

Chapter 3

Analysis and Review of Involvement Literature

the conceptual analysis of involvement remains unsatisfying from the standpoint of science's basic aim of analysis, partition, delineation of gross variables into more atomistic ones...it appears as a potpourri concept (Keisler, Collins & Miller 1969 p. 279).

3. Introduction

Chapter 2 presented a content analysis of the involvement literature, focusing on characteristics such as the number of studies published, methodological characteristics, products used, and trends in publications to provide a solid foundation for this study. This chapter presents a review and analysis of the conceptual characteristics of literature with respect to involvement in consumer behaviour. This chapter also provides the theoretical discussions which underpin the foundation for the use of the involvement construct in this study.

Consumer behaviour researchers have developed a number of wide ranging theories and models in their attempts to explain and predict the behaviour of consumers (e.g., Bettman 1979; Engel & Blackwell 1982; Holbrook & Hirschman 1982; Howard & Sheth 1969; Kassarijian 1981; Nicosia 1966; Olshavsky & Granbois 1979 and Petty & Cacioppo 1983). One stream of theories depicts consumers as actively searching for and processing information to make informed product selections to satisfy needs and wants. This implies that individuals are intelligent, rational, problem solving consumers who evaluate and store marketing stimuli to make informed and reasoned purchase decisions (Bettman 1979 and Howard & Sheth 1969).

The other stream of theories depicts the behaviour of consumers as not engaging in extensive information search, evaluation and problem solving to make purchase decisions

(e.g., Holbrook & Hirschman 1982; Kassirjian 1979, 1981 and Olshavsky & Granbois 1979). Kassirjian (1979) argued that of the vast numbers of decisions consumers make each day most are potentially mundane decisions and few if any are very important to them. Proponents of this approach to consumer behaviour argue that it may be inappropriate to assume active or heightened information processing and evaluation by consumers all the time (Olshavsky & Granbois 1979).

These two distinct views or streams of theorising and research essentially do not contradict the dynamic nature of consumer behaviour, but represent the two ends of a continuum of consumer behaviour. Such a view represents purchase decisions, purchases and consumption across a range of high to low involvement. Although this perspective is espoused in consumer behaviour by researchers such as Bettman (1979), Engel and Blackwell (1982), Kassirjian (1979) and Olshavsky and Granbois (1979) and others, it parallels the work of some psychologists such as Hammond (1996), Epstein (1980, 1993, 1994) and Buck (1985, 1988) who examined human thinking across a cognitive continuum from rational (analytic) to experiential or emotional (syncretic) processing.

The behaviour of consumers varies significantly across products and situations, and in order to deal with this variability researchers often study mediating variables which affect consumer decision making and purchase and consumption behaviour. Many of the first attempts to account for differences in purchasing and consumption were made by studying the influence of socio-economic and demographic variables (e.g., Massy, Frank & Lodahl 1968), and personality characteristics as an influence on consumer behaviour (e.g., Westfall 1962; Kassirjian 1971; Kassirjian & Sheffet 1991; Robertson & Myers 1969 and Tucker & Painter 1961).

Product characteristics, such as price, product complexity and product life cycle and market structure (e.g. number of brands in a product class and intensity of competition and distribution) have also been studied in attempts to determine differences in consumer behaviour across product categories (Farley 1964 and Blattberg, Peacock & Sen 1976). In recent years the importance of the characteristics of both the consumption and buying situation has also been discussed as determinants of consumer behaviour (e.g., Belk 1974, 1975; Celsi & Olson 1988 and Janiszewski & Warlop 1993). There has also been an

emphasis in some studies of interactional approaches which combine the effects of both the situation and the individual as determinants of consumer behaviour (e.g., Dickson 1982 and Punj & Stewart 1983). The various perspectives and theories of consumer behaviour provide a great richness to the study of the purchase and consumption behaviour of individuals. Part of this richness is evident in the construct of involvement.

3.1 Introduction to involvement

As indicated in chapter 2, since the mid 1970's and early 1980's interest in the concept of involvement and its effects on consumer behaviour has grown significantly (Bloch 1982; Kassarian 1981; Lastovicka & Gardner 1979. Laurent & Kapferer 1985; Mittal 1982; Mittal & Lee 1989; Rothschild & Houston 1977; Slama & Tashchian 1985 and Tyebjee 1979). Involvement is argued to affect consumers behaviour by impacting on for example, the extensiveness and temporal patterns of information processing (Ray 1973 and Robertson 1976), complexity of decision making (Houston and Rothschild 1978), brand loyalty (Jacoby 1971), opinion leadership (Venkatraman 1990 and Tigert, Ring & King 1976), brand categorisation (Brisoux & Chèron 1990), motivation (Block, Sherrell & Ridgway 1986 and Burnkrant & Sawyer 1983), heightened arousal (Mitchell 1980), cognitive elaboration (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann 1983) and cognitive response (Buchholz & Smith 1991). In spite of this quite substantial body of literature our current understanding of the conceptual nature, meaning and role of involvement in consumer behaviour is still fragmentary and lacks clarity and consensus (Kiesler, Collins & Miller 1969; Mittal 1992; Mittal & Lee 1989 and Poiesz & de Bont 1995). Reasons for this lack of consensus appear to be due mainly to the lack of a generally accepted definition of involvement and generally accepted psychometrically sound measures of involvement (Bloch 1981; Brisoux & Chèron 1990; McQuarrie & Munson 1987; Poiesz & de Bont 1995 and Seitz, Kappelmann & Massey 1993). The fragmentation and the lack of clarity and consensus potentially emanates from the conceptual derivation of existing definitions, theory and measures.

Instead of devising theoretical propositions endemic to marketing's use of involvement, many consumer researchers (e.g., Lastovicka & Gardner 1978; Roberts 1975 and

Rothschild & Houston 1977) have chosen to adapt notions developed by social psychologists in the context of attitudinal involvement with social issues. This translation of conceptual and empirical approaches across disciplines represents a considerable shift in level of abstraction for conceptualising the construct and a shift in the level of analysis, from abstract issues to material possessions. This translation across disciplines and the shift in the level of abstraction has often been ignored or assumed away in consumer behaviour research on involvement (Bloch 1981 and Slama & Tashchian 1987).

The direct translation of social psychological conceptualisations of involvement to a purchase and consumption context probably stems from the frequent mention in the social psychology literature of involvement with 'objects' as well as issues (e.g., Sherif & Cantril 1947; Sherif, Sherif & Nebergall 1965). The use of the term 'object' may have provided a *carte blanche* for consumer behaviour researchers to borrow social psychological approaches and apply them to involvement with products. It should be remembered, however, that although social psychologists utilised the term 'objects' as targets of involvement, in most cases, the object referred to an abstract, intangible issue, not a physical product.

The term 'object', as used in the social psychology literature, may not be completely compatible with the study of involvement with products. When social psychologists refer to involvement with an object they are often dealing with entities such as a politician, political candidate or building projects such as a new prison or highway, or social issue such as AIDS or educational issues such as changes to courses. Such objects do have some tangible characteristics just like products, but they cannot be possessed or incorporated into the individual's inventory of products for purchase and ownership. Therefore, when one owns or consumes a product their involvement may be a sufficiently distinct phenomenon to preclude simple adaptations of issue involvement notions and frameworks used in social psychology.

There is also the need to consider the nature of existing research on involvement in consumer behaviour. Bloch (1981a) identified that, for the most part, involvement work has been descriptive or exploratory rather than explanatory. Even though this statement was made by Bloch in 1981, it is a characteristic that is still prevalent in involvement

research (Poiesz & de Bont 1995 and Traylor & Joseph 1984). For example, several studies (e.g. Clarke & Belk 1979; Ratz & Moore 1989; Sherrell, Hair & Bush 1984; Slama & Tashchian 1987 and Sawyer, Rothschild, Heeler, Strong & Reed 1973) have, in an *a priori* fashion, defined a product as 'high or low involvement' and examined consumers' responses concerning them without considering if the actual consumers perceived the products to be high or low involvement for them. Also, the nature of existing empirical research appears also problematic regarding involvement measures. For example, many involvement measures appear to be contaminated by items that are considered to be antecedents to involvement or items that are considered to be consequences of involvement or have received other psychometric criticisms (Andrews & Durvasula 1991; Bloch 1981; McQuarrie & Munson 1987; Mittal 1989; Ohanian 1989 and Seitz, Kappelmann & Massey 1993).

Involvement has been the focus of a great deal of interest in consumer behaviour. This interest is indicated, for example, by special attention given to involvement in American Marketing Association's Attitude Research Conference in 1977 and in the 1977, 1980 and 1982 conferences of *Association for Consumer Research* and the special edition of the journal *Psychology & Marketing* in 1993 and the significant number of publications on the topic as indicated in Table 2.1 of chapter 2.

Part of this attention may be due to the fact that involvement has still not realised its full potential as a construct that helps consumer researchers understand the behaviour of consumers as well as to the likelihood that consumer behaviourists have made an error in adopting concepts from social psychology and applying them in consumer behaviour (Slama & Tashchian 1987). Therefore, researchers and academics continue to devote attention to and use involvement in an effort to fully develop the potential of the construct.

Consumer behaviour researchers have adopted a wide array of definitions of involvement and numerous hypotheses about involvement's role in purchasing and consumption behaviour have been proposed. However, there are still debates about what involvement means and how best to define and measure it. There appears to be a significant amount of theoretical and empirical work to be done before the full explanatory potential of involvement can be understood and realised (Bloch 1982; Flynn & Goldsmith 1993;

Kassarjian 1981; Lutz 1980 and Mittal & Lee 1989). The early status of the research dealing with involvement is described by Mitchell (1979) as follows:

Although 'involvement' has the potential of being an important mediator of consumer behaviour, our current understanding of its effects are limited. The primary reason for this seems to be our general failure to develop a publicly acceptable conceptual definition of 'involvement', valid measures of it Until this is accomplished the quality and quantity of empirical research in this area will be limited. (p.191)

Even though Mitchell made this statement 19 years ago it appears to be just as relevant and valid today. Mitchell was largely correct when he made this statement, except however, in hindsight, his view that the quantity would be limited has been shown not to have held. Involvement research has grown substantially since the late 1970's as indicated in chapter 2.

While the existing literature proposes that involvement influences several aspects of consumer behaviour, why product involvement occurs at all is still unclear (Andrews 1988). According to Hempel (1965), when discussing the philosophy of science, a scientific explanation must answer the question, why did the phenomenon occur? Since its inception in consumer behaviour, researchers have achieved little agreement or consensus on a scientific explanation of involvement, particularly, for different forms of involvement such as product involvement, purchase decision involvement, consumption involvement or communications involvement as they occur in the same consumer for a focal object (Muehling, Laczniak & Andrews 1993) and why involvement occurs.

3.1.1 Conceptual examination of involvement

When undertaking an investigation into the condition of knowledge in an area, there are two generally accepted approaches that can be followed. Firstly, one can directly survey individuals closely acquainted with the area or actively researching in the area. Such an approach was taken by Schöllhammer (1975). Secondly, as done here, one can perform an analysis of the literature published in the area of interest. Relevant literature were analysed

to obtain a perspective on conceptual and theoretical issues in relation to consumer involvement.

Similar analyses have also been utilised when attempting to clarify the meaning of a single concept with heterogeneous views or approaches (Albaum & Peterson 1984; Jacoby & Chestnut 1978 and Jacoby & Kaplan 1972). In involvement, this form of analysis has been used on a more limited basis by Andrews, Durvasula and Akhter (1990), Costley (1988), Day, Stafford and Camacho (1995), Finn (1983), Muehling, Laczniak and Andrews (1993) and Muncy and Hunt (1984). However, these analyses focus mainly on involvement in the context of advertising.

The purpose here is to discuss the involvement literature by means of an extensive and detailed literature review that analyses the extant conceptual consumer behaviour approaches to involvement in order to evaluate their contribution to the body of knowledge on involvement. Analysing the different definitions of involvement should produce a sufficiently detailed understanding of the literature to build an appropriate theoretical foundation which could be used for the development of a conceptualisation and explanation of involvement for use in this study.

Past Reviews and Analytical Studies and Approaches

The problem of how to determine the dimensions along which to classify the involvement definitions still remains somewhat unresolved. Commonly, involvement definitions have been analysed at the level of single treatments with a limited number of studies being utilised. That is, they are studied one by one in small numbers without the overarching objective of analysing all studies. However, there are a limited number of more analytical approaches which aim to clarify the construct of involvement (e.g., Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990; Costley 1988; Day, Stafford & Camacho 1995; Finn 1983; Muehling, Laczniak & Andrews 1993 and Muncy & Hunt 1984). However, these reviews are all limited to various degrees, because they focus on a limited domain such as only advertising or are constrained the number and type of journals examined in their analyses.

For example, Finn (1983) classified the approaches on the basis of whether involvement has been viewed either as a stimulus-centred variable, subject-centred variable or as a response-

centred variable. He evaluated the suitability of these different conceptualisations with regard to the cognition stage of the information processing hierarchy and proposed a single content for involvement.

Muncy and Hunt (1984) have also attempted to analyse the content of involvement by classifying involvement research into five discrete categories. These were (1) Ego Involvement, (2) Commitment, (3) Communication Involvement, (4) Purchase Importance and (5) Response Involvement. Their propositions for the five groups were based on simply stating that there exist these five distinct concepts under the term 'involvement'. They did not analyse or evaluate the relevance of the different definitions against one another, neither did they question the possibility of referring to different contents under the label 'involvement'.

