An assessment of consumers product, purchase decision, advertising and consumption involvement in fashion clothing

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Received 15 February 1999; received in revised form 7 July 2000; accepted 4 August 2000

Abstract

The drive to understand the purchasing and consumption behaviour of individuals and market segments has created significant interest in the construct of involvement. This study proposes and tests four types of involvement: (a) product involvement; (b) purchase decision involvement; (c) advertising involvement and (d) consumption involvement. It also proposes a higher order construct called consumer involvement. Measures of all four types of involvement are developed and empirical tests are performed using CFA and structural equation modelling (SEM). This study presents an alternate approach to the conceptualisation and measurement of four important types of involvement that will aid in better understanding consumer behaviour and developing improved marketing mix strategies. © 2000 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

PsycINFO classification: 3900; 2229

JEL classification: M390; M37; M31; C12; C42

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1. Introduction

Since products mean different things to different people, consumers form differing attachments to them. An individual’s attachments may be quite different from their family or friends in intensity and nature. Understanding consumers varying attachments, how they form, are maintained and are influenced is of interest to consumer researchers (academics) and practitioners (managers) alike. In an attempt to more fully understand the behaviour of consumers related to possessions, consumer researchers have often invoked the construct of ‘involvement’ (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Mittal & Lee, 1989; Ohanian, 1990; Slama & Tashchian, 1985; Zaichkowsky, 1986). The considerable empirical and theoretical effort devoted to this construct since the mid 1960s, has been driven by consumer behaviour researchers’ desires to understand the ways in which consumers become involved with products. This research has also sought to understand the effect involvement has on various purchasing and consuming behaviours (Browne & Kaldenberg, 1997; Tigert, Ring & King, 1976; Traylor & Joseph, 1984). To date this interest does not appear to be waning (Muehling, Laczniak & Andrews, 1993). Such interest may be partially because of the lack of consensus on involvement, and also because of the potential value that involvement has in contributing to a deeper understanding of consumer behaviour.

2. Fashion clothing

It has been argued that the philosophy and practice of relationship marketing and individuals ascribed meanings of products are clarified by the construct of involvement. Involvement (centrality) has been identified as being at the heart of the person–object relationship and the relational variable most predictive of purchase behaviour (Martin, 1998; Evrard & Aurier, 1996). Relevant to this study is the view that involvement may be understood via consumer-fashion clothing attachment or relationships.

Involvement has been discussed and utilised to examine fashion clothing in a number of prior studies (e.g., Browne & Kaldenberg, 1997; Fairhurst, Goog & Gentry, 1989; Flynn & Goldsmith, 1993; Tigert et al., 1976). The impor-
tance of involvement in the domain of fashion clothing can be seen via the defining role of fashion clothing in society. Further, fashion clothing’s continual and cyclical nature implies people are often drawn into the ‘style’ or fashion of the moment, and there are those who place a great deal of emphasis on their clothing. Contemporary fashion research would indicate that consumers are often distributed across a wide range of fashion consciousness and behaviours. Of particular note is the point that, the high fashion involved consumer has historically been important to fashion researchers and marketers (practitioners), because they are seen as the drivers, influentials and legitimists of the fashion adoption process (Goldsmith, Moore & Beaudoin, 1999; Tigert et al., 1976). The nature and role of fashion clothing and its function for individuals have also been shown to result in major differences between the fashion involved across cultures. For example, US consumers are said to exhibit lower fashion involvement than for example, Dutch consumers (Tigert, King & Ring, 1980).

Clothing theorists have devoted considerable attention to understanding the motivations and behaviours of fashion innovators (Goldsmith et al., 1999). This body of research has focused on a wide range of topics such as values, attitudes and behaviours. However, little work has been done on fashion involvement per se, particularly so with regard to a broader array of involvements in fashion clothing. Involvement is potentially an important area for fashion clothing as it often represents an important symbolic consumption area for consumers. Clothing can fulfil a number of functions beyond mere functional performance such as warmth or protection. It says how important an individual is, tells others how much status an individual has, what the individual is like (e.g., professional, sexy, casual). As such, how involved consumers become in their clothes provides a deeper understanding of the dynamics of consumer behaviour and the nature and role of the product category of fashion clothing in society.

3. The domain of involvement

Involvement research has often focused on pre-purchase settings in the context of decision making and advertising, with little attention being given to the construct as it affects consumer behaviour on an enduring basis (Bloch, 1982; Mittal & Lee, 1989; Muehling et al., 1993). Involvement is often couched in terms of pre-purchase search activities, information processing, the hierarchy-of-effects, attribute evaluation, and perception of brand differences.
These pre-purchase and information processing approaches appear insufficient to explain the totality of involvement within a broader context of effects, because they limit involvement to a very narrow context and temporal domain of consumer behaviour.

To date there is little formal description in the involvement literature about what activities accompany product involvement when a purchase situation or consumption is not imminent. Nor if any, relationship exists within the same consumer regarding a broader array of involvements toward a given object (e.g., a product, purchase decision, advertising or consumption (Bloch, 1981; Muehling et al., 1993)). The cognitive characteristics and enduring nature of involvement has not always been evident in the treatment of involvement within consumer behaviour, especially when determining involvement through goals and consequences associated with a purchasing situation or information processing occasion. Within this context, the enduring nature of involvement may be easily overlooked or neglected (exceptions are Bloch’s (1981, 1982) studies dealing with enduring involvement and Zaichkowsky (1985)).

