspectives that will be presented after explaining the full model. We are proposing that the two involvement dimensions are causally linked as follows:

ego involvement → purchase involvement

To illustrate this two-step involvement process, we must first consider the antecedents of involvement. The antecedents of ego involvement have received little attention with the exception of Laurent and Kapferer's [43] work. From their research, they derived four antecedents for involvement (without distinguishing whether these antecedents affected situational or enduring): 1) product importance and perceived importance of the consequences of a mispurchase, 2) the subjective probability of a mispurchase, 3) the hedonic value of the product class, and 4) the symbolic or sign value of the product class.

Let us assume that a hypothetical consumer feels ego involved with soft drinks. Perhaps this ego involvement is due to the fact that he considers soft drinks to be important and meaningful to him because of the pleasure derived from their consumption (hedonic value) or because he believes his soft-drink consumption says something about who he is to others (symbolic value). Because he is ego involved with soft drinks, he will care more about his choice of soft drinks than a friend who does not think soft drinks are important. Thus his intrinsic concern about the product category turns to concern about the purchase and selection of his soft drinks, that is, purchase involvement. He feels that it is important to make the right choice because of his intrinsic involvement. Further, he may feel even greater purchase involvement because of the specific task or situation at hand (for example, he may wish to impress a friend). This additional extraneous variable, situation, is not explicitly modeled here.

### The Concept of Commitment

A term closely associated with involvement is brand commitment, which may be defined as an emotional or psychological attachment to a brand within a product class [42]. Brand commitment is similar to the construct of brand loyalty. Use of the term brand commitment rather than brand loyalty in this article is based on definitional issues. Review of the brand loyalty literature [31, 32, 35, 47] suggests there is still considerable debate as to its nature. The most accepted definition, however, appears to be the following [32]:

Brand loyalty is the biased (i.e., nonrandom) behavioral response (i.e., purchase), expressed over time by some decision making unit with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands and is a function of psychological (decision-making) evaluative processes (p. 80-81). As a result of this decision-making, evaluative process, the individual develops a degree of commitment to the brand(s) in question; he is "loyal." The concept of commitment provides an essential basis for distinguishing between brand loyalty and other forms of repeat purchasing behavior (p. 84).

Jacoby and Chestnut [32] suggest that brand loyalty has been viewed and measured as an attitudinal concept, a behavioral concept, and simultaneously a behavioral and attitudinal concept. The emphasis in this article is on attitudinal statements of commitment with no direct measures of behavior; thus, the construct of brand commitment most adequately represents the construct of interest here.

The close association between the concepts of involvement and commitment has led to some confusion in the literature. For example, Robertson [51] utilized Krugman's [40] notion of low involvement to discuss low-commitment consumer behavior, in which he defined commitment as the strength of the individual's belief

system with regard to a product or brand. Freedman's [24] perspective is helpful in making a distinction between these two concepts. He noted that involvement can refer to a particular position on a brand or an issue (i.e., commitment) or to a general level of interest or concern in an issue without reference to a specific position (i.e., involvement). This perspective is similar to the distinction made by Zaltman and Wallendorf [63].

The current theoretical perspectives on the involvement-commitment linkage vary. Some researchers view commitment as a component of a more encompassing involvement construct. For example, Lastovicka and Gardner [42], studying a number of products, identified three orthogonal components of involvement: 1) familiarity, 2) commitment, and 3) normative importance. Traylor [59] on the other hand, suggests that ego involvement and brand commitment are different but related constructs, making the same distinctions between them that we do.

Crosby and Taylor [19] suggest that a person will most likely become "involved" in an issue without yet taking a stand. Involvement results when important values of the person's self-image are engaged or made salient by a decision situation. Commitment results when these values, self-images, or important attitudes become cognitively linked to a particular stand or choice alternative. Thus, they suggest that involvement will most likely precede or lead to commitment.