Costley (1988) conducted a meta-analysis in which she proposed that the approaches to the involvement construct presented in the literature differed along several dimensions. Costley (1988) proposed that four such dimensions were content, object, nature and intensity. The content dimensions could be categorised as cognitive, state and response approaches to involvement. The objects were seen by Costley as product, ad and situation and the nature dimensions were affective and functional. Costley's intensity dimensions were seen as continuous and high/low.

Andrews, Durvasula and Akhter (1990) examined the methods of conceptualising involvement, its proposed antecedents, state properties, consequences and various measures applied, only in advertising research on involvement. They identified what they believed were four emerging research streams and labeled them as attention/processing; personal/situational; audience/process and enduring/product involvement. They further delineated that attention/ processing contributed to the examination of state involvement, personal/ situational and enduring/product contributed to examining involvement's antecedents and audience/process contributed to examining consequences of involvement.

Muehling, Laczniak and Andrews (1993) examined methods of conceptualising involvement in advertising and detailed some of the approaches to measuring and manipulating involvement in the context of advertising research only. The classification of

involvement in the context of advertising by Muehling, Laczniak and Andrews (1993) grouped involvement into trait, state and process approaches and provided an author by author review according to the major propositions that had been presented in the literature.

Day, Stafford and Camacho (1995) reviewed only studies reported in the *Journal of Advertising* and related publications. They concluded from their analysis that most studies within their framework had been based on investigating enduring involvement with products and very few had examined enduring involvement with services. They also saw that involvement research in the advertising context had focused mainly on the effects of situational involvement on other variables, leading them to conclude that while theoretical work had been considerable, knowledge still remained incomplete and additional scale development work was warranted. Essentially, they used content (type of involvement, enduring/situational etc.) and context (objects, issue, products, services etc.) categories. They also placed involvement in a hierarchy from the more general level of involvement with activities and interests, to more specific with products and services to the very specific with purchases, advertisements and messages.

An appropriate analytical approach

Ultimately, an appropriate and rigorous analysis of literature depends on the purpose or objective at hand and the volume of literature to be analysed. Eskola (1971) also proposes in general terms that the typologies should be developed on the basis of those variables according to which the conceptualisations seem to differ most clearly. This study could have adopted methods similar to those previously used for analysing involvement literature such as used by Andrews, Durvasula and Akhter (1990), Costley 1988; Day, Stafford and Camacho (1995), Finn (1983), Muehling, Laczniak and Andrews (1993) or Muncy and Hunt (1984). Also, the context within which involvement has been theorised and presented could have formed the basis for analysis. For example, the contextual basis of advertising, purchase decision, purchase, consumption, task, product, ego, response and enduring involvement could have formed an appropriate system of analysis. The definitions presented by all authors could also form an appropriate basis for analysing and classifying involvement. However, such approaches would provide too many groupings or approaches to involvement. From a theoretical and practical perspective, the most appropriate method, for the purposes of this study, appears to be one that provides the most parsimony in

analysing the literature (Brinberg & McGrath 1985), that is, a method that condenses the large body of literature of involvement is the preferred outcome of this analysis.

Therefore, the most rigorous and parsimonious method appears to be one that uses both the content and context as a basis for analysing involvement. Importantly, because of the hypothetical or latent nature of involvement, its constituent elements or content should not or perhaps cannot be analysed without consideration of its contextual properties. Thus, both the content and the contextual properties of involvement are analysed here. This analysis of the context and content should provide a richer understanding of involvement and identify gaps for future research. This also allows for a reduction in the number of possible categories for analysing the various approaches to involvement found in the consumer behaviour literature. The key criterion was to use a minimum number of approaches to involvement, with sufficient homogeneity within each approach and adequate distinctions between the approaches.

Further, the content and context provides an understanding of the focus of involvement. For example, Mitchell (1979) and Andrews, Durvasula and Akhter (1990) and others have indicated that involvement always has an object or direction. That is, it does not exist in an individual in isolation from an object. Thus, the context provides the direction of involvement, such as advertising, product, purchase decision in conceptualisations. Also, in some conceptualisations, involvement is provided with nature dimensions (Costley 1988). For example, Mittal and Lee (1988) and others have proposed cognitive and affective characteristics to involvement. Intensity or duration characteristics of involvement conceptualisations is also an important element in analysing involvement. Many conceptualisations conceive involvement in dichotomous terms such as high or low and others as a continuous construct (Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990 and Costley 1988). The distinct approaches to involvement give quite different contents, objects, nature and intensity characteristics to involvement over the antecedent-consequence cognitive continuum.

Using the categories of Costley (1988) appears to be a useful starting point for the analysis of the conceptual approaches to involvement in consumer behaviour. Primarily, three approaches for viewing involvement can be distinguished. The first approach utilises

definitions which determine involvement through describing its cognitive bases, the cognitive linkages between an individual and an object, and these are labeled *cognitively-based* definitions (Costley (1988)). The second group consists of definitions which introduce involvement by describing an individual's motivational state or state of mind (Costley 1988), and these are labeled *individual-state* definitions. The third approach utilises definitions in which the content of involvement is described via different responses of an individual, either static or dynamic, created by a stimulus (Costley 1988), and these are labeled as *response-based* definitions. These broad approaches to involvement provide a tangible basis for analysis. The content and object approaches as specified by Costley (1988) are used to form the basis of the analysis of involvement, however, a larger body of literature than Costley (1988) surveyed will be used here. As well as the three consumer defined categories identified by Costley (1983), another form of definitions is identified here as the *product-defined* involvement definitions.

As indicated in the quote at the beginning of this chapter the conceptual analysis of involvement is unsatisfying and therefore this chapter is largely devoted analysing the conceptual nature of involvement in a more satisfying manner.

The analysis of the conceptual approaches to involvement is preferable in this research compared to the traditional author by author or chronological review or the contextually restricted reviews that have appeared in the literature where, for example, only involvement in an advertising context has been analysed (e.g., Muehling, Laczniak & Andrews 1993). It is a more analytical approach to what is a large and diverse literature. By analysing and presenting the literature at a conceptual level, a deeper understanding of involvement can be obtained.

3.2 Definitions of involvement

Involvement has been studied at an individual and an aggregate product level in consumer behaviour. Within the aggregate level, approaches to involvement 'conceptualisation' and 'analysis' of the construct can be seen to depend mainly on the characteristics of a product or stimulus object. The aim of the product-defined involvement approaches has

been to group products according to their level of involvement. This is evidenced in the literature where authors *a priori* define the product as either a 'high' or 'low' involvement product or where the study used a 'low' involvement or a 'high' involvement product (Bowen & Chaffee 1974; Houston & Rothschild 1979; Ratz & Moore 1989; Sherrell, Hair & Bush 1984 and Slama & Tashchian 1987).

The consumer-oriented conceptualisations and analysis of involvement, on the other hand, are largely based on the notion that the degree or level of involvement varies across individuals and across objects (Andrews 1988 and Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990). According to consumer-oriented definitions, involvement should be studied in the context of a consumer's cognitive (and behavioural) processes, because involvement is defined by consumer characteristics not the product characteristics (Andrews 1988 and Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990). Essentially, this means the concept of involvement is recognised within the consumer-defined approaches as a person-specific characteristic such that different individuals may possess different intensities of involvement with the same object (Ohanian 1988).

3.2.1 Involvement as a product defined construct

Although the concept of involvement has only been the focus of significant theoretical and empirical interest in consumer behaviour for some three decades, the nature and characteristics of involvement have been implicitly included in many aspects of theories within the area of marketing (Bowen & Chaffee 1974; Copeland 1923; Robertson 1976 and Woods 1965). For example, the classification of products as being 'convenience', 'speciality' or 'shopping' goods by Copeland (1923) is based on the view that consumers, as a group, consider products to differ in the inherent level of involvement associated with their purchase and consumption. Woods (1965) argued that certain products are inherently 'involving' because individuals identify with the symbolic meaning of these products. Products defined as 'prestige', 'maturity' and 'status' products are highly involving because they provide self enhancement due to their symbolic meaning according to Woods (1965). Another group of highly involving products, Woods (1965) argued, are 'anxiety' products which are used to allay fears and thus serve an ego-defensive function for consumers. The

amount of physical and mental effort consumers are willing to devote to purchases within these categories of products is the result of the characteristics of the product's influence on all consumers.

Some authors have seen the amount of perceived brand differentiation by consumers as a prime determinant of involvement. Such a view holds that when products have different characteristics or features consumers are more involved. Bowen and Chaffee (1974) assumed that involvement was mainly a function of product attributes and proposed that the number of pertinent distinctions a consumer can make between brands in a product group is the important characteristic. Similarly, Robertson (1976) stated that product involvement would be higher under the conditions where there was a large number of perceived distinguishing attributes among brands and a high level of salience attached to those attributes.

When defining the product or the product's characteristics that cause consumers to be involved, characteristics such as price, differences among brands, a consumer's previous experience in the product class, product consciousness and stage in product life cycle are assumed to affect the level of involvement induced by the product. It has been proposed that low priced, frequently purchased products that are in the maturity stage of product life cycle induce low involvement.

Lastovicka and Gardner (1979) stated, on the basis of their empirical research, "even with individual differences taken into account, it seems very proper to talk about perceptions and behaviours of consumers with parsimonious groups of products" (pp. 67-68). This type of product group comparison produces fairly self evident and insignificant results (Mittal 1989) and it has also been indicated in the literature that the use of importance measures, such as used by Hupfer and Gardner (1971) and Lastovicka and Gardner (1979), synonymously used as involvement, is somewhat problematic (Mittal 1992 and Richins & Bloch 1986).

Research conducted by Ray (1973) indicated that the so called "low-involvement hierarchy" of information processing was most prevalent for convenience goods. Similarly, Traylor (1981) argued that his evidence showed that buying decisions for consumer nondurables

tended to be less involving than decisions concerning durable goods. Although it may be argued that product classes or groups differ in the general level of involvement they evoke in consumers, the product defined aggregate level approaches have their limitations. The product-defined aggregate grouping essentially leads to very general and unsophisticated classification of goods as being either high involvement or low involvement products. Secondly, the product-related approaches tend to take into account only the characteristics of products as sources of involvement. This approach does not satisfactorily distinguish involvement from such concepts as perceived risk, product familiarity, product importance and product or brand commitment.

Product characteristics such as price and product life cycle stage are inherently insufficient to account for differences in the level of involvement across consumers, because they neglect the characteristics of consumers. For example, Clarke and Belk (1979) have shown that a higher price is not necessarily related to higher involvement and higher purchase effort.

Even though product-oriented or defined approaches are found in the literature, it is accepted that product differences are insufficient to account for differences in the level of involvement and that, for any product class, the level of involvement varies across consumers (Lastovicka & Gardner 1979; Mittal and Lee 1989; Rothschild & Houston 1977 and Tyebjee 1979). This has not, however, led to the total rejection of product aggregate-level approaches for determining the general involvement level associated with a product. Instead, it has been assumed, by advocates of this approach, that while individual differences in the level of involvement may exist, the rank ordering of products according to their involvement level may be sufficiently constant within a relatively homogenous population or market segment (Clarke & Belk 1979) to talk about high or low involvement products.

Largely identifying products as being either low or high involvement is seen here as too limiting and general, because it leaves out the characteristics of the consumer and focuses only on the characteristics of the product as the source of involvement (Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990). Apart from product characteristics, researchers have also turned to consumers' perceptions of products when determining the involvement level associated with

a product group. The view that involvement is a consumer-defined concept is contained within a large body of literature in the consumer behaviour area.

3.3 Involvement as a consumer focused construct

There are a large number of definitions which are based on involvement's conceptualisation as an internal individual or consumer-focused construct (Andrews 1988 and Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990). When viewing involvement as an internal consumer-defined construct, Costley (1988) argued that three categories of conceptualisations can be seen to exist in the literature and largely they fall along an antecedent-consequences cognitive continuum.

The cognitive, state and response definitions differ with regard to the level of abstraction at which they treat involvement, the content ascribed to involvement, its focus, its nature and intensity properties (Costley 1988). In the following analysis, the consumer-defined involvement definitions are presented in these three subcategories, namely cognitive, individual state, and response-based definitional categories. These three categories appear broad enough to encompass all the various definitions and approaches taken in involvement in consumer behaviour and are largely based on the prior work of Costley (1988), Muehling, Laczniak and Andrews (1993) and O'Cass (1997).

3.3.1 Cognitive definitions of involvement

The cognitive definitions emphasise the cognitive linkages between an individual and an object when defining involvement (Costley 1988). According to proponents of cognitively-based approaches to involvement, involvement exists whenever a stimulus object is related to the unique cluster of attitudes and values that constitute a person's ego (Bloch & Richins 1983).

The cognitively-based definitions of involvement in consumer behaviour have often been derived from the Social Judgement Theory developed by Sherif and his colleagues (Sherif & Cantril 1947; Sherif & Hovland 1961 and Sherif, Sherif & Nebergall 1965), where the

concept of involvement was first employed in studies of attitude change. Under the Social Judgement Theory, an individual's response to a persuasive message is argued to be determined by two factors acting together; prior attitude toward the topic and involvement (Sherif & Hovland 1961). An individual's prior attitude influences the way they categorise a message, whereas involvement determines the strength of or commitment to that attitude.