Besides construct clarification, a theoretical framework or model of involvement is needed that clearly explains the construct and its boundaries via a broader array of meaningful involvement types. It is only after this kind of theoretical explanation and analysis has been undertaken that the empirical measurement of involvement can and should be carried out. For the potential of involvement to be realised, it needs to be submitted to more stringent and rigorous, theoretical and empirical examination, so that it can be fully understood and utilised as an important mediator variable in consumer behaviour.

In this study, involvement is viewed as a construct linked to the interaction between an individual and an object and refers to the relative strength of the consumers’ cognitive structure related to a focal object (e.g., products). In consumer behaviour literature, different types of involvement are said to exist when referring to different objects that are the focus of a consumer’s involvement (Mittal, 1989). A consumer can be involved not only with a product, but also with consumption of the product and purchase decisions (or the process of purchasing) for the product and advertisements (or communications) for the product. It is believed that together these different involvement types can form an overall profile of consumer involvement that encompasses purchasing and consumption occasions or they can be treated as separate types of involvement that focus on a particular consumer–object context. As such, when studying the complexities of consumers’ purchasing and consuming
behaviours, the different types of involvement that are operative and relevant have to be determined and placed within a single explanation.

It should be noted that the consumer involvement theory (consumer involvement profile) proposed is a micro-theory of how different involvements exist and operate within consumers. Its contribution is to provide a richer explanation of how involvement operates and forms the link between consumers and objects.

3.1. The nature of involvement

Similar to Bloch (1981), Bloch & Richins (1983) and Fairhurst et al. (1989), involvement is conceptualised as enduring in nature and it is argued that characteristics of the environment and temporary situational changes encountered by the consumer do not directly produce changes in or affect involvement levels. For example, temporary characteristics of the purchasing situation and single responses to it, do not necessarily have an effect on a consumer’s involvement in a focal object, except to the extent that specific values are engaged differentially in different situations. The level of involvement is assumed to change only to the degree that changes in the consumer’s value system occur on an enduring basis as a result of interaction with a stimulus or the environment.

The stability and enduring nature of involvement does not preclude the longer term development of an upward or downward trend in involvement for consumers. This view is similar to the views expressed by Lewin, Dembo, Festinger and Sears (1944) in their aspirational studies, which found that people tended to raise their level of aspiration following successful goal attainment. It does, however, preclude the notion of fluctuating levels of involvement from period to period or situation to situation as alluded to in situational or response approaches to involvement.

A similar argument was raised by Mittal and Lee (1989) when they stated that their conception of “product involvement and brand-decision involvement reflected consumer perception about two separate phenomena. The former about the place a product occupies in a consumer’s life, and the latter about the stakes in making a casual rather than a careful brand selection. The situational/temporal variation is a separate dimension because both product and brand-decision involvement can manifest situational/temporal changes” (pp. 370–371). They also believed as we do that situational and temporal variation can be incorporated in the theory by assessing constructs with respect to specified, distinct contexts.
Involvement with an object should be stable whilst still allowing for situational fluctuations in certain underlying components such as for example, consumer perception of the importance or interest of an object due to a temporary situation encountered. These variables can and will periodically fluctuate from a base level, but overall involvement should be treated as a relatively stable individual difference variable. This is important, because it is the combination of the underlying variables that form involvement and alone they are not synonymous with involvement. For example, just because a consumer perceives a product to be suddenly important in particular situation is not the same as saying that consumer is involved with the product (Mittal, 1989; Mittal & Lee, 1989).

Involvement is argued here to refer to the extent to which the consumer views the focal object as a central part of their life, a meaningful and engaging object in their life and important to them. This definition is applicable to the four forms of involvement discussed above. The forms of involvement are oriented toward a different context of the focal stimulus–object relations. The conceptualisation of involvement developed here does not require or promote different definitions for different focal objects. The view proposed here is that the content, nature and intensity characteristics are the same, only the focus of involvement changes. Overall it is the aggregate of the forms of involvement that are synthesised into the consumer involvement notion, which then forms the bond or attachment with an object (consumer–object relationship). Therefore, a unified, single explanation applicable to different objects is argued here to be the most theoretically appropriate way to proceed in furthering our understanding of consumer involvement (at a theoretical and measurement level).

3.2. Prior measures

Part of the foundation of the body of knowledge is the development of instruments specifically designed to measure involvement in a consumer behaviour context. Many measures of involvement have been proposed since the concept’s introduction to marketing by Krugman (1965) and McLuhan (1964). Unfortunately, most of the previous measures of involvement have met with significant criticism due to their underlying weakness in theory development and psychometric rigour and validation [e.g., see comments by Bloch (1981), Goldsmith et al. (1991), Jain and Srinivasan (1990), Seitz, Kappelman and Massey (1993), McQuarrie and Munson (1992), Mittal (1992a, b, 1995), Poiesz and de Bont (1995)].
The analysis of the consumer behaviour literature reveals a number of involvement measures. These included scales to assess involvement with a product class, involvement general to several types of products, purchasing involvement, purchase decision involvement and advertising involvement. Included in the analysis were major revisions of instruments, that had as their major purpose the refinement of an existing instrument. These have been classified as development of instruments to broaden the measures developed. Revision of instruments is particularly relevant to Zaichkowsky’s personal involvement inventory, which has been modified not only by Zaichkowsky herself (Zaichkowsky, 1990), but also by many other researchers such as Mittal (1992a,b) and McQuarrie and Munson (1986). Measures were analysed and classified as either involvement measures based on field survey methods or involvement manipulation check measures for experiment based work. Only multi-item measures were included in line with the recommendations of Bearden, Netemeyer and Mobley (1993). In the period 1960–69, two consumer behaviour instruments to measure involvement were developed. During the period 1970–79 four involvement measures were developed and two manipulation check measures were developed and for 1980–89, 12 involvement measures were developed and five manipulation check measures. In the period 1990–99, seven new instruments were developed. The period of the 1980s saw a dramatic growth and e/C128ort in developing measures of involvement, however this developmental trend declined in the 1990s. In total over the last 40 years, 23 measures have been developed and nine manipulation checks have been developed.