### Proposed Involvement-Commitment Model

Drawing from the previous discussions, we propose the following model:

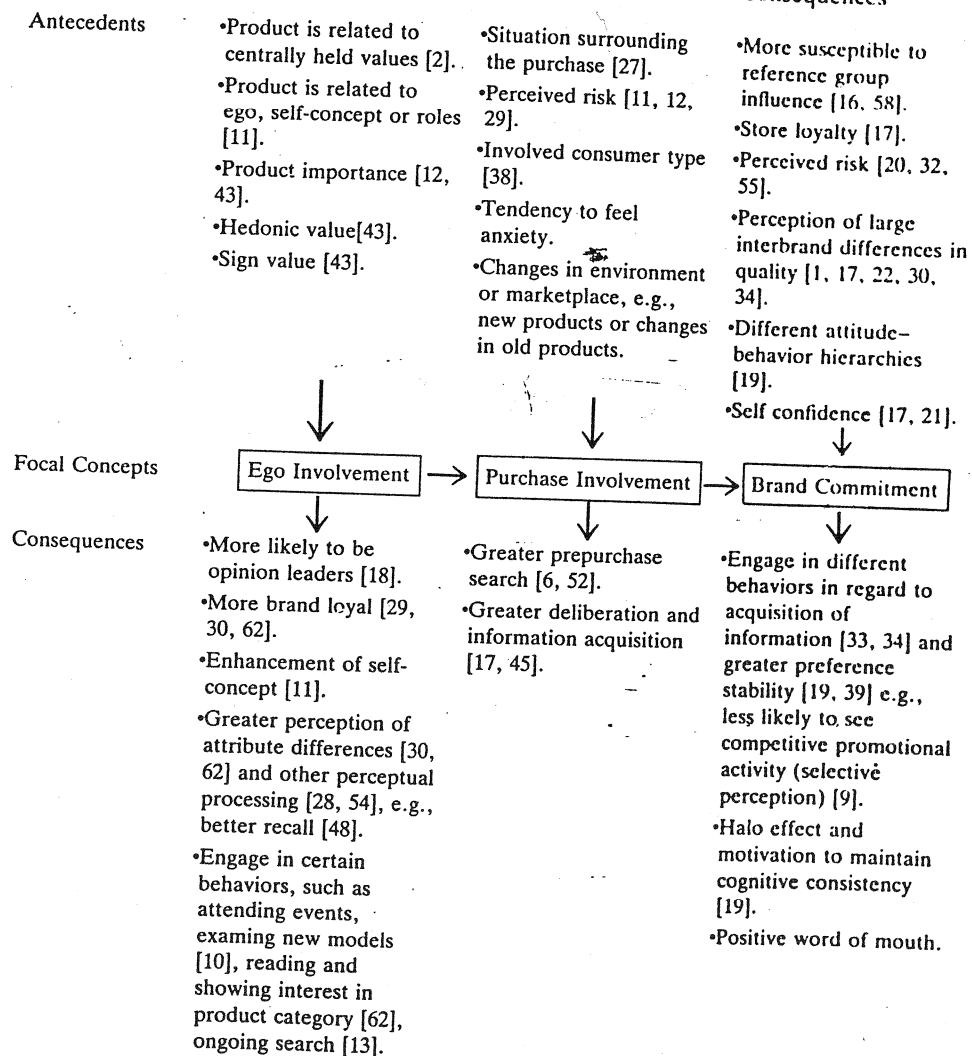
Ego Involvement → Purchase Involvement → Brand Commitment

Figure 1 presents our conceptualization of the involvement-commitment model. This figure also presents both postulated and verified antecedents and consequences of our three focal concepts [4]. There were however, several difficulties involved in establishing distinctive antecedents and consequences. First, the three concepts have been confused and not clearly distinguished by previous researchers. Further, some of the same effects might be caused by any one of the three constructs [50].

We noted earlier that our hypothetical consumer's ego involvement influenced his purchase involvement. His purchase involvement probably led to a more extensive decision-making process including greater deliberation and search [6, 45]. Once his selection is made, however, and assuming reasonable satisfaction, he will tend to be more brand committed. His psychological attachment to a brand will be stronger perhaps because of its hedonic value or its symbolic value for him. It would be difficult but not impossible to switch him to another brand. He will be brand committed but that does not prevent him from keeping abreast of other new brands in the marketplace since his ego involvement will cause him to have a continuing interest in the product category.

The major goal of this article is to establish construct validity for this model. Campbell [14] suggests the necessity in construct-validity research of establishing both trait and nomological validity. Trait validity attempts to establish whether the conceptualized constructs are truly distinctive from one another. In an initial attempt to establish distinctions, Richins and Bloch [50] conducted a longitudinal study of automobile purchasers. They were able to establish "differing temporal patterns of behaviors" with enduring involvement and situational involvement.