Sherif and Cantril (1947) conceptualised involvement in terms of the relationship between an issue or object and the domain of one's ego. Sherif et al (1965) defined the concept in terms of the centrality of beliefs to an individual's identity. The fundamental focus of Social Judgement Theory is that it deals with attitude organisation, change and judgmental processes. Within social judgement theory, an individual's attitude structure is assumed to be reflected by a psychological profile which consists of three regions: the latitude of acceptance, the latitude of rejection and the latitude of noncommitment. Any persuasive communication will be judged according to this profile. Attitude change is assumed to result from the judged discrepancy between an individual's own position on the issue and the position presented by the persuasive communication (Sherif & Hovland 1961).

Ego involvement, a central concept in the Social Judgement Theory is assumed to affect the width of, acceptance, rejection and noncommitment and thus the probability of attitude change (Sherif & Cantril 1947; Sherif & Hovland 1961 and Sherif, Sherif & Nebergall 1965). It is assumed that highly involved individuals will generally have quite a wide latitude of rejection and narrow latitudes of acceptance and noncommitment to a message. Low involvement, on the other hand, is characterised by quite wide latitudes of acceptance and noncommitment and a rather narrow latitude of rejection of a message.

According to Sherif and Hovland (1961), the ego represents the core of an individual by being the constellation of attitudes which determine the enduring nature of one's identity. Therefore in this view, involvement exists when an object is related by an individual to the domain of the ego and for involvement to exist, ego attitudes must be aroused (Sherif & Hovland 1961). Sherif and Cantril (1947), Sherif and Hovland (1961) and Sherif, Sherif and Nebergall (1965) used the term "involvement with the issue" quite synonymously with the term "ego involved attitudes" and thus treated involvement as a property of an attitude and its centrality within an individual's values.

Another social psychological treatment of involvement relevant to this study, is that of Ostrum and Brock (1968), who also related the concept of involvement to an individual's cognitive structure. The three conditions which affect the level of involvement according to Ostrum and Brock (1968) are: the number of values engaged by the object; the centrality of these values within the consumer's life (the position of these values in an individual's structure); and the strength of the relationship between a stimulus-object and a personal value held by a consumer. High involvement exists when an object is linked strongly and often with highly central values held by an individual (Ostrum & Brock 1968).

In the consumer behaviour literature, the relationship between an individual and a stimulus object has been utilised when defining the concept of involvement. Houston and Rothschild (1979) defined enduring involvement as a "pre-existing relationship between an individual and the object of concern" (p.3). The strength of this relationship depends on the consumer's prior experience with the product and the centrality of the consumer's values related to the product. The notion of the strength of the relationship between the product and an individual's needs and values is also included in Bloch's (1981a) definition where he proposed that involvement "is a long-term interest in and concern with the product which is independent of situational influence and is based on the strength of the product's relationship to individual needs and values" (p.97).

Lastovicka and Gardner (1979) defined the concept of 'normative importance', which they viewed as a component of involvement, as being "how connected or engaged a product is to an individual's values" (p.68). The more related a product is to central values the more 'involving' it is. This centrality notion has also been examined by Rothschild (1979) who viewed enduring involvement as occurring relative to the degree that the product is related to a need deriving from a value high in the individual's hierarchy of values.

Tyebjee's (1979) definition of product involvement is based on Ostrum and Brock's (1968) cognitive model of attitudinal change, and also includes the notion of values centrality. According to Tyebjee (1979) product involvement depends on three conditions: (1) the number of values engaged by a product, (2) the centrality of these values to the consumer's life, and (3) the product's relatedness to these values. According to Tyebjee (1979), when product involvement is low, all these components are low whereas high involvement occurs

when the product is related strongly and often to very central and important values. Thus, high involvement exists when a product is intensely related to a consumer's central values (DeBruicker 1979 and Tyebjee 1979).

The analysis of the literature revealed many definitions of involvement that have a cognitive basis. Table 3.1 provides a representative sample of definitions classified here as cognitively-based involvement definitions according to the criteria of Costley (1988) and O'Cass (1997).

Table 3.1 Cognitively-based Definitions of Involvement

Author	Terminology used to label 'involvement'	Definition adopted
Engel & Light (1968)	Involvement	"the extent to which a product is connected to self-concept, important values, or motives" (p.45).
Day (1970)	Involvement	"the general level of interest in the attitude object, or the centrality of the object to the person's ego-structure" (p.80).
Hupfer & Gardner (1971)	Ego- involvement	"the degree of ego-involvement can be determined by the relative importance of an attitude that the individual holds regarding the object or activity" (pp.262-263).
Wright (1973)	Content processing involvement	"when a person is confronted by an advertisement which he/she perceives as particularly relevant to an impending decision" (p.55).
Houston & Rothschild (1979)	Enduring involvement	"pre-existing relationship between an individual and the object of concern. The strength of this relationship depends on the individual's prior experience with the product and the centrality of the relevant values" (p.3).
Lastovicka & Gardner (1979)	Normative importance	"how connected or engaged a product is to an individual's values" (p.68).
Rothschild (1979)	Enduring involvement	"it reflects his pre-existing cognitive and affective sets and may also reflect past behavior" (p.77).
Tyebjee (1979)	Involvement in a product	"depends on the number of values engaged by a product, the centrality of these values, and the product's relatedness to these values" (p.99).
Bloch (1981a)	Enduring involvement	"Is a long-term interest in and concern with the product which is independent of situational influence and is based on the strength of the product's relationship to individual needs and values" (p.97).

Table 3.1 Continued

Author	Terminology used to label 'involvement'	Definition adopted
Traylor (1981)	Product involvement	"is a recognition that certain product classes may be more or less central to an individual's life, his attitudes about himself, his sense of identity, and his relationship to the rest of the world" (p.51).
Engel & Blackwell (1982)	Involvement	"reflects the extent of personal relevance of the decision to the individual in terms of his basic values, goals, and self-concept" (p.273).
Zaichkowsky (1984)	Involvement	"a person's perceived relevance of the object based on their interest, needs, or values" (p.33).
Greenwald & Leavitt (1984)	Involvement	"personal relevance or importance" (p.583).
Slama & Tashchian (1985)	Purchasing involvement	"the self-relevance of purchasing activities to the individual" (p.73).
Peter & Olson (1987)	Involvement	"degree of personal relevance, which is a function of the extent to which the product or brand is perceived to help achieve consequences and values of importance to the consumer" (p.127).
Leigh & Menon (1987)	Audience involvement	"the level of attention and depth of processing (i.e. focus on sensory versus semantic features) should serve to define the level of audience involvement" (p.4).
Beatty, Kahle & Homer (1988)	Ego involvement	"the importance of the product to the individual and the individual's self-concept, values, and ego"(p.150).
	Purchase involvement	"the level of concern for, or interest in, the purchase process triggered by the need to consider a particular purchase "(p.150).
Ratz & Moore (1989)	Involvement	"both a state of mind and process variable which was a function of the level of thinking an individual engaged in concerning a given class or specific type of object" (p.115).
Goldsmith & Emmert (1991)	Consumer involvement	"refers to the feelings of interest and enthusiasm consumers hold toward product categories" (p.363).

(Source: Developed for this study)

The sample of definitions listed in Table 3.1 view involvement as a reflection of the consumer's cognitive relationship to a specific product. Involvement is seen to refer to the strength or extent of the psychological linkage or attachment between an individual and a

focal object. This attachment or linkage is largely seen through the extent that an object is related, connected or engaged in an individual's values. This relatedness is seen in some definitions that were developed in the mid 1980's as being filtered through the perception of personal relevance or importance (Beatty, Kahle & Homer 1988 and Peter & Olson 1987).

Interestingly, one definition stands out in cognitively-based definitions in Table 3.1. The definition of Beatty, Kahle and Homer (1988) of ego involvement and purchase involvement clearly expresses similar dimensions as all the other cognitively-based definitions, such as importance, values, concern, and interest. However, Beatty, Kahle and Homer (1988) go on to propose that both ego involvement and purchase involvement address forms of arousal or drive activation, and thus can be considered motivating variables. Thus, while they define involvement similarly to the general thrust of the cognitively-based definitions they further add that this construct has motivating characteristics. These motivating characteristics, however, do not define the core content of involvement and should best be seen as consequences of involvement.

Also, at a general level, a common feature of some of the cognitively-based definitions of involvement, particularly those that have appeared in the mid 1980's in consumer behaviour are seen as referring to the perceived personal relevance of an object to an individual. This perceived personal relevance is explicitly expressed in the definitions of Engel and Blackwell's (1982), Zaichkowsky's (1984), Slama and Tashchian's (1985) and Peter and Olson's (1987).

The above definitions provide a conceptual base for identifying how involvement has been defined and studied within what is called here cognitively oriented definitions of involvement. As discussed above, cognitively-based definitions of involvement stress the cognitive linkage between an individual and a stimulus object (Engel & Blackwell 1982; Hupfer & Gardner 1971; Lastovicka & Gardner 1979 and Zaichkowsky 1984), and many view involvement as the perceived personal importance or relevance of an object to an individual (Engel & Blackwell 1982 and Peter & Olson 1987). This perceived importance appears to be determined by such factors as the strength of the link between the object and the consumer's self concept, values or motives. However, it is not clear from the literature

if both values and self-concept need to be engaged in or by the product (stimulus) to create or cause involvement, or if values or self-concept alone are sufficient to cause involvement.

It should be noted, however, that the direct translation of cognitively-oriented social psychological definitions of involvement into the domain of consumer behaviour has resulted in some problems. The cognitively-based conceptualisation of involvement are somewhat problematic because of their origins in social psychology where the scope of reference has usually been a social issue, whereas in marketing the primary interest lies in the area of involvement with products (Bloch 1981). Generally, social issues have been perceived as being more involving or important than products (e.g., Hupfer & Gardner 1971). The current literature analysis questions whether existing measures based on the cognitive definitions of involvement are able to discriminate between different levels of involvement related to various products, although they may well discriminate between involvement levels associated with different social issues (Bloch 1981 and Slama & Tashchian 1987). Perhaps this issue is one of the reasons why, in consumer behaviour literature, the definitions of involvement, have focused more on behaviours such as in the response-based approaches and have been more operationally directed than those more abstract definitions appearing in the social psychological literature.

Some concern is also raised regarding cognitive definitions where the concept of involvement is to be used in a complex choice situation. In such situations, what is the object of involvement? Is it involvement with the product, or with the purchasing or consuming situation? Also, would the proper level of analysis focus on the single brand level or the level of a product group or perhaps at the level of purchasing and/or consumption in general? In order to manage such complexity and diversity in purchasing activity, several types of involvement have been presented in consumer behaviour literature. As indicated in Table 3.1, within the cognitive approaches, terms such as ego involvement, enduring involvement, normative importance and purchasing involvement have been used not to define the content of the construct, but to define the focus or object of involvement.

The commonality amongst the cognitive definitions is that they define involvement through characterising the cognitive relationship between an individual's values, higher order knowledge structure and a stimulus object. Fundamentally, within the cognitively-based

definitions, involvement is not seen as either solely the property of an individual, or of an object, but is the cognitive *relationship* between an individual and an object. The cognitively-based approaches see involvement as the degree of association between a consumer's cognitive structure and the stimulus-object.

In order to bring the concept of involvement closer to the consumer behaviour discipline, definitions based on the consumers motivational mental state and response behaviour have been developed. These definitions determine involvement by describing either an individual's mental state or the response effects of involvement.

3.3.2 State definitions of involvement

Individual state conceptualisations of involvement focus on the motivational mental state of an individual evoked by a stimulus or stimuli at a particular point in time (Antil 1984; Cohen 1983; Hastak 1990; Mitchell 1979; Mittal 1982; Muehling & Laczniak 1988 and Park & Young 1986). The content of involvement in the state-based approach is usually considered to be synonymous with various expressions describing an individual's motivational state of mind, such as arousal, arousal capacity, interest or drive (Costley 1988; Higie & Feick 1989; Mitchell 1979; Park & Mittal 1985; Rothschild 1984 and Wilkie 1986). Such definitions conceive of involvement as an actualised individual state variable that possesses 'direction', 'intensity' and 'persistence' properties (Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990).

Mitchell (1979) sought to define involvement as referring to the amount of interest evoked by a stimulus, conceiving it as "an internal state variable that indicates the amount of arousal, interest or drive evoked by a particular stimulus or situation" (p.194). Mitchell's approach is closely aligned to product choice situations, taking into account the complexity included in such a situation and its temporary nature. This is seen in Mitchell's discussion of involvement's connection to the individual's goal hierarchy at a particular point in time and his belief that a high involvement situation will have a relatively high position in the goal hierarchy and a low involvement situation a relatively low position in the hierarchy of goals of consumers (Mitchell 1979). When extrinsic goals are included, the treatment of involvement is a temporary phenomenon because it can be assumed that when the goals are

achieved, their importance will diminish. Being connected to goal achievement, the level of involvement will or should theoretically reduce or diminish when the goal is reached (Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990). The temporal nature of Mitchell's conceptualisation appears to make it more suitable for studying involvement related to a temporary purchasing process or situation rather than studying enduring involvement or the longer term association between the consumer and a stimulus object.