Scales were generally based on a semantic differential scale format or Likert type formats, with the number of items in instruments ranging from three to thirty three and scale point ranging from five to seven are commonly used in measures. Table 1 below identifies the key authors that have developed measures during the period 1960–99.

3.3. Conclusions for the theoretical propositions

From a marketer’s perspective, involvement is considered the key to activating consumer motivation and a fundamental basis for understanding consumer/seller relationships in markets. From an individual perspective, it could be considered a key to personal growth and satisfaction within the marketplace, as well as to motivation and goal directed behaviour. Increasing involvement may potentially increase marketing effectiveness and efficiency
by engaging consumers more completely in the product and its consumption. Involvement in one or more products (stimulus objects/contexts) is an important factor in the lives of most consumers.

Product-related activities consume a large proportion of time and money and constitute a fundamentally important aspect of life for most people. People may be stimulated by and drawn deeply into their consumption-related behaviour or alienated from it. Therefore, the quality of one’s life experiences can be greatly affected by one’s degree of involvement in or alienation from products and their consumption. High involvement implies a positive and relatively complete engagement of core aspects of the self in the focal object, whereas no or very low involvement implies a separation (apathy or automaticity toward) of the self from the focal object. Fundamentally, consumers become involved in a particular object or stimulus when they perceive its potential for satisfying salient higher order psychological needs.

Table 1
Major instruments identified by author

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Involvement measures</th>
<th>Involvement manipulation check measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tigert et al. (1976)</td>
<td>Gardner, Mitchell and Russo (1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lastovicka and Gardner (1978)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tybje (1979)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laurent and Kapferer (1985)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zaichkowsky (1985)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>McQuarrie and Munson (1986)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wells (1986)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higie and Feick (1989)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mittal (1989)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zinakh and Fornell (1989)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zaichkowsky (1990)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>McQuarrie and Munson (1992)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mittal (1992)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arora (1982)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. The study objectives

Muehling et al. (1993) published an extensive review of the state of involvement arguing strongly that what is lacking is a body of research that investigates the relationships between involvement types. They argued that it is unclear whether for example, advertising involvement may lead to or have an influence on other forms of involvement.

Taking the views of Muehling et al. (1993) and others the central purpose of this study was to develop and test a model of the relationships between four focal forms of involvement, using a general conceptualisation that underpins these four forms of involvement. The view expressed here reflects a movement away from the divergent definitions to a single definition applicable to differing forms of involvement. The multiplicity of divergent definitions and approaches to involvement has been argued to be problematic (Mittal & Lee, 1989; Poiesz & de Bont, 1995; Muehling et al., 1993). The purpose of the four forms is to represent basic types of involvement relevant to a consumer’s environment and maintain involvement as an enduring relationship between a consumer and an object, not a temporary or situational one. It also reflects a movement away from using terms or denoting involvement with prefixes such as response, situational or ego, which has been quite problematic (Mittal & Lee, 1989; Zaichkowsky, 1986). The theory identifies the higher order, second-order construct of consumer involvement, which underpins the first-order constructs of product involvement, purchase decision involvement, advertising involvement and consumption involvement. These constructs, in turn, underpin specific indicator variables for each first-order construct.

Here, involvement is positioned with respect to differentiating between the four first-order types of involvement, in an overall profile of consumer involvement as a second-order construct. This implies a need to connect both the forms of involvement and involvement’s observable/measures. Based on the theoretical development discussed above and the research objectives the following hypotheses are proposed.

4.1. Hypotheses

As indicated in prior research on fashion clothing, differences are said to exist between males and females in their involvement levels (Browne & Kaldenberg, 1997; Tigert et al., 1976). Age has also been identified as an important dimension in fashion clothing and age differences in fashion
clothing attachment and usage are said to exist (Auty & Elliott, 1998; Fairhurt et al., 1989). As such, it is hypothesised that:

**H1a**: Females will be more involved in fashion clothing than males.

**H1b**: Younger consumers will be more involved than older consumers in fashion clothing.

As indicated in the above discussion involvement is positioned with respect to differentiating between four first-order forms of involvement in an overall profile of consumer involvement as a second-order construct. This approach builds on the notion of Kapferer and Laurent (1985) of consumer involvement profiles. However, instead of seeing the profile being constituted by one or more antecedents, the profile notion is used here as a profile of forms of involvement. That is, different forms of involvement (product, purchase decision, advertising and consumption) form the profile of consumer involvement. This is seen via the view that all consumers will be differentially involved in these four forms and thus they constitute a profile. Thus the consumer involvement profile underpins the four forms proposed and examined here.

The alternative model developed is similar to the notion of Mittal and Lee (1989) proposing that product involvement acts as an antecedent to purchase decision involvement. This has also been proposed by Slama and Tashchian (1987), when they investigated the S–O–R paradigm. The notion proposed that similar to Houston and Rothschild (1979) and Arora (1982) enduring involvement and situational involvement act as antecedents to response involvement. The usage of situational, response and enduring as discussed above has proven problematic. So whilst they use these terms it is the relationships between involvement forms that is important and would under the second alternate model see a configuration similar to the Mittal and Lee (1989). Taking this antecedent notion a little further would also see product involvement acting as an antecedent to advertising involvement and consumption involvement.