Figure 1. Involvement-Commitment Model with Antecedents and Consequences



Additionally, Arora [2] established construct validity for Houston and Rothschild's [29] situation involvement, enduring involvement, and response involvement. In the current study, the alternative hypothesis to be tested is:

H1: *Ego involvement, purchase involvement, and brand commitment are three distinctly different components of the involvement-commitment model.*

Once trait validity has been established through internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, then nomological validity is of interest. Nomological-validity investigations address the degree to which hypotheses derivable from theory are true. The following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: *Ego involvement will have a positive effect on purchase involvement.*

H3: *Purchase involvement will have a positive effect on brand commitment.*

We have postulated a positive relationship between ego involvement and purchase involvement. Although instances can be imagined in which purchase involvement would be high without a high degree of ego involvement (for example, the task may involve making a purchase for a special dinner), generally higher involvement with a product should generate higher involvement with the purchase. When an individual feels that a product is closely related to his or her self-concept, values, and ego, he or she will care more about the choice decision involving that product category. Selin [52] established this linkage when studying recreational choices in the only study we were able to locate that specifically examined this relationship.

The positive relationship we have postulated between purchase involvement and brand commitment has been previously suggested by both Crosby and Taylor [19] and Zaltman and Wallendorf [63], although Crosby and Taylor technically were discussing the linkage between ego involvement and commitment. Zaltman and Wallendorf propose that in cases where brands undergo little change in functional features, brand selection involvement will become brand loyalty due to repeated purchases of the same brand (p. 561). It is proposed that, when individuals are more concerned about their purchases within a product category, they will be inclined to establish strong preferences and develop brand loyalties more readily. Empirical evidence for this linkage comes from the positive linkage found between perceived risk, which is closely related to and may be a component of purchase involvement, and brand loyalty [20, 32]. In addition, Zaichkowsky [62] found a positive relationship between involvement (enduring or ego) and brand preferences, while Selin [52] found that purchase involvement positively influenced program loyalty in his study on recreational choices.

### *Comparison with Other Perspectives*

Although our perspectives derive from the previous conceptualizations of Houston and Rothschild [29] and Bloch and Richins [12], there are distinctions between our proposed model and theirs. In the Houston and Rothschild [29] S-O-R Model, situation and enduring involvement combine to elicit response involvement. "Response involvement refers to the complexity or extensiveness of cognitive and behavioral processes characterizing the overall consumer decision process" [29, p. 5]. It is not clear from their article how situation and enduring involvement combine, but Arora [2] attempted to assess the model empirically with a cross-sectional data set on university choice. He established the following linkages:

situational involvement → enduring involvement → response involvement

His study may be criticized from several perspectives. The lack of longitudinal data reduced his ability to assess directionality correctly. His directional assessment on situational involvement and enduring involvement is in direct opposition to our model. It was necessary for him to include correlated errors between each element to achieve an acceptable fit, which considerably reduces the interpretability of the results [25]. Additional concerns involve unusual or questionable operationalizations of the constructs and a small sample ( $N=96$ ). Clearly, additional assessments

of these constructs are needed. We should also note that our brand commitment is a much narrower construct than response involvement. That is, one type of response involvement is brand commitment.

In the Bloch and Richins [12] product-importance model, the enduring importance of the product has two influence links. First, it influences instrumental importance (i.e., amount at stake and importance of the purchase) that combines with uncertainty to form perceived risk. Perceived risk, then, influences situational involvement that, in turn, influences response involvement. In a separate influence link, enduring importance influences enduring involvement that leads to various ongoing responses. Thus, they visualize a different temporal pattern of responses from enduring involvement and situational involvement, which they validated in a well-designed longitudinal study of automobile purchasers [50]. Their conceptualizations are similar to ours with the exception of differing temporal-response patterns. We would suggest, however, that temporal patterns play a unique role with infrequently purchased products, such as automobiles, but not with frequently purchased products, such as soft drinks. Again, their operationalization of response involvement is different from ours with their focus on information gathering and dissemination and product care.

Laurent and Kapferer's [43] findings are fairly consistent with Bloch and Richin's [12] model and our perspectives. Although they did not identify which antecedents or facets of involvement related to enduring or situational involvement, this may be speculated upon. Consistent with Bloch and Richin's model and the antecedents and consequences of our constructs noted in Figure 1, risk importance and sign values should be relevant for both ego and purchase involvement, risk probability should be most relevant for purchase involvement, and pleasure value should be most relevant for ego involvement. Their findings on the consequences of these various facets are fairly consistent with the above interpretation and with Bloch and Richin's model. One difficulty, however, is that they failed to clearly distinguish the focal concept (involvement) from its antecedents (sources of involvement).