Within the state-based approaches, there has been significant use of the term 'situational involvement' indicating the inclusion of the situation in definitions. Within the views of many of the proponents of the state approaches, particularly Rothschild (1975, 1979) and Houston and Rothschild (1978), situational involvement seems to include the effects of both purchasing and the anticipated consumption situation as mechanisms to elicit concern for behaviour in a situation. These authors assumed that the consumer's perception of both product stimuli (product, cost, perceived complexity, frequency of purchase and similarity of choice alternatives) and social stimuli (especially the social surroundings of the anticipated consumption situation) can cause a consumer to be concerned for and about their behaviour in a particular situation.

Bloch (1981a) has, however, proposed that situational and enduring involvement are two separate forms of product involvement. But, unlike Houston and Rothschild (1978), Bloch (1981a) focused on a product rather than on a situation when defining situational involvement. According to Bloch (1981a) situational involvement refers to the consumer's temporal concern with a product, deriving from their desire to attain a specific extrinsic goal. This goal may derive from a purchase and/or an anticipated consumption situation. Bloch's definition resembles Clarke and Belk's (1979) treatment of product and task involvement. Clarke and Belk (1979) saw product involvement as purchase item specific, not purchase situation specific, and task involvement is defined by the consumer's intentions at a particular place and point in time. However, the concept of situational involvement, as expressed by Bloch (1981a), and task involvement by Clarke and Belk (1979) have some problems. Bloch points out that situational involvement is temporary in nature as does Clarke and Belk regarding task involvement. This seems to contrast the cognitive perspectives, which Bloch takes in his studies and the cognitive approaches in general, which view involvement as an enduring phenomenon. Theoretically, some argue (Bloch

1981) it would be more appropriate to consider situational involvement as basically an enduring phenomenon by itself and emphasise that it is only the situation or task under consideration that is temporary. Thus, in similar situations and with similar tasks, the level of situational or task involvement should be similar within a consumer.

As mentioned above, state-based definitions view involvement as focusing on the mental state of an individual evoked by a stimulus or stimuli. For example, this is explicitly expressed in Bloch's (1982) definition of enduring involvement "as an unobservable state reflecting the amount of interest, arousal or emotional attachment evoked by the product in a particular individual" (p 413). Importantly, they do not require the arousal of or attachment to a consumers' central values as a necessary prerequisite for involvement to exist as do cognitive-based definitions. Thus, the meaning of involvement is not given in terms of the cognitive bases or higher order self-related knowledge structures or causes of involvement, but rather through viewing involvement as synonymous with certain expressions describing an individual's motivational state. Expressions, such as arousal, arousal capacity, interest, drive or motivation, are common in the state-based conceptualisation of involvement. Largely, because of these characteristics, the state-based approaches see involvement as a motivational construct (Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990 and Costley 1988).

Although the content of state-based definitions of involvement are diverse, commonality can be seen in that they all include motivational properties. Whereby involvement describes the motivational state of an individual toward a stimulus object and essentially they all, to some degree, view involvement as the amount of perceived importance, interest, attachment (emotional), arousal, drive, activation and/or motivation of a consumer evoked by a stimulus. For example, Clarke and Belk (1979) stated, when dealing with the determinants of arousal, that:

While product and task involvement are not the only determinants of arousal, in a focused activity like product choice and purchasing they are generally dominant (p.314).

Table 3.2 provides a representative sample of state-based definitions of involvement. The initial understanding concerning the content of state-based approaches to involvement

Table 3.2 Continued

Author	Terminology used to label involvement	Definition adopted
Baker & Lutz (1987)	Advertising message involvement	"a motivational construct embodying the amount of cognitive effort directed by the consumer at processing the contents of an advertising message" (p.75).
	Advertising execution involvement	"a motivational construct embodying the degree of cognitive effort directed by the consumer at processing the executional properties of an advertising stimulus without regard to their brand relatedness"(p.80).
Andrews (1988)	Message involvement	"An individual, internal state of arousal with intensity and direction properties" (p.24).
Mittal (1989b)	Involvement	"a motivational state that has been activated by a stimulus, situation, or a decision task" (p.699).
Ratchford & Vaughn (1989)	Involvement	"interest level or motivational intensity" (p.293).
Mittal (1982)	Involvement	"a motivational state of mind of a person with regard to an object or activity. It reveals itself as the level of interest in that object or activity" (p.64-5).
Park, Assael & Chaik (1985)	Involvement	"goal-directed arousal capacity" (p.13-14).
Higie & Feick (1989)	Enduring involvement	"an individual difference variable representing an arousal potential of a product or activity that causes personal relevance" (p.690).
Mittal & Lee (1989)	Involvement	"is the perceived value of a goal object that manifests as interest in that goal object" (p.365).
Mittal (1989)	Purchase Decision	"the extent of interest and concern that a consumer brings to bear upon a purchase decision task" (p.150).
Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter (1990)	Involvement	"an individual, internal state of arousal with intensity, direction, and persistence properties" (p.28).
Heslin & Johnson (1992)	Involvement	"as motivation to expend personal resources to learn about or purchase a product or service" (p.210).

(Source: Developed for this study)

Examination of the content and object characteristics of state-based approaches to involvement suggests that it is conceptualised fundamentally as arousal or intensity directed toward a stimulus object. This is expressed, for example, by statements indicating that involvement refers to the amount, state or level of interest, arousal or motivation (Mittal 1982 and Rothschild 1984). Hence, state-based approaches largely view involvement as a

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mediating, reactive, motivational mental state elicited through exposure to a specific stimulus or stimuli. Direction for behaviour is often prescribed by the stimulus or stimuli which arouses involvement. Within state definitions, the direction of involvement has been specified in terms of a stimulus object, such as an advertisement, product, a specific brand of product or even a goal (Bloch 1981a and Mitchell 1979). This is explicitly expressed in some definitions where involvement is 'activated by', 'evoked by' or 'derived from' a specific stimulus (Mitchell 1979 and Mittal 1989b).

Implicitly, the mediating reactive role of involvement as acting between a stimulus and a consumer's response is included in all the propositions presented as state-based involvement conceptualisations. The intensity characteristic however, does vary within the state-based conceptualisations of involvement. Some identify the intensity characteristic as a continuum (Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990; Antil 1984 and Mittal 1989), whereas others identify in terms of high or low level characteristics (Mitchell 1979).

The notion that involvement reflects the amount of arousal, interest or emotional attachment (Bloch 1982) or amount of arousal, interest or drive (Mitchell 1979) evoked by a stimulus seems to oppose Krugman's idea about the meaning of involvement. Krugman (1965) was the first to introduce the concept of involvement into marketing literature when he studied the influence of television advertising. He argued that, the concept of personal involvement does "not mean attention, interest, or excitement but the number of conscious 'bridging experiences', connections, or personal references per minute that the viewer makes between his own personal life and the stimulus" (Krugman 1965 p.355).

Krugman fundamentally adopted the social psychological notion that involvement denotes the relationship between an individual and a stimulus object in his operationalisation of personal involvement. He suggested that high and low involvement can be associated with effective persuasion, albeit by different routes. With high involvement the classic approach to persuasion of modifying consciously held beliefs and opinions applies, whereas with low involvement, effective persuasion involves gradually shifting perceptual structures by repeated exposures to messages.

Petty and Cacioppo (1986) termed the former the 'central route' and the latter the 'peripheral route' to persuasion and attitude change. Greenwald and Leavitt (1984) suggested four levels of involvement: 'preattention', involving sensory buffering and feature analysis; 'focal attention', involving channel selection and perceptual and semantic processing; 'comprehension', involving syntactic analysis; and 'elaboration', involving conceptual analysis. This suggests that involvement is seen as the level and allocation of various cognitive processing activities. Krugman (1965), Petty and Cacioppo (1986) and Greenwald and Leavitt (1984) largely define (high) involvement in terms of what Buck (1988) saw as analytic cognition. However, an opposing and thought provoking view was proposed by McLuhan (1964), who conceptualised involvement in terms of sense ratios, arguing television is a highly involving medium because it engages many senses. In contrast, and ironically Krugman (1965) saw television as a low involvement medium.

Perhaps these diametrically opposing views can be reconciled by taking on board the views of Buck (1988) and Tucker (1981) who argued that affect and reason are often thought of as ends of a continuum, but they are more appropriately seen as two qualitatively different types of systems that interact with one another. Such a view would not restrict high involvement to only analytic cognition or central route processing in Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) terminology but would encompass what Buck (1988) termed syncretic or affective cognition which has been seen largely as a low involvement phenomenon by authors such as Krugman (1965) and Petty and Cacioppo (1986).

Further, when studying the discrepancy between Mitchell's and Bloch's propositions and Krugman's and Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) approaches, the most central feature is the degree to which the proposed states are influenced by the relationship between one's cognitive structure and stimulus object and to what extent other determinants affect the state.

Within the state-based conceptualisations, involvement has been argued to affect the nature and extensiveness of consumer information processing, attitude formation, brand selection and behavioural responses (Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990). Involvement's base within state-based approaches is seen to be the goals of an individual at a particular point in time (Mitchell 1981) which are posited to be determined by different needs and motives

(Mittal 1982 and Park & Young 1984). Within this conception of involvement, the stimuli for involvement are potentially all the situational/environmental stimuli impacting on the consumer within a specific context and time frame. Thus, in a product choice situation it is theoretically feasible that, as well as the product, the characteristics of the marketing activities as well as the social context of purchasing and consumption all potentially affect the degree of consumer involvement with a product. In addition to the situational factors confronting consumers, their previous product and consumption experience could also influence the degree of involvement. Such an approach to involvement can be seen to be problematic regarding the scope of the conceptualisations and their differentiation of detail from other constructs.

To overcome many of the problems inherent in state-based approaches to involvement Cohen (1983) argued for theoretically separating the consumer's goals, beliefs and interests from the concept of involvement. He argued that "involvement might fundamentally be viewed as a state of activation, directed to some portion of the psychological field" (p.326). Involvement is seen therefore as the actualised interaction with the stimulus and should be separate from the antecedent and consequent variables (Cohen 1983).

According to Cohen, an appropriate way to operationalise involvement would probably be closely related to some measure of attention. Cohen (1983) viewed involvement as something similar to focused activation. He further stressed selectivity as a characteristic of involvement, but without imposing requirements for the direction of involvement as a determinant for its level. Such features of the view of Cohen (1983) can be seen in his proposition that:

I feel we should discontinue the practice of referring to the consumer as in a state of 'low involvement' just because the individual's attention is disproportionately going to something he or she may be interested in ... rather than what the advertiser is interested in (p.326).

Similarly this notion was expressed by Park and Young (1984) as an essential component of the definition of involvement when they proposed that:

Only when arousal is directed towards a particular object with higher intensity is an individual said to be highly involved with that object (p.2).

An analysis of the state-based definitions of involvement shows that they largely conceive of involvement as a construct formed or created by a combination of the internal and external determinants of behaviour. However, under this approach, involvement and its relationships to other contiguous concepts (such as product importance, product familiarity, learning, perceived risk, motivation, perceived brand differences and product or brand commitment) is not well-specified and remains poorly defined (Bloch 1981b; Mittal 1982 and Zaichowsky 1984). Within state-based approaches to involvement, it is accepted that involvement directly influences behavioural outcomes. However, the examination of other potential mediating variables acting between involvement and purchasing behaviour or consumption is largely untouched in this stream of research.

The majority of the proponents of the state-based approaches see involvement as a temporary phenomenon and they usually ignore the antecedent conditions of involvement as well as other factors potentially affecting the internal state of a consumer. Due to their 'temporary' nature, the suitability and appropriateness of many of the state-based definitions as currently expressed are restricted largely to a single choice or advertising situation. Further, it is questionable whether any progress is being made in our understanding of involvement and consumer behaviour by replacing previously used concepts such as motivation, arousal or attention with the term involvement (Costley 1988). As Costley (1988) aptly stated regarding the state-based approaches to involvement:

It suffers, however, from the problem of being defined in terms of other concepts. The involvement state is frequently defined in terms of arousal, motivation, attention, or interest. If involvement is any of these, it is not a unique construct and is therefore unnecessary (p.554).

3.3.3 Response definitions of involvement

Response-based approaches take the position of defining and measuring involvement in terms of a consumer's response patterns evoked by a stimulus (Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990 and Costley 1988). The response definitions of involvement fundamentally define it as a function of a consumer's responses under different involvement levels. Response-based definitions are commonly used when studying information processing or

advertising communication. Such response approaches can be attributed to Krugman (1965) where he stated:

The significance of conditions of low or high involvement is not that one is better than the other, but that the process of communication impact are different. That is, there is a difference in the change processes that are at work. Thus, with low involvement one might look for gradual shifts in perceptual structure, aided by repetition, activated by behavioral-choice situations and followed at some time by attitude change. With high involvement one would look for the classic, more dramatic and more familiar conflict of ideas at the level of conscious opinion and attitude that precedes changes in overt behavior
(p.355).