Another alternative approach to involvement would be via its multi-dimensional nature. Much of the literature identifies involvement as possessing multiple dimensions such as Bloch (1981) who developed a scale of involvement with a product class containing six factors. Lastovicka and Gardner (1978) also identified a three-factor structure to involvement as did by McQuarrie and Munson (1992). The third alternative model would see
involvement’s dimensions being different types of involvement. These would in effect be four factors (product, purchase decision, advertising and consumption) of the construct consumer involvement. Such a representation may be feasible given the often discussed multi-dimensional nature of involvement and the fact that there has been identified in the literature product involvement, consumption involvement, advertising (message and execution) and purchase decision involvement (Flynn & Goldsmith, 1993; Mittal, 1989; Muehling et al., 1993).

It is argued that the profile approach manifest via the second-order construct underpinning the first order constructs will provide better clues to understanding the nature of the person–object relationship. As such it is hypothesised that:

**H2:** A second-order factor model incorporating the construct of consumer involvement and four first-order constructs of product, purchase decision, advertising and consumption involvement will fit the data better than a model of involvement where product involvement acts as an antecedent to purchase decision involvement, consumption involvement and advertising involvement or four-factor model of consumer involvement, where product, purchase decision, advertising and consumption involvement are factors of the construct.

5. Method

5.1. The questionnaire development process

In reviewing the existing measures for the present research, it was concluded that no existing involvement measure taken as a whole was appropriate for tapping the four forms of involvement as conceptualised in this study. This meant that the involvement measures had to be specifically designed.

The generation of the initial list of items was achieved by analysing the previously published measures on involvement (as done by Mittal (1989) and Mittal & Lee (1989)) and conducting a small number of in-depth interviews to generate items that were believed to tap involvement. Items from the literature (Mittal & Lee, 1988; Traylor & Joseph, 1984; Zaichkowsky, 1985) along with those generated by the researchers for the study
and those from the interviews were placed in an initial pool of items that were believed to tap the constructs as defined in the study. Utilising the items generated and grouping them into items that tapped the four forms of involvement, a review process was undertaken to refine, delete and validate items. The initial pool of items developed were submitted to a panel of expert judges (active researchers in consumer behaviour), for evaluation of content and face validity in a similar process to that advocated and adopted by Andrews (1985), French and Michael (1966) and Zaichkowsky (1985). Evaluating the content validity of a measure and its items is the same as subjectively recognising the adequacy of the definition (French & Michael, 1966; Zaichkowsky, 1985).

This validation process was performed iteratively in two successive passes through the item list, first for initial deletion of recognisably poor items and then again for more rigorous refinement of the items which remained, as recommended by Zaichkowsky (1985). Initially, three judges with expertise in the consumer behaviour (active researchers) rated each item as to whether the item tapped involvement as represented by the definition and the overview of the concept provided by the researcher in written form. According to the instructions given, the judges rated each item using a dichotomous categorisation process, as either representative of involvement or not representative of involvement. The first assessment reduced the number of items from 177 to 139. The remaining items were then submitted to a second expert judging assessment, which reduced the number of items to 83 tapping the four forms of involvement. The second judging used a three-pole scale (clearly representative, somewhat representative and not representative) and all rating required that items achieved 80% agreement between judges for inclusion into the final instrument.

5.2. Pilot testing

After the items were validated by the expert judges, a pilot survey was constructed and tested using a convenience sample of 80 students undertaking a unit in consumer behaviour. The pilot test data were analysed using correlation analysis, reliability tests (Cronbach Alpha), cluster analysis and exploratory factor analysis. This allowed for further refinement of the instrument. Following similar procedures adopted by Mittal and Lee (1989) examination of inter-item correlations and total sub-scale to item correlations and factor analysis of items led to the identification of items to tap the four forms of involvement.
The pilot test allowed the development of four measures of involvement that achieved similar correlations between items for each measure as has appeared in the literature (between 0.4 and 0.8) and similar internal consistency estimates (between 0.67 and 0.97) (e.g., see Arora, 1982; Flynn & Goldsmith, 1993; Mittal & Lee, 1989; Zaichkowsky, 1985). The scale used was a forced response, six-point Likert type scale, with poles from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The final questionnaire contained items tapping product involvement (16 items), purchase decision involvement (10 items), advertising involvement (8 items) and consumption involvement (8 items), age and gender items.

5.3. The sample

The data set to test the proposed model came from a self-administered survey of a convenience sample of consumers. The sample consisted of 900 randomly selected students supplied through the student administration office of a major Australian University, from a database containing 12,000 names. The database contained both full-time and part-time undergraduate and post-graduate students studying in both on-campus and off-campus (correspondence) modes of study. Of the 900 mail surveys sent, 478 were returned, and after the initial data screening 450 were retained as usable. The sample was deemed acceptable for theory testing, as the intent of this study was to explore the relationships between the four forms of involvement and not to provide point and interval estimates of population parameters (Calder et al., 1981; Eastman, Fredenberger, Campbell & Calvert, 1997; Ferber, 1977; Mittal & Lee, 1989).

The sample contained both part-time and full-time students and those who study externally as well as those who study on the university campus and the age of respondents was also quite broad as indicated in Table 2. The characteristics of the sample are believed to be from a fairly good spread of older working individuals to the more general full-time not working student and thus represent an adequate sample of respondents. The sample did not possess the normal characteristics of young, not working individuals to the extent present in many student samples.