While acknowledging that brand commitment is only one operationalization of response involvement, we have noted one other major distinction between our model and the models discussed above. Both Houston and Rothschild's [29] and Bloch and Richin's [12] models suggest a direct impact of ego involvement on response involvement, while we hypothesize only an indirect effect. That is, we believe that commitment is the direct result of involvement related to the purchase act, which in turn is influenced by ego involvement. Only under rare occasions, such as receiving a gift, would the purchase act (and therefore purchase involvement) not intervene between ego involvement and brand commitment. This expected pattern would seem to be particularly true for frequently purchased products where the consumer must repeatedly engage in the purchase decision. Thus, this difference allows us to assess our model vis-à-vis other proposed models. The following hypothesis may be added to the previous three:

*H4: The effect of ego involvement on brand commitment will be mediated by purchase involvement.*

## Method

### *Subjects*

The 204 participants (approximately equal numbers of males and females) in this study were student volunteers enrolled in various undergraduate business courses at three western universities. They completed the questionnaire once early in the term and again one month later, thus providing a longitudinal assessment of the model.

### *Product Category*

This study dealt with soft-drink consumption. The primary target market for soft drinks is all individuals under 35, with an emphasis on those under 18. This group accounts for 70% of all soft-drink sales [22]. Thus, college sophomores and juniors seem to be an appropriate population for the topic area under study. Eighty-eight percent of the sample had consumed at least one soft drink in the previous week.

A frequently consumed nondurable was chosen rather than an infrequently consumed durable for several reasons. First, much of the definitional concern revolves around whether involvement resides with the products or with the consumer. The issue of involvement in marketing really began with a focus on so-called low-involvement products, (i.e., products causing minimal concern or arousal), but empirical studies have tended to focus on products that engender high involvement, such as automobiles [2, 10, 50] possibly because reactions may be more concrete and measurable. Thus, this study addresses involvement issues on a product generally considered to be less involving, based on the assumption that involvement lies within the individual, not necessarily the product. In addition, with a longitudinal study, it would be necessary to acquire observations at the appropriate place in the purchase sequence with a major purchase, while with a frequently purchased item, such precision would be difficult to achieve and is really not necessary given the continually reoccurring sequence of events in such a product category.

### *Measures*

The questionnaire included attitude-behavior questions and involvement questions for soft-drink consumption. The involvement items utilized consisted of Likert-like statements with 9-point scales (either agree-disagree or likely-unlikely). Response direction was varied on several of the items to reduce response bias.

Originally, a large number of items was generated through a thorough search of the literature. The items finally selected for inclusion in the questionnaire were drawn from a number of measures of involvement and brand loyalty [20, 41, 42]. The resulting scales, which appear to have face validity, are in Table 1.

### *Analysis Overview*

To assess the degree of internal consistency and convergent validity, the LISREL approach of confirmatory factor analysis was used [36]. To assess the proposed



Table 1. Items in the Major Constructs

Construct	Items
Ego involvement	I can make many connections or associations between my use of soft drinks and experiences in my life. The brands or types of soft drinks I use say a lot about who I am. My friends give me a hard time if I choose the wrong soft drink.
Purchase involvement	I am very concerned about what brands of soft drinks I purchase. I care a lot about what brands of soft drinks I consume. Generally choosing the right brands of soft drinks is important to me.
Brand commitment	If my preferred brand or type of soft drink were not available at the store, it would make little difference to me if I had to choose another brand. (reversed) I consider myself to be highly loyal to one brand of soft drink. When another brand is on sale, I will generally purchase it rather than my usual brand. (reversed)

causal linkages, LISREL VI was utilized [36]. Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesized relationship of ego involvement, purchase involvement, and brand commitment. In the figure, each construct ( $\eta_1$ ) is measured by three different items ( $y$ 's). The hypothesized relationships of the involvement elements are: Ego involvement affects purchase involvement directly ( $\beta_{21}$ ) and purchase involvement affects brand commitment ( $\beta_{32}$ ). There is only an indirect linkage between ego involvement and brand commitment ( $\beta_{31}$ ), not a direct influence.

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and ranges derived from the relevant scales. These numbers clearly indicate that there is considerable individual variation in the degree of involvement or commitment felt toward soft drinks. That is, even a product generally considered to generate low involvement can generate relatively high involvement for some people.