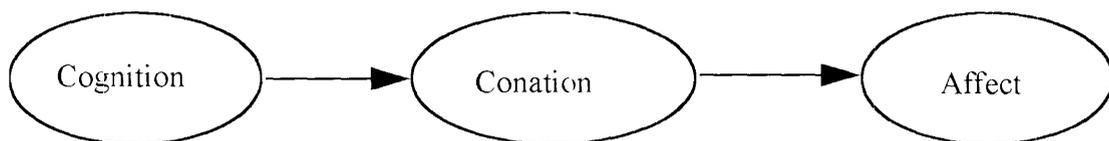
Krugman operationalised involvement by counting the number of conscious bridging connections a viewer made between their own life experiences and the stimulus (TV advertisement). The development of the response-based approaches to involvement can be seen in the early work of researchers such as Ray (1973) who elaborated on and modified the view of Krugman (1965) by incorporating advertising and information processing into various hierarchies of effect. Other researchers have also stressed the difference in information processing dynamics proposed by Krugman when defining the level of involvement through various hierarchies of effect (e.g., Calder 1979 and Finn 1982).

The hierarchy of effects model proposes that an advertisement or other persuasive communication leads to brand purchase through an established sequence of steps. These steps are often depicted as awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction and purchase (Lavidge & Steiner 1961). This original sequence can be summarised by the three summary labels of cognition (referring to awareness and knowledge), affect (referring to liking and preference) and conation (referring to conviction and purchase). These three labels are variously represented in the sequences depicted in the following five figures. The term 'hierarchy of effects' indicates that each step is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for the next step. The assumption that these stages always occur proposed

sequences has been debated extensively in the literature (e.g., Batra & Ray 1983; Calder 1979; Finn 1982 and Ray 1973). The importance of the hierarchy of effects to the involvement debate is that researchers introduced the level of involvement as an important variable to account for the different sequences in the various hierarchies and have subsequently used the hierarchies to identify different levels of involvement.

For example, Ray et al (1973) argued that, in low involvement situations, conative (behavioural tendencies) development occurs before affective development as indicated in Figure 3.1 and labelled this the low involvement hierarchy.

Figure 3.1 Ray's Low Involvement Hierarchy



(Source: Adapted from Ray et al 1973)

The learning hierarchy is used to describe information processing under high involvement conditions. In high involvement situations, affective development was thought to precede conative response. Figure 3.2 describes the stages of the learning hierarchy which is characterised as the stages a highly involved consumer would move through.

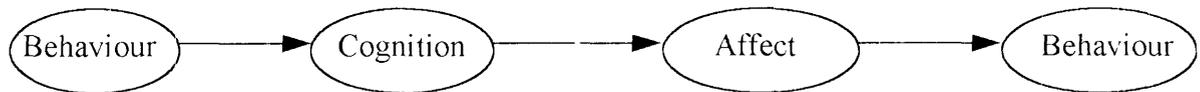
Figure 3.2 The Learning Hierarchy



(Source: Adapted from Ray et al 1973)

Ray and his colleagues argued that they found some support for the existence of these two hierarchies in their laboratory experiments. However, others have criticised the existence of the proposed hierarchies (Finn 1983). Calder (1979) emphasised differences between high and low involvement information processing by describing the low involvement hierarchy using the stages depicted in Figure 3.3. Unlike Ray, Calder focused on the direct effect of advertising on behaviour without any mediating cognitive change. Calder hypothesised that dissonance would be a high involvement process and post-behavioural self-perception a low involvement process.

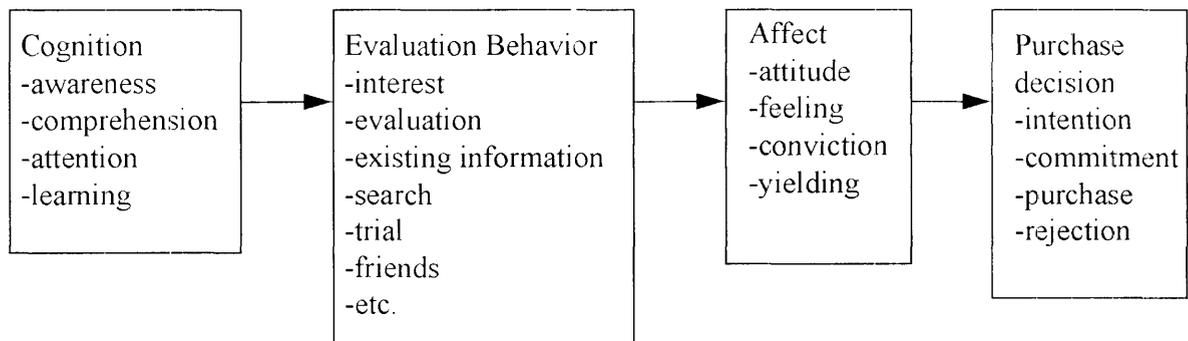
Figure 3.3 Calder's Low Involvement Hierarchy



(Source: Adapted from Calder 1979)

Finn (1982) criticised the notion of different hierarchies and proposed a single hierarchy solution (cognition - evaluation - behaviour - affect- purchase decision) and elaborated the various stages so that low involvement processing could be interpreted within his stages as depicted in Figure 3.4. Finn (1982) also disagreed with the proposition that the level of consumer involvement could be determined afterwards according to the hierarchy.

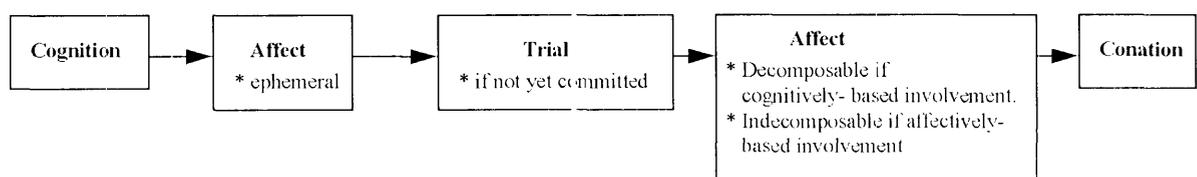
Figure 3.4 Finn's Hierarchy of Effects



(Source: Adapted from Finn 1982)

In response to what they believed were problems with the original hierarchies of effects, Park and Mittal (1983) proposed what they argued was a more general hierarchy of effects. Their model took a broader view of affect than the previous studies by proposing various types of affect. These types included decomposable affect, indecomposable affect and ephemeral affect. The stages and elements of Park and Mittal (1983) model is detailed in Figure 3.5 below.

Figure 3.5 Park & Mittal General Hierarchy of Effects Model



(Source Adapted from Park & Mittal 1983)

Within the information processing context, the order of cognitive, affective and conative development proposed in the various hierarchies of effect is assumed to be a reflection of

involvement levels. In line with the incorporation of the hierarchy of effects approach to involvement, Batra and Ray (1983) used the term “*message response involvement*” to characterise the way a specific message gets processed by a particular individual at a particular point in time. According to Batra and Ray (1983) “in the communication and advertising context, involvement may usefully be conceptualised and operationalised as the depth and quality of response-evoked cognitive responses” (p. 309).

Table 3.3 provides a representative sample of definitions found within the response-based approaches to involvement. The sample of definitions presented in Table 3.3 largely sees involvement representing various static or dynamic responses of a consumer elicited through their interaction with a stimulus object. These approaches treat involvement as a response process of various cognitive and behavioural response activities of consumers.

Table 3.3 Response-based Definitions of Involvement

Author	Terminology used to label ‘involvement’	Definition adopted
Zimbardo (1960)	Response involvement	“the individual’s concern with the consequences of his/her response or with the instrumental meaning of his/her opinion” (p.87).
Ray, Sawyer, Rothschild, Heeler, Strong & Reed (1973)	Involvement	information processing hierarchy is characterized by the sequence:
	Low involvement hierarchy	cognitive - conative - affective development
	Learning hierarchy	cognitive - affective - conative development
	Dissonance-attribution hierarchy	conative - affective - cognitive development.
Kallick, Nearby & Shaffer (1974)	Limited involvement group	“consists of people who don’t care about the product class. They rely on product familiarity and acceptability when making a choice and devote only minimal effort to purchasing”(p.461).
	Moderately involved group	“consists of individuals who think about the products in terms of benefits and attributes. These consumers show brand preferences and are willing to allocate energy to purchasing”(p.461).
	Highly involved group	“comprises consumers who do not just think about brands but also perceive symbolic and emotional significance associated with a brand in a product class and they are bound to their brand choice” (p.461-462).

Table 3.3 Continued

Author	Terminology used to label 'involvement'	Definition adopted
Rothschild (1975)	No involvement	"a consumer will not participate in the process at hand" (p.216)
	Zero-order involvement	"an individual merely responds to the process or issue without having taken a position and does not need to have gone through affective development prior to behavior" (p.217)
	Higher-order information-seeking involvement	"an individual has a fully developed set of beliefs and set of attitudes upon which to make a decision and behave" (p.217)
	Higher-order brand/party loyalty involvement	"an individual does not need such a fully developed cognitive set since loyalty predominates his attitude set" (p.217).
Gardner, Mitchell & Russo (1978)	Advertising involvement	<p>High involvement learning (brand set): the interest in the product category is high and the consumer is actively processing the information in the advertisement to reach an overall evaluation of the advertised brand.</p> <p>Low involvement learning (nonbrand set):</p> <p>a) strategy limited: the person processes the advertisement with other than a (brand) evaluation strategy. A trace of the advertisement is stored in episodic memory.</p> <p>B) attention limited: the advertisement does not receive enough attention for it to be fully perceived or evaluated" (p.584).</p>
Houston & Rothschild (1978)	Response Involvement	"the complexity or extensiveness of cognitive and behavioral processes characterizing the overall consumer decision process" (p.185).
Calder (1979)	Low involvement	"might best be described by the order behavior, cognition, affect, behavior, where the initial behavior may be produced by a prior chain of cognition, affect, or more likely, by other variables" (p.33).
Batra & Ray(1983)	Message Response Involvement	"in the communication and advertising context involvement may usefully be conceptualized and operationalized as the depth and quality of message-evoked cognitive responses" (p.309).
Greenwald & Leavitt(1984)	Audience Involvement	"is the allocation of attentional capacity to a message source, as needed to analyze the message at one of a series of increasingly abstract representational levels" (p.591).
Stone (1984)	Behavioral involvement	"time and/or intensity of effort expended in the undertaking of behaviors" (p.210).

(Source: Developed for this study)

The general thrust of response-based approaches is represented in the definition offered by Kallick, Nearby and Shaffer (1974) in Table 3.3, which assumes that the degree of cognitive and affective development as well as the amount of total effort a consumer is willing to devote differ according to involvement levels. According to Kallick et al. (1974), facilities are the prime issue in limited involvement consumers, cognition is the prime issue in moderate involvement consumers and affect is the prime issue in highly involved consumers. Problematically, this definition has the level of abstraction about the choice object changing between the descriptions of moderate and highly involving consumers. While the moderately involved consumer (as well as limited involvement consumers) is described at the level of a product group, the highly involving consumer is described at the level of a single brand. Kallick et al. (1974) propose differences in information processing responses between levels of involvement. Critically, this definition confuses the notion of brand loyalty (or commitment to a single brand) with the notion of product involvement. As commonly seen in response-based approaches to involvement, Kallick et al (1974) also focus on consequences of involvement, not on the central or core nature of the construct (Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990). Typically response-based involvement definitions do not provide a definition per se, but provide a list of differences in information processing or cognitive and behavioural responses at different levels of involvement.

Rothschild (1975), in a similar manner to information processing researchers such as Ray (1973) and Batra and Ray (1983), applies a dynamic hierarchical perspective when discussing involvement by arguing that some level of involvement is needed before an individual will participate or behave at some level. He identifies three types or levels of involvement and uses three types of hierarchies for describing the level of involvement as indicated in Table 3.3. These were zero-order involvement, higher-order loyal involvement and higher-order information seeking involvement.

The distinguishing element between zero-order involvement and higher-order involvement is the order of cognitive stages. In zero-order situations, attitude formation does not precede behavioural response whereas the opposite is stated to describe higher-order situations. A distinction is also made between two types of higher-order involvement and the basis of “commitment” to a particular brand. Again, the confusion between brand commitment and involvement arises from this latter notion of higher-order involvement. Rothschild, like

others, does not give a primary definition of involvement, he only defines, in a secondary way, the causes of involvement or what effects involvement has on other processes. Like Kallick et al. (1974), Rothschild (1975) also assumed that brand loyalty always implies higher involvement.

Rothschild (1979) also proposed that low involvement occurs when a consumer uses only a few attributes of the object in decision making, weights them heavily and combines them in a non-compensatory decision process. However, using Rothschild's approach, it could be feasible that a consumer has only one salient attribute, namely product familiarity, and would always be classified as a low involvement consumer under Rothschild's conceptualisation. Using such an approach confuses the effects of the consumers' previous experience with the product or brand and their involvement with it. Interestingly, under this approach, it is argued that if a consumer makes a brand choice on the basis of familiarity, they would automatically be considered as being a low involvement consumer (Kallick et al 1974).

Accordingly, under Rothschild's (1979) response approach, low involvement occurs when the consumer uses a small number of attributes and has wide latitudes of acceptance when making a choice. When involvement increases, the number of attributes used is assumed to increase, and the level of acceptance of each salient attribute is argued to become narrower (Rothschild 1979). This is similar to the Social Judgement Theory approach to involvement, however, it is applied in Rothschild's approach to a hierarchy of response processes. It is theoretically feasible that previous experience with a product class, will have an influence on the number of attributes used and their level of acceptance. Involvement conceived and measured in this manner would be potentially affected by the stage in the consumer's decision making process and a consumer's previous experience and knowledge of the product.