5.4. Data analysis

Preliminary data analysis was undertaken to examine the psychometric properties of the scales via measures of central tendency, dispersion, bivariate
pearson correlations, principle components analysis with oblique rotation (Mittal & Lee, 1989), reliability estimates and confirmatory factor analysis. To evaluate the fit of the CFAs and structural equation modelling (SEMs), several goodness-of-fit indicators were used including, using $\chi^2$ statistic, Goodness-of-fit index (GFI), Adjusted-Goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), Root mean square residual (RMSR), and Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (Mittal & Lee, 1989). Following the preliminary analysis the hypotheses were tested via $t$-test, ANOVA and regression analysis for H1a and H1b and structural equation modelling for H2.

5.5. Confirmatory factor analysis stage

5.5.1. Preliminary tests of involvement scales

The product involvement scale contains items that represent the degree the consumer is involved in the product of fashion clothing (see Table 3). The results indicated that the factor loadings ranged from 0.81 to 0.91 explaining 74% of the variance, internal reliability estimate (Cronbach Alpha) was 0.98 indicating high internal reliability. The fit indices achieved from the confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the model of product involvement had acceptable fit on the key indices with $\chi^2 = 144$, GFI of 0.938, RMSEA of 0.042.

The purchase decision construct contains items that represent the degree the consumer is involved in the purchase decision of fashion clothing. The
results indicate (see Table 3) that the factor loadings ranged from 0.67 to 0.88 explaining 67% of the variance. The internal reliability estimate was 0.95 indicating high internal reliability and consistency. The factor was then subjected to confirmatory factor analysis and had acceptable fit with $\chi^2 = 82$, GFI of 0.952 and RMSEA of 0.064.

The consumption involvement construct contains items that represent the degree the consumer is involved in the consumption of, or wearing fashion clothing. The reliability estimate was 0.94 indicating high internal reliability and consistency, loadings ranged from 0.77 to 0.89 explaining 75% of the variance (see Table 3). The fit of the confirmed factor model resulted in a $\chi^2 = 29$, GFI of 0.979 and RMSEA of 0.062.

The advertising involvement construct contains items representing the degree the consumer is involved in advertising communications to do with fashion clothing. The results indicate (see Table 3) that the factor analysis resulted in loadings ranging from 0.67 to 0.86 explaining 68% of the variance and the confirmed factor model had a $\chi^2 = 27$, GFI of 0.983 and RMSEA of 0.042. The reliability estimate was 0.93 indicating high internal reliability.

5.5.2. Conclusion to preliminary results

The preliminary results indicated robust that the measures of the four types of involvement possessed factor structures, with acceptable reliability and levels of fit on the indices used to judge the confirmed factor models. These preliminary results indicated that the constructs proposed were being tapped by the measurement instrument developed for the four forms of involvement. The results of the preliminary analyses of the instrument indicate acceptance of the psychometric properties of the scales, providing ample support to move to the next stage of the study involving the full scale estimation and testing via SEM (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Mittal & Lee, 1989).

5.6. Results hypotheses

5.6.1. H1

H1a: Females will be more involved in fashion clothing than males.

H1b: Younger consumers will be more involved than older consumers in fashion clothing.
Table 3  
Four involvement measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product involvement</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fashion Clothing means a lot to me</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion Clothing is a significant part of my life</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a very strong commitment to Fashion Clothing that would be difficult to break</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider Fashion Clothing to be a central part of my life</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think about Fashion Clothing a lot</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For me personally Fashion Clothing is an important product</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am very interested in Fashion Clothing</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some individuals are completely involved with Fashion Clothing, attached to it, absorbed by it. For others Fashion Clothing is simply not that involving. How involved are you with Fashion Clothing?</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion Clothing is important to me</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion Clothing is an important part of my life.</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would say Fashion Clothing is central to my identity as a person</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would say that I am often pre-occupied with Fashion Clothing</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can really identify with Fashion Clothing</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am very much involved in/with Fashion Clothing</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find Fashion Clothing a very relevant product in my life</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I pay a lot of attention to Fashion Clothing</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Purchase decision involvement                                                    |         |
| Making purchase decisions for Fashion Clothing is significant to me               | 0.88    |
| Some individuals become completely involved or engrossed in making purchase decisions for Fashion Clothing. For others, purchase decisions for Fashion Clothing are not that involving. How involved do you feel in making purchase decisions for Fashion Clothing? | 0.77    |
| I think a lot about my choices when it comes to Fashion Clothing                | 0.82    |
| I place great value in making the right decision when it comes to Fashion Clothing | 0.77    |
| Purchase decisions for Fashion Clothing are very important to me                 | 0.86    |
| Making a purchase decision for Fashion Clothing requires a lot of thought         | 0.67    |
| I attach great importance to purchasing Fashion Clothing                         | 0.85    |
| I like being involved in making purchases of Fashion Clothing                    | 0.78    |
| The purchase of Fashion Clothing is important to me                              | 0.87    |
| Purchasing Fashion Clothing is significant to me                                 | 0.85    |

| Consumption involvement                                                         |         |
| The feeling of self-fulfillment I get from wearing Fashion Clothing is significant | 0.80    |
| I feel a sense of personal satisfaction when I wear Fashion Clothing             | 0.79    |
| Wearing Fashion Clothing is one of the most satisfying and enjoyable things I do | 0.81    |
| I like to think about wearing Fashion Clothing                                   | 0.79    |
| I often become pre-occupied with wearing Fashion Clothing                       | 0.77    |
| Wearing Fashion Clothing is important to me                                      | 0.87    |
| Wearing Fashion Clothing means a lot to me                                       | 0.89    |
| Wearing Fashion Clothing is a significant part of my life                       | 0.87    |

| Advertising involvement                                                          |         |
| Ads about Fashion Clothing are of no concern to me                               | 0.74    |
| I pay a lot of attention to ads for Fashion Clothing                             | 0.84    |
| Some individuals become completely involved, absorbed or engrossed in ads for Fashion Clothing. For others, ads for Fashion Clothing are simply not that involving. How involved do you feel in ads for Fashion Clothing? | 0.85    |
Following the initial analysis of factor structure and reliability estimates, mean scores were computed for all four forms of involvement (by gender and age) as shown in Table 4.