Figure 2 represents the structural equation model used for the LISREL tests of the causal hypotheses among the ego-involvement, purchase-involvement, and brand-commitment constructs. Initially, a model was estimated with all indicators of the three underlying constructs measured at time one. This procedure can only

Table 2. Statistics on Constructs

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Ego involvement	7.29	4.62	3-27
Purchase involvement	12.73	7.09	3-27
Brand commitment	11.90	7.01	3-27

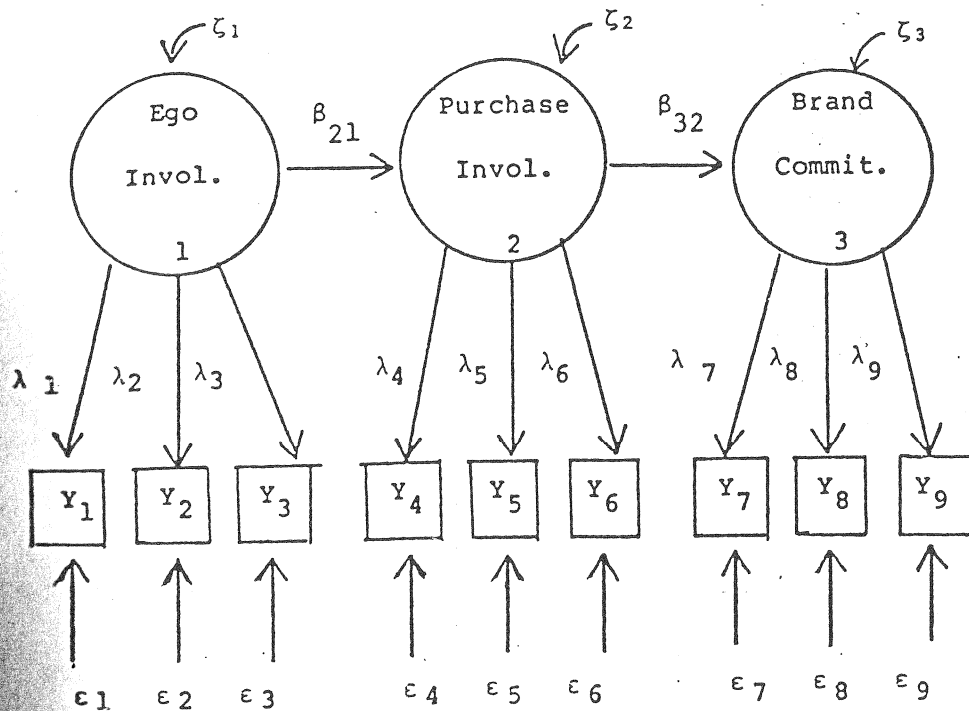


Figure 2. Structural Equation Model: Model 1—all measures at time one. Model 2—purchase-involvement and brand-commitment measures at time two. Model 3—brand-commitment measures at time two.

indicate a plausible causal relationship, however. Longitudinal data or experimental design can more directly address causality. Given that data were gathered at two points in time, two additional models were estimated to assess the causal relationships among the involvement constructs. The causal path between ego and purchase involvement was examined in a model that measured ego involvement at time one and purchase involvement and brand commitment at time two. A third model used time-one measures for ego and purchase involvement simultaneously with time-two measures for brand commitment. The use of longitudinal data in the LISREL analysis should increase the validity of our results.

### III: Trait Validity

Table 3 presents the standardized factor loadings,  $T$  values, reliabilities, and proportions of extracted variance for the constructs of the three models. The factor loadings on the factors and results in LISREL's modification indices (LISREL did not identify any additional paths between indicators and underlying constructs) indicate convergent validity of the involvement constructs. The measurement errors and structural disturbances were used to calculate reliability estimates of the constructs [61] and proportions of extracted variance [23]. As expected, these values are essentially identical across models (except for rounding error). Thus, H1 is supported: ego involvement, purchase involvement, and brand commitment are