Extending on the earlier work of Rothschild (1975), Houston and Rothschild (1978) proposed that 'response involvement' reflected the joint effects of enduring and situational involvement and defined it as:

the complexity of extensiveness of cognitive and behavioral processes characterizing the overall consumer decision process (p.185).

Houston and Rothschild considered the extensiveness of both cognitive activity and behavioural processes as determinants of the degree of involvement. However, definitions based on the extensiveness of the decision making process can be considered to be more appropriate to the initial purchasing situations where the influence of previous experience or familiarity is not so evident or significant. Even within the domain of decision making research and information processing, the response-based definitions of involvement have serious theoretical and empirical weaknesses.

The response definitions are essentially all based on a circular or reciprocal treatment of involvement. They determine the level of involvement through a particular type of response, and then argue that this response is to be accounted for by the level of involvement. Even though it is a widely held assumption that the level of involvement will have an effect on the amount of cognitive and physical effort devoted to the decision making process (Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990), other determinants or factors such as prior product experience, product knowledge, ability and learning are some of the variables that will also potentially have an effect on such processes (Mitchell 1979). Contrary to the view espoused by authors such as Houston and Rothschild (1978), Mitchell (1979) stressed that:

However, if we conceptualize 'involvement' as discussed here, defining 'involvement' as a process may be misleading. Although, the level of 'involvement' may have a strong effect on the process used to make decisions or acquire information, I do not believe that it is the only determinant of these processes. For instance, in acquiring information from advertisements, the modality, the structure and content of the advertisement may also have an effect on these processes (p.94).

A further conceptual weakness in the response-based definitions is the potential for involvement to operate as a mediating variable (Bloch & Richins 1983). If indeed involvement is a mediating variable, it raises the issue of how it can also be a response variable (Venkatraman 1990). Thus, inferring the level of involvement from a given response is justified only if the following two conditions can be fulfilled. First, there are no other determinants (such as product importance, product familiarity, product or brand commitment, product trial, motivation or learning) besides involvement that directly affect

the particular cognitive or behavioural outcome. Second, the specific level of involvement can only lead to an *a priori* known form of information processing, which is included in the specific involvement definition. However, it seems that neither of these two conditions can be found within response-based definitions of involvement nor their empirical operationalisations. Involvement is not the only determinant for behaviour (Mitchell 1979 and Ray 1979) and we do not know the exclusive type and extent of cognitive or behavioural processes and information processing at specific involvement levels (Muncy 1990). At the current stage of knowledge development regarding involvement, there is not enough theoretical reasoning or empirical data for an *a priori* determination of all possible response patterns at different involvement levels (Mittal 1985; Muncy 1990 and Park & Young 1986) and we do not know nor can we predict when the stages represented in the various hierarchies change, from, for example, those expressed in the low involvement hierarchy to the learning hierarchy.

It would be more appropriate to view the responses depicted within the response-based stream as the potential consequences or effects of involvement and not as involvement *per se* (Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990; Antil 1984; Cohen 1983 and Costley 1988). Importantly, within the response-based approach, there is an inherent inability of many of the theoretical propositions and measures to distinguish the effects of involvement from the effects of the other related constructs in purchasing and consumption processes nor do they describe the inherent content and nature of involvement. Another limitation arises from involvement being viewed only in relation to a temporary process, either as information processing or decision making processes. Fundamentally, the suitability of these definitions is limited to the context of a single purchasing or advertising occasion in a very defined and specific contextual situation.

Involvement has been seen by response proponents as a subject-related response variable and, similar to the state definitions, the antecedent conditions that produce it have often not been discussed within the response-based approaches. The response-based definitions are very operational in nature and they tend to view involvement as an overt behavioural or actualised response pattern. It is often described in terms of a temporal pattern of response behaviour. Further, involvement is usually seen by advocates of this approach as a dichotomous variable, the level of which is either high or low (Ray et al 1973 and

Rothschild 1979). Consequently, the accompanying responses have been classified as either high or low involvement behavior.

Largely, response based approaches take the position of determining and measuring involvement in terms of response patterns (Ray 1973 and Batra & Ray 1983). As Costley (1988) validly points out “responses don’t seem to need a new label such as “involvement”, so this conceptualisation seems weak” (p.554). She further argued convincingly, that “while constructs are typically measured by items that are expected to correlate with each other and with the construct, construct validity is evaluated in terms of the correlation between the measured construct and other constructs to which it theoretically relates. Involvement should be expected to correlate with responses, but involvement is not responses per se” (Costley 1988 p.554). Responses should be seen to be theoretically related, but should not be seen to be one and the same, and, if they are, the construct of involvement is not necessary (Cohen 1983 and Costley 1988).

3.4 Discussion

In the consumer behaviour literature, involvement has been conceived and defined in a variety of ways using numerous properties to define its content, its focus, nature and intensity characteristics (Costley 1988; Muehling, Laczniak & Andrews 1993 and O’Cass 1997). Characteristics such as the duration of involvement, the level and direction, arousal, interest, relevance, importance, commitment as well as affective and cognitive properties have been used when describing the characteristics of involvement within the three broad categories used to analyse involvement in this study (cognitive, state and response) (Costley 1988 and O’Cass 1997).

As mentioned before, involvement is seen by some as a temporary phenomenon when studying situational involvement. Further, terms such as ‘situational involvement’, ‘response involvement’ and ‘enduring involvement’ seem quite misleading because the distinction between these concepts is not the duration of involvement but the focus of involvement (Houston & Rothschild 1979) or the duration of the process which is affected by these involvement types (Bloch 1981a). For this reason, some have proposed that the

different involvement types should be labeled according to the focus of involvement (Andrews 1988, Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990).

Further, in many of the definitions, involvement is proposed to contain the dimensions of direction and intensity (Mitchell 1979). Intensity refers to the degree of involvement. It may be assumed that some level of involvement has to exist in order for an individual to participate or behave (Rothschild 1975). In consumer behaviour, involvement has often been viewed as a dyadic phenomenon. For example, when defining involvement through the pattern of information processing, only two levels of involvement have been assumed to exist: low or high involvement with regard to a focal stimulus (e.g. Ray 1973). More probably, the levels of involvement should be thought to form a continuum reaching from zero to very high levels of involvement (Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990; Bloch 1986 and DeBruicker 1979). Largely, all definitions include the characteristics of the direction of involvement toward stimulus object. Some authors have proposed that in a purchasing process there are potentially two main directions of involvement to be studied. Product involvement is directed towards a particular product in question and purchasing involvement is directed to purchasing process itself (Mittal 1989). Further, some authors have suggested that it is possible to study involvement at the level of a single brand (e.g., DeBruicker 1979; Mitchell 1979 and Mittal & Lee 1989). This may, however, be easily confused with the notion of commitment to a single brand. The terms 'involvement' and 'commitment' and their definitions have created some problems in the literature (Beatty, Kahle & Homer 1988).

In social psychology, it has often been assumed that commitment and involvement are related (e.g. Freedman 1964 and Sherif et al. 1965). In social psychology there are also opposing views about this involvement-commitment issue where, for example, Festinger (1957) defined involvement as "concern with the issue itself" while Freedman (1964) defined involvement as meaning "commitment to a position or concern with a specific stand on an issue" (p.290). Freedman's (1964) definition is much more focused and restrictive than Festinger's (1957) definition. This same tendency is also evident in consumer behaviour, for example, where Robertson (1976) and Kassarian and Kassarian (1979) have also used the term commitment synonymously with the content of involvement.

Further, Kallick et al. (1974) and Rothschild (1975) also assumed that high commitment always implied high product involvement.

However, while Freedman (1964) stressed commitment in social psychology, some in consumer behaviour have, stressed that commitment and involvement are different concepts (Beatty, Kahle & Homer 1988; Finn 1983 and Mitchell 1979). There is also some empirical evidence which shows these two constructs can be treated as distinct and they do not vary directly (Lastovicka & Gardner 1979). However, there are some problems with the Lastovicka and Gardner work in that it is more in line with product importance not product involvement. It has been argued in the literature that product importance and involvement are not one and the same. Product importance is subsumed within the construct of involvement (Mittal 1989, 1992). Further, product importance is argued to be an early peaking concept in that many things may be perceived as important without the individual being seen as significantly involved (Mittal 1989 and Traylor 1981). Thus, perceptions of importance occur prior to and before the occurrence of involvement.

The issue of the relationship between commitment and involvement has created much confusion in the literature. The issue of their exact relationship remains vague, where some authors treat the two terms synonymously, some as separate but related and some as separate and unrelated. For example, Kiesler (1971) argued that commitment can be seen to refer to how 'pledged or bound' an individual is to his behavioural acts, and subsequently Lastovicka and Gardner (1979) applied this definition to the field of consumer behaviour and determined the concept of commitment as "the pledging or binding of an individual to his brand choices" (p.68). According to them, commitment is a brand rather than a product related phenomenon. Commitment can be considered a psychological attachment toward a particular brand (Beatty, Kahle & Homer 1988 and Traylor 1981). This resembles the cognitive dimension of brand loyalty (Mitchell 1979 and Finn 1983). Further, it seems evident that prior experience with a product class may have a great influence on the development of commitment, although it is not a necessary condition.

As indicated by the empirical results of Lastovicka and Gardner (1979), commitment and involvement may not vary directly, because commitment to a particular brand may be high, although the level of product involvement is low and high product involvement does not

necessarily mean greater commitment to a brand (e.g., Lastovicka & Gardner 1979 and Traylor 1981). Houston and Rothschild (1979) argued that commitment is a component of involvement. Thus commitment may be likened to importance in that it is subsumed within the concept of involvement.

Importantly, characteristics such as centrality, importance, ego involvement, interest, relevance, arousal, commitment and the numerous other different terms alone and the surplus meaning that accompanies each provides little direct assistance toward understanding the involvement construct. Their real value is in assisting in understanding how the construct has developed, some say into a *bag of worms* (Lastovicka & Gardner 1979 and Russell Belk 12-7-1996 per comm). This problematic nature of involvement and related constructs are evident in statements such as that of Slama and Tashchian (1987) where they stated that:

Consumer involvement is becoming an “umbrella concept” in that many similar but distinct terms are employed to define and operationalize it (Muncy and Hunt 1984). Statements that there is no consensus definition of involvement are common (Arora 1982; Leavitt, Greenwald and Obermiller 1981), and the area has been described as a “bag of worms”. . . (p.36).

Further difficulties arise with regard to the nature of involvement, particularly so with respect to propositions of cognitive and affective types of involvement. Park and Young (1986), Park and McClung (1986) and Duncan and Fontczak (1985) have for example suggested that involvement can be cognitive or affective in nature. Further, Sherif and Cantril (1947) characterised ego-involved attitudes as “attitudes that the individual identifies himself with, and makes a part of himself, and that have affective properties” (pp. 126-127). According to them, involvement exists when these ego attitudes are aroused and affective properties are treated as necessarily linked to ego involvement in this view. Although psychological attachment to a brand is not a necessary condition for affective properties to exist, it can still be included in the concept of involvement. This view is not always included in the treatments of product involvement and it has been thought that product involvement can be separated into *affective* and *cognitive* types of involvement (Chaudhuri 1993; Kim & Lord 1991; Kim 1991; Mittal 1987 and Mittal & Lee 1988). Park and Young (1983) determined two types of involvement, namely cognitive and affective, on the basis of

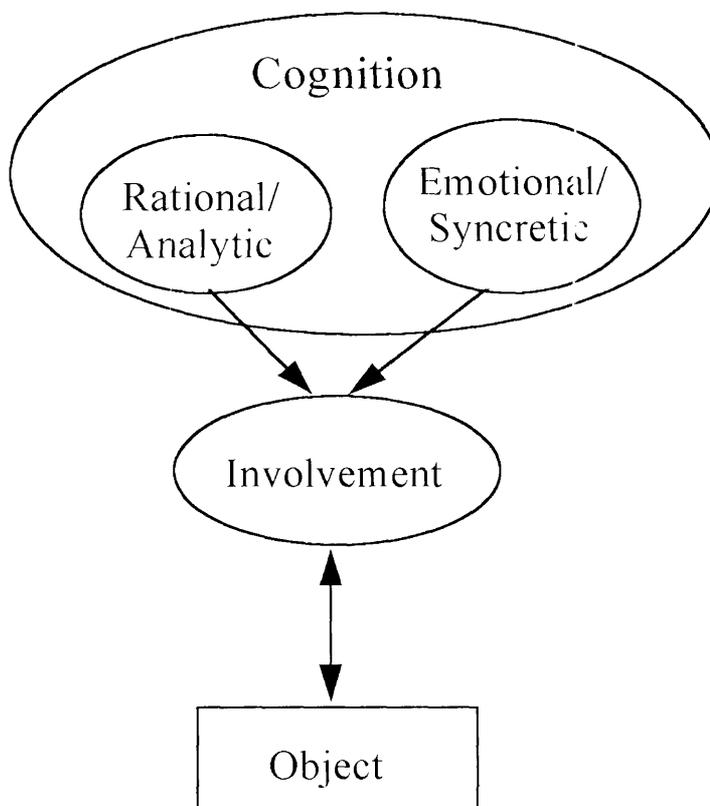
motives or reasons underlying involvement. For cognitive motives, Park and Young (1983) referred largely to utilitarian motives, whereas affective motives referred mainly to value-expressive motives.