The initial analysis to test the hypothesis 1 was via \( t \)-test for gender differences, followed by ANOVA for age differences (using four age groups). The mean scores of involvement by gender and age presented in Table 4 indicate that generally female respondents were more highly involved in fashion clothing, its purchase, advertising and wearing than males. The age of respondents was categorised into four groups (see Table 4). The analysis indicated significant differences between males and females across the four types of involvement. For fashion clothing involvement mean scores for males was 1.95 and female 2.57, \( t \)-value \(-5.97\), significant at 0.001. For Fashion clothing purchase decision involvement, mean scores for males was 2.59 and female 3.40, \( t \)-value \(-7.28\), significant at 0.001. For Fashion clothing advertising involvement, mean scores for males was 2.40 and female 2.91, \( t \)-value \(-5.33\), significant at 0.001. For Fashion clothing consumption involvement, mean scores for males was 2.21 and female 2.76, \( t \)-value \(-5.60\), significant at 0.001.

Following the \( t \)-test analysis for gender differences, age differences were examined. Initially an ANOVA using the four groups was computed, indicating significant age group effects. The results indicate mean scores decrease with age and there are significant differences across age groups. For example, the ANOVA results indicate for fashion clothing involvement the \( F \)-value 11.94, significant at 0.001, for Fashion clothing purchase decision involvement the \( F \)-value 7.40, significant at 0.001, for Fashion clothing advertising involvement the \( F \)-value 6.43, significant at 0.001 and for Fashion clothing consumption involvement the \( F \)-value 8.48, significant at 0.001.

The results indicated that younger respondents are significantly more involved than older respondents. Following the gender and age analysis that
was undertaken, a regression was computed with age and gender as the independent variables and the four types of involvement as the dependent variables. The results indicate significant effects for gender and age on all four types of involvement as shown in Table 5.

The results indicate that age has a significant (negative) effect, as age increases involvement decreases across all four forms of involvement. The regression analysis also identifies gender effects, with females reporting higher levels of involvement in fashion clothing (all four types of involvement). Therefore, Hypotheses 1a and 1b are supported.
H2: A second-order factor model incorporating the construct of consumer involvement and four first-order constructs of product, purchase decision, advertising and consumption involvement will fit the data better than a model of involvement, where product involvement acts as an antecedent to purchase decision involvement, consumption involvement and advertising involvement or four-factor model of consumer involvement, where product, purchase decision, advertising and consumption involvement are factors of the construct.

5.7. Developing and testing the consumer involvement models

In areas such as psychology and consumer behaviour, responses to a number of items or questions of indicators are usually collected in order to develop composite scores that represent some underlying latent construct or trait (e.g., Bacon, Sauer & Young, 1995; Hau, 1995). Latent constructs have been traditionally computed in social psychology, psychology and consumer behaviour research as factor scores or unit-weighted composite scores of there measured indicators. Such derived indices for the composite variables are then treated as continuous variables in omnibus general linear modelling techniques such as ANOVA or
multiple regression which assume that such indices are measured without error. In SEM, these composite scores are used to estimate explicit measurement models for each construct via Parallel, Tau-equivalent and Congeneric models.

Another issue in the estimation and testing of SEMs rises when the observed variables used in the measurement component of the model do not meet distributional assumptions. For example, non-normality in the data warrants particular adjustments in the estimation procedures used to fit such models. The assessment of normality for product, purchase decision, advertising and consumption involvement indicate moderate levels of skew and kurtosis. The skew of the data was for product involvement 0.82, purchase decision involvement 0.034, advertising involvement 0.239 and consumption involvement 0.46. The kurtosis of the data was for product involvement −0.189, purchase decision involvement −0.82, advertising involvement −0.57 and consumption involvement −0.43. The data were identified as being not normally distributed and Asymptotic Distribution Free estimation (ADF) is argued to be a suitable and defensible estimation procedure for such data (Browne, 1984) and was therefore used to estimate parameters and test the models.

6. Results for fitted models

6.1. Hypothesised model 1 of first- and second-order relationships

Fig. 1 details the fitted model of the four types of involvement and the second-order construct of consumer involvement. Evaluation of model fit is via $\chi^2$, GFI, AGFI, RMRS and RMSEA. All values (path weights) shown in the model are standardised estimates.

The chi-square statistic for the hypothesised model was small $\chi^2 = 1.908$, $P = 0.385$, $df = 2$ and the fit measures suggested a high degree of fit to the data with, GFI 0.997, AGFI 0.989, RMSR 0.011 and the RMSEA < 0.001, all indicating a very good fit. All error variances are small and reliabilities are high, thus, there is good statistical support for the model. The significance of the structural paths and variance explained are also important. All structural paths range from 0.8 to 0.99 and $R^2$ are high and error variance are low supporting the model. For example, 80% of the variance of product involvement is explained by the variance
in consumer involvement, 63% of the variance of advertising involvement is explained by the variance in consumer involvement, 91% of the variance of purchase decision involvement is explained by the variance in consumer involvement and 95% of the variance of product involvement is explained by the variance in consumer involvement. This model shows the incorporation of a higher construct that is underpinned by the four forms of involvement, appears to be a meaningful representation of the theory and data related to fashion clothing involvement. Thus, we could in reality use such an approach as a profile of involvement called consumer involvement (profile), based on measures of product, purchase decision, advertising and consumption.