Table 3. Measurement Model Results

Models	Standardized Factor Loadings	T Values <sup>a</sup>	Reliability	Proportion of Extracted Variance
<i>Model 1</i>				
Ego ( $\eta_1$ )			.57	.31
Y <sub>1</sub>	.460	—		
Y <sub>2</sub>	.536	4.147 <sup>b</sup>		
Y <sub>3</sub>	.662	4.222 <sup>b</sup>		
Purchase ( $\eta_2$ )			.83	.62
Y <sub>4</sub>	.852	—		
Y <sub>5</sub>	.765	11.303 <sup>b</sup>		
Y <sub>6</sub>	.750	11.074 <sup>b</sup>		
Brand ( $\eta_3$ )			.76	.52
Y <sub>7</sub>	.728	—		
Y <sub>8</sub>	.814	9.105 <sup>b</sup>		
Y <sub>9</sub>	.607	7.576 <sup>b</sup>		
<i>Model 2</i>				
Ego ( $\eta_1$ )			.57	.31
Y <sub>1</sub>	.463	—		
Y <sub>2</sub>	.512	4.160 <sup>b</sup>		
Y <sub>3</sub>	.685	4.303 <sup>b</sup>		
Purchase ( $\eta_2$ )			.83	.62
Y <sub>4</sub>	.780	—		
Y <sub>5</sub>	.779	10.559 <sup>b</sup>		
Y <sub>6</sub>	.810	10.829 <sup>b</sup>		
Brand ( $\eta_3$ )			.75	.51
Y <sub>7</sub>	.630	—		
Y <sub>8</sub>	.780	7.464 <sup>b</sup>		
Y <sub>9</sub>	.714	7.344 <sup>b</sup>		
<i>Model 3</i>				
Ego ( $\eta_1$ )			.57	.31
Y <sub>1</sub>	.460	—		
Y <sub>2</sub>	.539	4.113 <sup>b</sup>		
Y <sub>3</sub>	.659	4.154 <sup>b</sup>		
Purchase ( $\eta_2$ )			.84	.64
Y <sub>4</sub>	.847	—		
Y <sub>5</sub>	.786	11.375 <sup>b</sup>		
Y <sub>6</sub>	.740	10.752 <sup>b</sup>		
Brand ( $\eta_3$ )			.75	.51
Y <sub>7</sub>	.617	—		
Y <sub>8</sub>	.802	7.535 <sup>b</sup>		
Y <sub>9</sub>	.703	7.307 <sup>b</sup>		

<sup>a</sup>T values are not calculated for one indicator associated with each eta because they were set to 1 to run the program.

<sup>b</sup>significant at  $p \leq .05$ .

three distinctly different dimensions. Further, the scales developed seem to capture the dimensions adequately, although reliability is lower than desired with ego involvement. Low reliability ought to inflate the standard errors and, therefore, reduce the factor loadings. Even with a lower level of reliability, the factor loadings are high and statistically significant, thus implying that the measures are reasonably good indicators of their underlying constructs.

Table 4. Causal Model Results

Models	Standardized Path Coefficients	T Values	
<i>Model 1</i>			
$\beta_{21}$	.529	3.944 <sup>a</sup>	
$\beta_{32}$	.699	7.536 <sup>a</sup>	
Goodness of fit			.967
Chi Square			33.21
df			25
significance, $p =$			.126
<i>Model 2</i>			
$\beta_{21}$	.551	4.029 <sup>a</sup>	
$\beta_{32}$	.559	5.545 <sup>a</sup>	
Goodness of fit			.971
Chi Square			27.80
df			25
significance, $p =$			.317
<i>Model 3</i>			
$\beta_{21}$	.503	3.82 <sup>a</sup>	
$\beta_{32}$	.613	6.031 <sup>a</sup>	
Goodness of fit			.967
Chi Square			30.85
df			25
significance, $p =$			.194

<sup>a</sup>significance at  $p \leq .05$ .

### *H2 through H4: Nomological Validity*

Estimates of the causal path coefficients (betas) for all models are reported in Table 4, in addition to the goodness-of-fit findings. The causal path between ego involvement and purchase involvement is supported by the statistically significant  $\beta_{21}$  coefficient of .551 in Model 2. The  $\beta_{32}$  coefficient (.613) estimated in model 3 is equally strong evidence of the purchase-involvement-brand-commitment link. Goodness-of-fit indices of all three models are acceptable according to Bentler and Bonnett's [8] heuristic that model fits of less than .90 are inadequate. All  $p$  values for the models' chi squares exceed .10, thus implying the data adequately fit the models and that we can not reject the hypothesis of a good fit. The results from the LISREL analysis indicate that our proposed involvement model is valid, which provides support for H2 and H3. Ego involvement influences purchase involvement, which, in turn, influences brand commitment.