Such a view as depicted in Figure 3.6 and in the previous discussion on the dual forms of cognition can be supported by the work of Buck (1988), Buck and Chaudhuri (1994), Epstein (1994) and Tucker (1981). This body of literature defines affect as the immediate, direct and unmediated knowledge by acquaintance of feelings and desires (Buck 1984, 1993). Knowledge by acquaintance is a concept derived from epistemological theory, indicating a self-evident experience like the taste of a piece of fruit such as a pear or apple or the experience of colour (James 1890 and Russell 1912).

Affect and emotion are often seen as opposites to reason and cognition by consumer behaviour researchers and theorists, particularly in persuasion theory (e.g., Bettman 1979; Petty and Cacioppo 1981, 1986 and Krugman 1965), where rational appeals are contrasted with emotional appeals. Buck (1988) and Buck and Chaudhuri (1994) do not regard emotion and cognition to be opposite, but they argue emotion is a kind of cognition. Specifically, they define cognition as simply '*knowledge*' or more specifically 'knowledge by description' and 'knowledge by acquaintance'. Support for such a view is also found in the work of Tucker (1981) who distinguished two kinds of cognition, 'analytic cognition' which is linear, sequential and associated with the left hemisphere of the brain and 'syncretic cognition' which is holistic, synthetic and associated with right hemispheric functioning of the brain.

Based on the work of Tucker (1981) and Buck and Chaudhuri (1994), it is suggested that affect is a kind of cognition, the knowledge of acquaintance of feelings and desires, which is a source of bodily information. Thus, two sorts of cognition are involved in the cognitive view of involvement, rational cognition which constitutes analytic knowledge by description of object attributes and affective cognition which constitutes syncretic knowledge by acquaintance of one's feeling and desires associated with an object (Buck & Chaudhuri 1994). So while there are two types of cognition or cognitive processes, there are not separate types of involvement, in that these two forms of cognition are the inputs into involvement as depicted in Figure 3.6.

Figure 3.6 Involvement Input and Object Relationships



(Source: Developed for this study)

Whether or not cognitive and affective involvement can be treated as totally distinct types of involvement is an important issue for consumer behaviour to examine. It can be assumed though, that the amount of affect and reason in a consumer's product involvement may vary across consumers and across products. However, if we take the view of Buck (1988) and others regarding cognition as involving both analytic (rational) and syncretic (intuitive) cognition, then involvement based on the cognitive view would encompass these two elements. Not necessarily as separate cognitive and affective involvement however, as some do (Mittal 1982; Park & Young 1983) or a functional involvement or expressive involvement (Mittal 1989). Further, some in the consumer behaviour area have made similar propositions regarding the nature of involvement. For example, Andrews, Durvasula and Akhter (1990) made a strong statement in their review arguing that care should be taken not to label involvement as cognitive involvement, emotional involvement or behavioural involvement.

The cognitive and affective division is problematic and not necessary if we treat cognition as Buck (1988) does. Buck (1988) views cognition as containing both analytic and syncretic

forms. This view of cognition includes both rational (analytic) cognition and syncretic (affective) cognition. Treatment of cognition and affect as separate is seen by Buck (1988) as theoretically invalid and extending this argument into the involvement debate one may assume that the treatment of separate cognitive and affective involvement is also invalid. However, we could represent this dual form of cognitive (analytic and syncretic) input into involvement as depicted in Figure 3.6 and indicates that involvement has both rational (analytic) cognition and syncretic (emotional, affective) cognition inputs into involvement, not as cognitive involvement and affective involvement as indicated in the literature.

The above has provided a brief discussion of the content, nature, focus and directional characteristics as discussed in the review of the cognitive, state and response approaches to involvement. The following section will summarise the review before proceeding on to the theoretical discussion that underpins the use of involvement in this study.

3.4.1 Summary of the definitions of involvement

It is generally agreed that for any single product class, the level of involvement will differ across consumers (Andrews 1988 and Andrews & Durvasula 1991). The involvement construct has the potential to account for the differences in consumer behaviour both between individuals for a given product and within individuals for different products.

The state-based definitions as well as the response-based definitions of involvement have focused more on purchasing situations, advertising and information processing in their use of the construct of involvement. The state definitions determine the level of involvement as depending on the amount of arousal, interest, drive and/or emotional attachment a stimulus object evokes in a consumer. The response definitions, on the other hand, have focused more on the development and extensiveness of consumers' responses as indicators of different levels of involvement.

The response and state definitions of involvement have a number of conceptual weaknesses in common. Firstly, they tend to ignore the antecedent conditions affecting involvement. Secondly, intentionally or not, they view involvement as the only determinant affecting the

internal state or responses of a consumer. Thirdly, they largely view involvement as a temporary phenomenon. These weaknesses constrain the suitability of these definitions to situation-specific research settings. Other limitations connected particularly to response definitions are that they do not define the central or core meaning of involvement. They fundamentally provide a list of consequences of involvement, and argue these account for the different levels of involvement. It can be concluded that, although it is reasonable to assume that the type and degree of cognitive and behavioural responses will differ according to the level of involvement, the construct of involvement should be conceptually separated from the set of involvement mediated-responses (Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990; Cohen 1983; Costley 1988 and Muehling, Laczniak & Andrews 1993) and from involvement's antecedents.

Also, although the concepts of situational and enduring involvement are said to be distinct, inherently there are some commonalities. For example, the level of enduring involvement associated with a product is potentially affected by its usual consumption situation. If a product is usually consumed in the presence of important others it can be assumed that this will positively influence the level of enduring involvement a consumer has toward the product and the usual consumption situation. That is why it seems reasonable to assume that the concept of situational involvement is relevant only when the consumption situation differs from the one that is usual, such as if a product is to be purchased for a gift as used by Clarke and Belk (1979). Situational involvement seems to offer little beyond the notions of perceived risk that already exist in the literature (Bloch 1981 and Parkinson & Schenk 1980).

Further, the use of terms such as situational involvement can be seen to be problematic if one views consumer behaviour similarly to that identified in the person-situation correspondence literature (Scarr & McCarthy 1983 and Buss 1987) and person-situation congruence (Diener, Larsen & Emmons 1984 and Emmons, Diener & Larsen 1986) models of behaviour. A basic tenet of these approaches is that, except in artificially controlled settings (laboratory settings), individuals and environments are not randomly crossed or chosen. Instead, consumers actively select environments that are maximally congruent with their actual or desired dispositions. Consumers choose seemingly incongruous environments only when they believe that it is within their power to manipulate the

environment in ways that bring it closer to their dispositions, motives and goals (Zuckermann 1974; Bem & Funder 1978; Buss 1984 and Snyder & Ickes 1985). Therefore, terms such as situational involvement and its empirical assessment in artificial experimental settings may place consumers in situations that are totally incongruent with their normal purchasing and consuming situations thereby severely limiting the external validity of findings.

Over time in the consumer behaviour literature, the construct of involvement seems to have changed its meaning to either 'personal relevance' or 'perceived importance'. This transition is clearly evident in the cognitive approaches to involvement in the mid to late 1980's and is also present in some of the state definitions. Even though there seem to be some in the literature who suggest that general agreement exists that involvement does relate to personal relevance (Zaichkowsky 1985) or perceived importance (Houston & Walker 1996), it remains unclear if involvement should be interpreted as the synonym of perceived relevance or perceived importance, as a conceptual equivalent, as something more general or more specific than personal relevance or perceived importance.

Many have argued that using other terms synonymously with involvement is problematic and make the point that, is anything being gained by replacing previously used concepts with the word involvement and vice versa (Costley 1988; Poiesz & de Bont 1995 and Slama & Tashchian 1987). This problematic nature of involvement seems no closer to resolution and becomes evident in the following three quotes, two from the 1989 *Advances in Consumer Research* proceedings and one from the journal-based literature. Mittal (1989) stated that:

Despite differences in nuances there does seem to be a common thread. This common thread may be constructed as 'motivational state that has been activated' by a stimulus, situation, or a decision task (p.699).

Higie and Feick (1989) stated that:

Although many conceptualizations of involvement have been offered, an examination of the definitions indicate that the crux of involvement is personal relevance (p.690).

Finally, Webster (1993) proposed that:

Involvement is the level of perceived importance and/or interest evoked by the purchase of a particular product. It follows, then that the term involvement can be used interchangeably with the term importance (p.201).

3.5 Conclusions

Problems still seem to exist with regard to the construct of involvement and the words of Kiesler, Collins and Miller (1969) are probably true even to this day, when they stated:

the conceptual analysis of involvement remains unsatisfying from the standpoint of science's basic aim of analysis, partition, delineation of gross variables into more atomistic ones...it appears as a potpourri concept which may have several independent elements (p. 279).

Statements concerning the problematic treatments and nature of involvement still abound in the literature up to the present. For example, Mittal and Lee (1989) stated that:

an overview of involvement suggests that the concept is a rich potpourri of ideas, each of these ideas has elements of face validity, but taken together, somehow they look disjointed, and therefore confusing (p.364).

Statements such as Keisler, Collins and Miller (1969) and Mittal and Lee (1989) and others indicate a need for more research into this construct. The considerable amount of empirical and theoretical effort has unfortunately also contributed to a lack of definitional and operational clarity in this domain (Costley 1988; Muehling, Laczniak & Andrews 1993; Poiesz and de Bont 1995 and Slama and Tashchian 1987).

Bagozzi (1980) proposed that one should examine constructs from the perspective of their theoretical meaningfulness. Fundamentally, the theoretical meaningfulness of a construct refers to the nature and consistency of the language used to represent the construct (Bagozzi 1980). Within the involvement domain, the nature of the language used to represent the construct has lacked a consistent character and quality. In light of the arguments raised in the literature, one must question the theoretical clarity and

meaningfulness of the involvement construct at this point in time. Clearly, since several equiprobable connotations of involvement could exist, the construct could be described or labeled as being ambiguous in nature and theoretically weak.

As the previous sections have revealed, existing conceptualisations of involvement vary in both content, nature, focus and intensity characteristics. Definitions and terms referring to the construct within the domain of marketing have differed from author to author and context to context and at this time neither the precise nature of involvement nor its determinants are clearly delineated or understood in an unequivocal manner (Poiesz & de Bont 1995).

The problem with involvement may be located in its inherent plausibility or conceptually self-evident nature which prevents the user from explicitly considering the question of its uniqueness and contribution to the discipline. This renders it difficult for the casual observer to distinguish involvement from competing but closely related concepts in the consumer behaviour literature such as needs, values, interest, drive, arousal, motivation, importance, commitment and familiarity.

A new direction and research effort is needed that separates involvement, both theoretically and empirically, from its antecedents and consequences (Andrews 1988 and Andrews & Durvasula 1991). The issues raised above reflect a theoretical weakness which has characterised involvement research since its inception in consumer behaviour in the 1960's. What appears to be lacking is a well-formulated framework for the study of involvement that includes all relevant variables and specifies the relationships between these variables in a comprehensive model of involvement and key individual difference variables.

In regard to much of the prior research, one could conclude that the correspondence between conceptual and operational definitions of involvement is poor. As yet, there is no widely accepted single and precise conceptualisation of the construct that clearly identifies the core meaning of the construct, that is not contaminated by terms or items tapping concepts outside a core meaning and that separates involvement from antecedents and consequences (Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990).

Rather than focusing on the very core of the conceptualisation of involvement itself, the literature presents an inventory of different levels of involvement, different types of involvement, different properties of involvement, different sources and antecedents of involvement and different consequences of involvement. Taken as a whole the literature on involvement emerges as a loose conglomeration of various underlying notions and assumptions, explicit or implicit, whose central and fundamental meaning, value and mutual relationships to consumer behaviour remains obscure.

By representing a number of more or less similar concepts that are portrayed as equivalent, involvement is logically and not surprisingly argued to be a significant construct in consumer behaviour literature in explaining the behaviour of consumers (O’Cass 1997). Only a sustained research effort that theoretically and empirically examines not only involvement but also its relationship to other key variables can clarify this problematic construct.

3.6 Attempting to reformulate and reconstruct involvement

The divergence in the various conceptual and empirical approaches of involvement has arguably existed since its introduction into consumer behaviour in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. The heterogeneity of these views is clearly derived from the level of abstraction at which involvement is treated and results largely because of the differing content, focus, nature and intensity characteristics given in each conceptualisation.

The various approaches and treatments of involvement presented under the response, state and cognitive categorisations cannot be logically viewed as reflections of the same underlying construct; they are inherently dissimilar concepts at both a conceptual and empirical level.

One can however, adequately and meaningfully use the most appropriate components to synthesize a more fuller and richer understanding of involvement. The cognitive-based and state-based approaches appear to offer much in this regard. They appear to have some convergence and elements that could be used to synthesize a new view of involvement.