6.2. Alternative proposed models 2 and 3

The next stage was to estimate the two hypothesised alternative models. Such an approach is argued by Cudek and Browne (1983) and Baumgartner and Homburg (1996) to be the most appropriate method of testing and evaluating SEMs.

6.2.1. Alternative model 2

The first alternative model developed and tested suggested that product involvement was the exogenous construct and consumption, purchase decision and advertising involvement were the endogenous constructs in the
relationship as shown in Fig. 2. This model has as its foundation the theoretical proposition of Mittal and Lee (1989) who argued that “product involvement is an antecedent to purchase decision involvement” (p. 365). This view is extended here to include purchase decision, consumption involvement and advertising involvement also.

The chi-square statistic for the hypothesised model was high $\chi^2 = 70.706$, $P = 0.0001$, $df = 3$ and largely the fit measures suggested a poor degree of fit to the data with, GFI 0.899, AGFI 0.663, RMSR 0.060 and the RMSEA 0.224. However, all error variances are small and reliabilities are high, thus, there is moderate support for the model on these grounds. The variance explained and the significance of the structural paths are also important. All structural paths are high ranging from 0.8 to 0.98 and variances ($R^2$) range from 0.64 to 0.96. For example, 96% of the variance of consumption involvement is accounted for by the variance in product involvement, 79% of the variance in purchase decision involvement is accounted for by the variance in product involvement, 64% of the variance in advertising involvement is accounted for by the variance in product involvement providing some support for the model on these features. However, in general Fig. 2 does not fit the data as well as Fig. 1.

6.2.2. **Alternative model 3**

Fig. 3 suggested that involvement was best seen via a four factor model, where the individual forms of involvement are factors or dimensions of consumer involvement.
The chi-square statistic for the hypothesised model was moderate $\chi^2 = 195.04, P = 0.001, df = 6$ and largely the fit measures suggested a weak degree of fit to the data with, GFI 0.739, AGFI 0.565, RMSR 0.152 and the RMSEA 0.265. All error variances are small and reliabilities are high, thus, there is some support for the model on these grounds. All paths are high ranging from 0.76 to 0.96 providing some support for the model on these grounds. Further, $R^2$ are high with 82% of the variance in product involvement, 77% of the variance in purchase decision involvement, 58% of the variance in advertising involvement and 92% of the variance in consumption involvement accounted for by the variance in consumer involvement. However, the conventional fit indices indicate slightly poorer fit than Fig. 1.

Overall, the fit indices used to judge the models indicated that Fig. 1 fit the data better than Figs. 2 and 3. The model of the four types of involvement and the higher order construct of consumer involvement (consumer involvement profile), Fig. 1 fit the data well. All other models (Figs. 2 and 3) did not fit the data as good as Fig. 1. The composite factor congeneric model was the simplest form of measurement model and represented the regression of a set of observed indicators on a single latent construct, and therefore H2 is supported.
7. Discussion of results

The theory developed and structural equation models tested in this study related to involvement in fashion clothing were formulated in terms of latent or hypothetical constructs that were not directly observable or measurable (Mittal, 1989; Zinkhan & Muderrisoglu, 1985). As a method of testing the theory, computation of the latent constructs from a larger set of measured variables was undertaken. This computation process helped examine and understand the latent constructs that underlie consumers purchase and consumption processes related to the construct of involvement in fashion clothing. The composite factor models were developed as a means of data reduction in order to obtain a manageable number of valid, more reliable measured variables which were used to test the theory via analysing the proposed structural equation models (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1995; Kenny, 1979; Williams & Hazer, 1986).

Further, the results indicate that accurate representation of the reliability of the measured variables is best accomplished in the two stages used here. This process also avoided interaction of the measurement and structural models in the initial assessment of the data. Importantly, while the measurement and structural models cannot be evaluated in complete isolation, the possibility of the potential for within-construct versus between-construct effects was considered to be important as it may result in interpretational confounding (Burt, 1976; Hair et al., 1995). The method of estimating and fitting models in the two stages avoided this problem.

The SEM undertaken attempts to minimise unreliability and account for measurement error in the measurement and modelling of involvement. The theory testing process was accomplished by simultaneously estimating the measurement properties of latent constructs and structural relationships among latent constructs in the structural equation models presented in this study. Also, the modelling approach (congeneric) allowed for differences in the degree to which each individual measure (item) contributed to the overall composite scale thus providing a more realistic representation of the data. The fit statistic for the congeneric model also proved useful as a quasi-test of validity, the indicator variables contributing to the overall measurement of the manifest or composite variables all represented the same generic true scores, meaning they are valid measures of the underlying construct of involvement.
Similar to Mittal (1989, 1992a,b), Mittal and Lee (1989), and Zaichkowsky (1986), product importance and product relevance were seen in this study to be subsumed within the construct of involvement. That is, they are part of the involvement mechanism, but they do not constitute involvement alone or involvement per se and should not be seen or used synonymously with involvement. Further, importance and relevance are early peaking concepts in that fashion clothing (and many other products), advertisement, purchase decisions may be perceived as important and/or relevant by consumers without them being involved in such product or objects. Fashion clothing importance and fashion clothing relevance are seen and used in this study as elements of the specific measurement items for involvement in fashion clothing. Thus, involvement is construed and shown here to be a more overarching, higher order construct than for example, importance, relevance or interest. The findings have shown this to be the case and have thus supported the earlier work of Mittal (1989) and Mittal and Lee (1989) on this point. This means that many consumers may see fashion clothing to be important or relevant, however, they may not have significant interest or attachment to the product, nor do they pay much attention to it for example. Overall, such consumers would be seen as low involvement consumers. This study has moved to a higher level of abstraction by conceptualising and measuring involvement as more than importance or relevance. (The view is taken here that the whole (involvement) is greater than the sum of its parts (individual items).)