Further, when the path connecting ego involvement and brand commitment was estimated, as expected, it was low and nonsignificant, and the  $\beta_{21}$  and  $\beta_{32}$  coefficients remained essentially the same, implying lack of a substantial direct effect. This finding supports H4. See Table 5 for a summary of the results for the less constrained models.

### Discussion

An involvement-commitment model representing the integration of several theoretical thrusts was presented and empirically tested with LISREL. The involve-

Table 5. Results for the Less Constrained Causal Models<sup>a</sup>

Models	Standardized Path Coefficients	T Values
<i>Model 1</i>		
$\beta_{21}$	.524	3.919 <sup>b</sup>
$\beta_{32}$	.676	6.041 <sup>b</sup>
$\beta_{31}$	.041	0.374
<i>Model 2</i>		
$\beta_{21}$	.523	3.890 <sup>b</sup>
$\beta_{32}$	.749	5.587 <sup>b</sup>
$\beta_{31}$	-.239	-1.852
<i>Model 3</i>		
$\beta_{21}$	.568	4.098 <sup>b</sup>
$\beta_{32}$	.721	5.082 <sup>b</sup>
$\beta_{31}$	-.261	-1.866

<sup>a</sup>The nonsignificant paths do differ in terms of their sign between the cross-sectional model and the longitudinal models, but this can be expected merely due to chance fluctuations between the two data-collection time periods.

<sup>b</sup>significant at  $p \leq .05$ .

ment and commitment scales appear to capture the identified constructs adequately. The model suggests that ego involvement is a precursor of purchase involvement, which in turn precedes brand commitment, and that all three constructs are conceptually distinct.

The model we have proposed has its origins in Houston and Rothschild's [29] S-O-R involvement model and Bloch and Richin's [12] product-importance model. Our model is more specific than these models in that brand commitment (one possible type of response involvement) was the final dependent variable of interest. Our concept of *ego involvement* is identical to their concept of *enduring involvement* while our concept of *purchase involvement* is essentially equivalent to, but more narrowly focused, than their concept of *situational involvement*. Both of these variables were renamed for clarity. Contrary to these other researchers' perspective that enduring involvement directly influences response involvement, we postulated and verified that ego involvement worked only indirectly on brand commitment through purchase involvement. The direct linkage between ego involvement and brand commitment, as postulated, was not significant. This finding indicates the criticalness of the purchase-involvement construct in creating brand commitment. This model was assessed with data involving a frequently purchased product category, soft drinks.

Advantages of LISREL include explicit modeling of measurement error and correction for attenuation in the path estimations. These advantages are especially important in the social sciences where measurement errors tend to be relatively large. The assessment was particularly powerful given the alternative measurement models created due to the availability of multiple measures gathered over two time periods. However, LISREL also has strict assumptions underlying the technique, and there is a lack of information on its robustness [15].

## Implications and Conclusions

Due to the single product studied, generalization of results must be done with caution. Future studies should assess this model's validity across other product categories. The product category utilized here was selected because it represented a frequently purchased product, which is typically considered a low-involvement product. As stated earlier, this choice was made for several reasons. We were able to find sufficient involvement variation across individuals in this study to suggest that it is more reasonable to consider involvement as residing within the individual (toward the product, decision, or brand) than within the product only.

With this frequently purchased product and longitudinal data, we were able to test our model in a dynamic sense, such that small changes in one variable contributed to small changes in another variable. Presumably, our model would work equally well on an infrequently purchased product, although much greater care on measurement timing would be necessary to ensure measurement of the proper lag. Additionally, situation variables would need to be explicitly incorporated. The generalization of this model beyond the present product category studied is still an empirical question.

The goal of this article has been to model and test a specific theory of involvement. We delineated two types of involvement and a closely related construct, commitment, and their directional influence on one another. We presented these three focal concepts in conjunction with their purported antecedents and consequences. We did not, however, attempt to present a broader decision model and show how involvement fits into such a model. For example, changes in the environment (e.g., a new and improved alternative introduced into the market) may cause an increase in purchase involvement and an interrupt in brand commitment. This higher purchase involvement could lead to additional search and evaluation of the new brand alternatives and then lead to brand commitment again once a brand is chosen. In general, search and selection would occur between purchase involvement and brand commitment while ongoing search [50], evaluation and product usage are ongoing throughout the individual's lifetime experience with the product. A complete modeling of involvement, search, and evaluation in future studies would be useful.

As argued by one reviewer, a rival hypothesis to our specified model is that we have created three attitudinal concepts reflecting different degrees of specificity rather than three unique focal concepts. Thus, future studies should specify and test unique antecedents and consequences for each focal concept. Figure 1 highlighted some relevant possibilities for future assessment.

Further, we need to know more about the antecedents of ego involvement. It would be useful to know why some people are more ego involved with soft drinks or other products than others. Laurent and Kapherer's [43] conceptualizations would be useful for this purpose. It would also be helpful to understand how brand-committed individuals are different from nonbrand-committed individuals in terms of their resistance to new information or brands or in terms of their future behavior. Some efforts have been made in this direction as noted in Figure 1, but more work is needed.

The primary findings here are that brand commitment is a result of purchase involvement, which is a result of ego involvement. If a marketer can generate

greater involvement in consumers, then greater commitment will follow for an increased percentage of those consumers.

A critical question to address, however, is how to create greater ego involvement or purchase involvement. In experimental studies, involvement is manipulated by statements aimed at creating greater personal relevancy for the incoming information. Then involvement might be verified by the recall of the information [48]. More study is needed on the ways to increase (or decrease) ego involvement and purchase involvement.

As agreed upon by other researchers [29, 42], ego involvement occurs when a product is related to important values, needs, or the self-concept. However, clear empirical examples of involvement inducement outside of the laboratory are not available. Presumably, greater involvement would be engendered by relating important values or the self-concept to the usage of the product. This approach appears to be satisfactorily used by advertisers who, however, probably do not view this from ego-involvement perspective. Much advertising today is aimed at exposing important values, even for low-involvement products. For example, "Set yourself free with Stouffers" and "Just for the taste of it" (Diet Coke) are aimed at *self-fulfillment* while Weight Watcher's slogan "This is living" invokes the value of *fun and enjoyment in life*. Previous studies have ascertained that the values endorsed by individuals can successfully distinguish segments with different consumption behaviors [5, 37]. Thus a more directed attack could be achieved by knowing which values or self-concept issues are most heavily endorsed by the potential target market or by the consumers who are already highly brand committed. Then, the values or self-concept issues espoused in the advertisements can be aimed directly at those individuals whom the firm wishes to influence with the goal of increasing ego involvement.

Purchase involvement could be increased by increasing ego involvement or by the occurrence of other outside events (such as the development of a new and improved product choice). The issue revolves primarily around the importance of the decision and the perceived riskiness of that decision. (Both of these concepts have been linked closely with purchase involvement in the past). Perhaps, comparative advertising, where one brand is compared to others, has the effect of creating greater concern about the purchase (purchase involvement). Concern with the proper choice should then lead to decisions aimed at reducing the felt uncertainty and leading to commitment toward a particular brand that best meets the individual's needs (brand commitment). For example, Jacoby and Chestnut [32] suggest that individuals who perceive large interbrand differences in quality (and consequently greater uncertainty) tend to be more brand loyal.

However, one difficulty concerned with increasing purchase involvement is the difficulty of insuring that increased involvement will lead to greater commitment of the firm's brand rather than a competitor's brand. Of course, one way this can be accomplished is to increase purchase involvement while also clearly showing how commitment to the firm's product will resolve the concerns raised. For example, firms, such as Federal Express, probably clearly raise purchase involvement (by showing the inherent risks of packages not arriving on time in their "absolutely, positively, overnight campaign") and then attempt to assuage it by associating positive benefits to the firm's product. These steps can be easily incorporated into personal selling themes also.

Given the extreme interest all firms should have in creating and maintaining a loyal customer base, it would seem imperative to understand the antecedents of brand commitment. The indication from this research is that brand commitment can be directly influenced by purchase involvement and indirectly influenced by ego involvement. Thus, marketers need to know how to influence and manipulate involvement to achieve greater commitment.

Marketers also need to clearly understand that their committed consumers are also more involved consumers. This point can be illustrated by a recent marketing faux pas. Noting market share gains by its rival Pepsi-Cola, Coca-Cola changed its long standing product formula in order to induce individuals loyal to Pepsi to try the *new* taste of Coke. This strategy ignored Coca-Cola's involved and committed consumers who felt betrayed and who reacted strongly. However, Coca-Cola's quick reaction of returning Classic Coke the marketplace not only saved it from a major marketing disaster, but also increased the total number of loyal Coca-Cola drinkers [46]. This situation indicates the high involvement and commitment that may exist for products generally considered to generate little involvement.

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