The results for gender and age while in-line with what was expected are still interesting. This is the first study to assess multiple forms of involvement across age and gender. The results suggest gender and age differences are important issues to consider when investigating fashion clothing involvement. So while others such as Slama and Tashchian (1985) identified that gender differences exist across involvement they did so only in relation to purchasing involvement. Others such as Brown and Kaldenberg (1997) examined gender differences for product involvement. Further, Fairhurst et al. (1989) and Auty and Elliott (1998) examined age differences, however still focusing on single involvement types. The results indicate all four forms of involvement were significantly influenced by the gender and age of respondents and this is the first study to show this is so.

7.1. Model evaluation and outcomes

A conceptualisation and operational measure was developed that appears selective enough to differentiate the level of involvement across consumers for
a focal object (product, purchase decision, advertisements and consumption). The results have provided evidence that the conceptualisation of involvement developed in this study and its subsequent operationalisation through the instrument can differentiate levels of involvement across consumers and different forms of involvement within consumers.

When we talk about consumers’ involvement with a focal object we essentially place such involvement on a continuum from total attachment or absorption of the individual with the product and related activities (high involvement) to complete detachment or automaticity (very low involvement), with respect to the person-stimulus dyad. Fundamentally, involvement should focus on a consumer’s interaction with a product or stimulus in a marketing context. The more the focal object is placed in a prominent or key position in the consumer’s life the more involvement or the more involved the consumer is said to be in the focal object. The levels of involvement experienced by consumers for the product fashion clothing, fashion clothing advertising, purchase decisions for fashion clothing and consumption of fashion clothing formed a continuum, reaching from minimal to high levels. This supports the earlier work of DeBruicker (1979), Bloch (1986), and Tigert et al. (1980) who argued involvement can be thought of as a continuum from minimal to high involvement.

In the past consumer behaviour research into involvement has had as its prime focus an interest in temporal processes, like information processing and decision making. However, it was proposed here that the different involvement types should be labelled according to their focus, but have as their foundation the same underlying conceptualisation. The results provide support for the view of moving beyond the temporal aspect and information processing focus, to a more enduring oriented approach focusing on products, purchase decisions, advertising and consumption.

7.2. Implications

The findings of this study support the unified conceptualisation of the four types of involvement and the profile called consumer involvement. All studies that have attempted multiple conceptualisations and measurement approaches in the past have received equivocal or weak support at the empirical level (e.g., Mittal, 1989; Mittal & Lee, 1989; Flynn & Goldsmith,
1993; Goldsmith et al., 1991). Such a unified approach to theory and measurement has important implications for the academic study of involvement and practical application of involvement in marketing by practitioners. The findings move the literature in the direction recommended by Muehling et al. (1993) by focusing on multiple types of involvement.

7.3. Limitations

There are some limitations given the nature of the sample, however, it should be noted that other involvement research and measurement (e.g., Mittal, 1989; Zaichkowsky, 1985) have also been developed using student respondents (O’Cass, 2000). However, as identified earlier the sample is acceptable for theory testing (e.g., see, Calder et al., 1981, and others). The study may also be limited by the use of a single product (fashion clothing), however other studies have also used single products (Arora, 1982; Fairhurst et al., 1989; Mittal & Lee, 1988; Slama & Tashchian, 1987; Tigert et al., 1980). Further, a significant focus of the study was consumer involvement in fashion clothing and students are considered an appropriate sample for this product type (Browne & Kaldenberg, 1997; O’Cass, 2000).

7.4. Future tests for nomological validity

In summary, the domain of the constructs has been specified, a set of items relevant to the breadth of the domain of involvement has been generated for each type of involvement and tested. The items have been refined and the retained items have been shown to be internally consistent and valid representation of fashion clothing involvement, a significant future step will be to see how well the measures of the four forms of involvement relate to measures of other constructs to which involvement should be theoretically related. That is, does involvement behave as expected in a theoretical network. While the reliability, discriminant and convergent validities ensure the soundness of the research procedures employed, nomological validation ensures that what is being researched will play a role in the building of knowledge in the domain of interest (consumer behaviour). The conceptualisation, results and findings of this study indicate that a sufficient scope for involvement in consumer
behaviour may be limited to focusing on product, purchase decision, advertising and consumption. Therefore, the driving force and long-term goal of future research is to test this conceptualisation and measures in different settings with different products.

8. Conclusion

The framework presented and tested here builds on much of the prior work on involvement (e.g., Arora, 1982; Mittal & Lee, 1989; Slama & Tashchian, 1987; Houston & Rothschild, 1979). However, it substantially modified key aspects also. The framework appears to be a valuable aid in bringing together the diverse extant approaches to construing and measuring involvement. Such improvement can only enhance the effective utilisation of this construct at both a theoretical and practical level in understanding consumer behaviour.

References