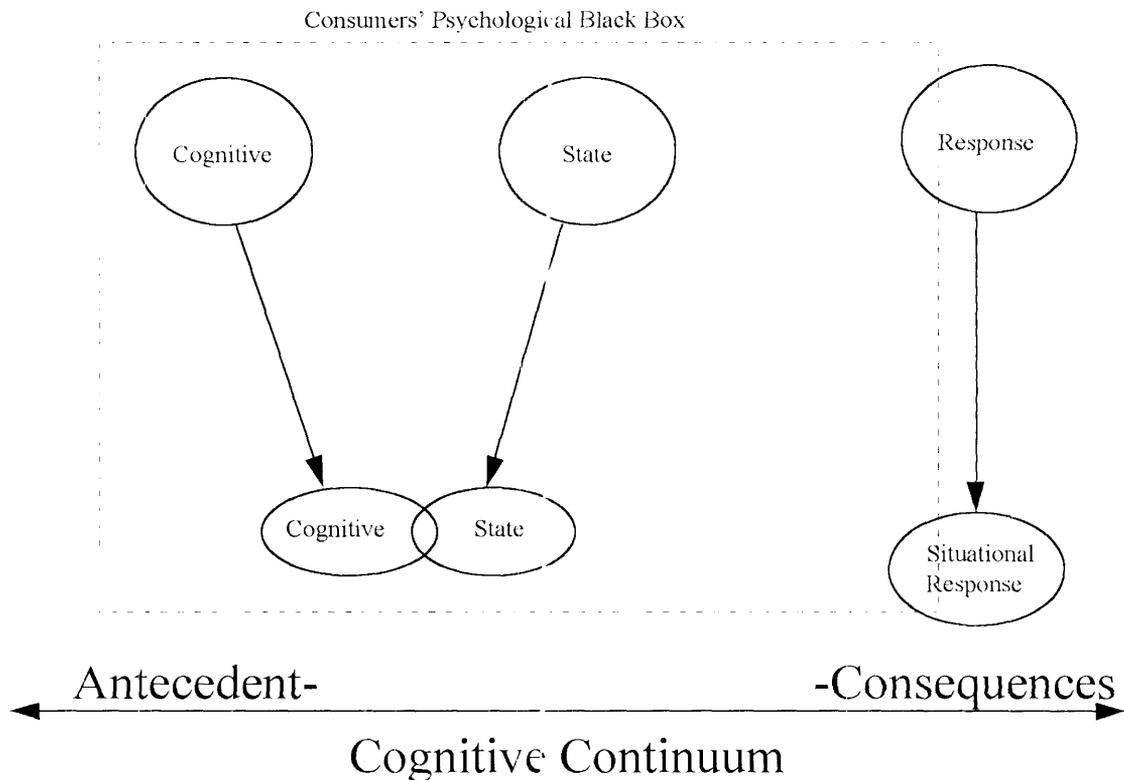
As indicated by Costley (1988), the content of the various approaches taken to involvement differentiates the way researchers have used the term involvement along an antecedent-consequences cognitive continuum. Further, the conceptual approaches to involvement can be seen to differ with regard to the underlying paradigms that support the conceptual approach presented by various authors.

Fundamentally however, because the majority of approaches to involvement regard it as a mental concept, the paradigms within which it has been used and analysed belong largely to various research traditions within the cognitive school of thought. Thus, we see definitions that fit within paradigms such as the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) as presented by Houston and Rothschild (1977, 1978) and Parkinson and Schenk (1980), the response-response (R-R) paradigm of Dulany (1968), Lutz (1977, 1980) and the interactionist paradigm of Lauer and Handel (1977) and Pujj and Stewart (1983).

The cognitive school of thought where involvement is seen as a mental concept is also evident in many of the advertising-based models driven by involvement. Models such as the elaboration likelihood model (Petty and Cacioppo 1981 and 1983), the attitude toward the ad model (Lutz 1985; Mitchell & Olson 1981 and Shimp 1981) and the integrated information response model (Smith & Swinyard 1982 and 1983), are founded on the cognitive paradigms that support the conceptualisation of involvement as a mental concept.

Figure 3.7 attempts to graphically represent the degree convergence or overlap found at both the conceptual and empirical level between the three approaches analysed and discussed here. It indicates that the response-based approaches do not converge, as do the cognitive and state approaches.

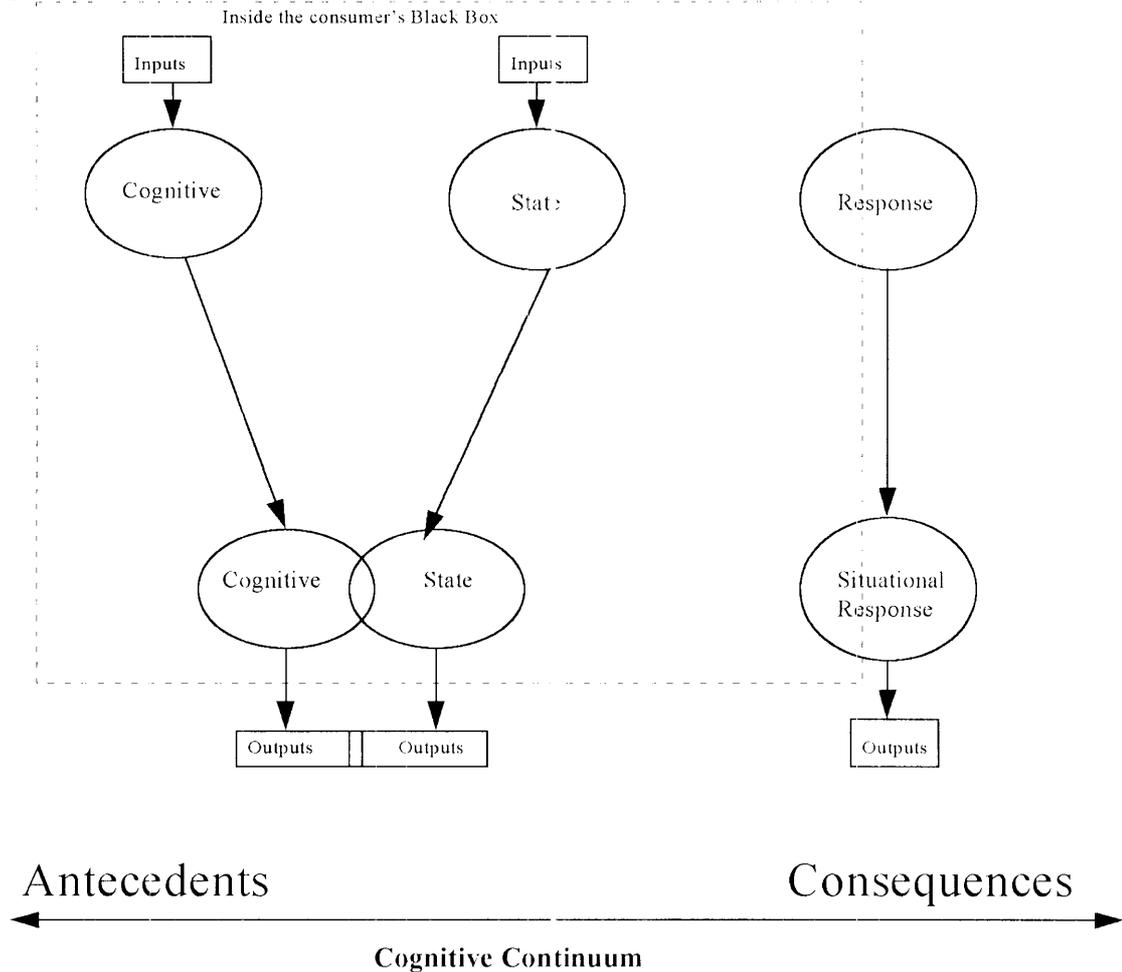
Figure 3.7 Mapping the Convergence of Consumer Defined Approaches to Involvement



(Source: Developed for this study)

The cognitive-based approaches and the state-based approaches are seen to exist inside the 'black box' of the consumer along this antecedent-consequence cognitive continuum as described by Costley (1988). The response-based approaches are more behavioural in nature and look at overt consequences. They do not go inside the consumer's 'black box' significantly, nor do they possess any overlap with the cognitive or state based approaches to involvement. The response-based approaches are seen here to be conceptually and empirically weak and do not offer much in regard for future theoretical developments of involvement (Costley 1988). The commonality of the psychological element of the cognitive and state approaches allows some degree of convergence between the two approaches, because of their position on the antecedent-consequence cognitive continuum. Figure 3.8 attempts to graphically represent the common nature of the cognitive and state approaches by representing them inside the consumers black box and shows that some definitions do refer to common inputs and outputs of the two approaches. However, the response approaches are on the boundary of the black box and commonly only look at output processes or behaviours.

Figure 3.8 Commonality of Input and Output on the Cognitive Continuum



(Source: Developed for this study)

The commonality between the cognitive and state approaches is derived largely because they are both clearly within the overall cognitive process of consumers and they both include inputs and outputs in many of their definitions. The key difference between the two approaches is that they fall at different points along the antecedent-consequence cognitive continuum (Costley 1988).

Although only a moderate degree of convergence exists in the past conceptualisations based on the cognitive and state approaches to involvement, they may help in the efforts here to reconstruct involvement into a meaningful and more useful construct in consumer behaviour. Further commonality can be seen in the following table that shows common terms found in the two approaches to involvement. The basic difference between the cognitive and state approaches is the position they occupy on the antecedent-consequence cognitive continuum. While both take the view of involvement as mental construct, the

cognitive perspective to involvement sees it as a construct linked to the value-object relationship, while the state approaches take the view that it is a mental motivational construct. These views can be seen in the terminology used to describe the construct in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 identifies key terms commonly found in the definitions of the cognitive and state approaches to involvement reviewed above.

Table 3.4 Terms Used to Define Involvement

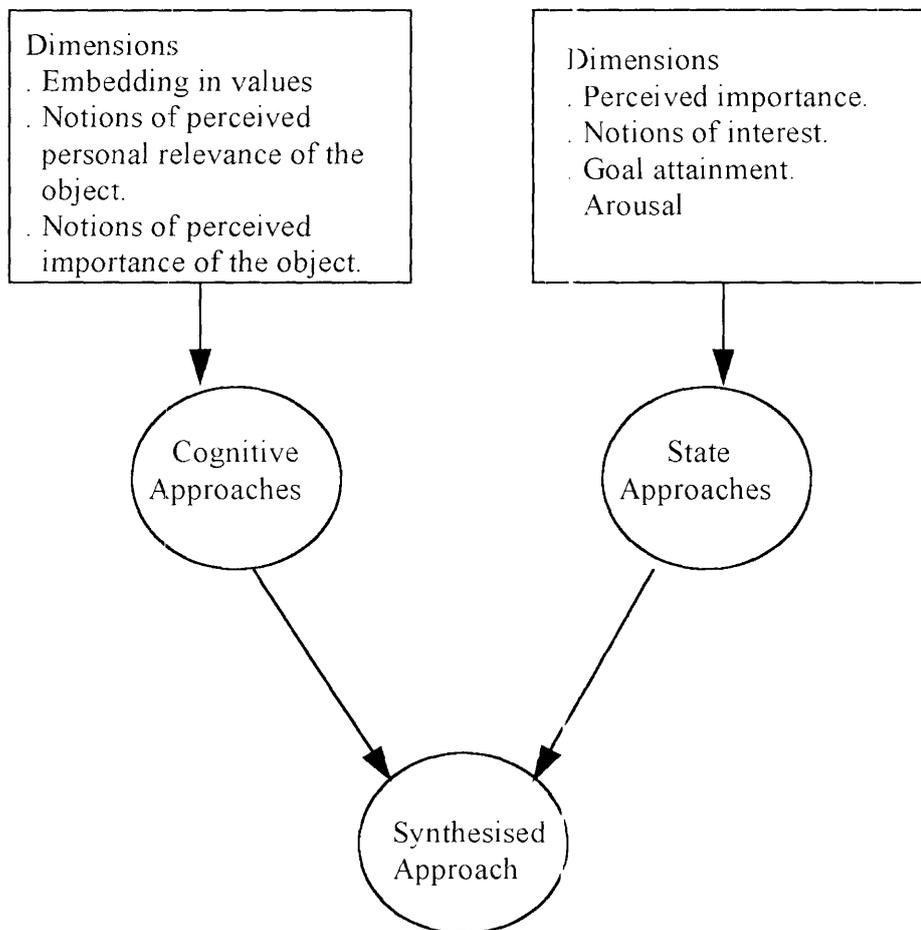
Cognitive	State
Connected	Concern
Important	Internal state
Interest	Amount of arousal
Relative importance	Drive
Relationship	State of activation
Centrality	Need for information
Engaged	Meaningfulness
Cognitive & affective sets	Caring
Values centrality	Perceived importance
Relatedness	Interest
Concern	State of interest
Relevance	Motivation
Personal relevance	Arousal
Importance	Goal directed arousal capacity
Attention	State of energy
Depth of processing	Cognitive effort
State of mind & process	Intensity
Feelings of interest	Direction
Enthusiasm	Motivational state
	Interest level
	Motivational intensity
	Arousal potential
	Personal relevance
	Perceived value

(Source: Developed for this study)

In an attempt to further highlight the potential convergence that would result from using elements of the state and cognitive definitions, Figure 3.9 attempts to synthesize a new approach. The convergence in certain aspects of the conceptualisation is further depicted in Figure 3.9. For example, such a bridging approach can be found in previous work in the consumer behaviour literature where, for example, the notion of the level of consumer interest connected to a product class was proposed as early as 1970 by Day (1970).

According to Day involvement “can be thought as the general level of interest in the attitude object, or the centrality of the object to the person's ego structure” (p.80). This view not only stressed the ‘interest’ notion but further applied Sherif et al’s (1947, 1961, 1965) bases of involvement through the centrality dimension of the cognitive structure. This view provides a linkage between the cognitive and state approaches.

Figure 3.9 A Synthesised Approach to Involvement in Consumer Behaviour



(Source: Developed for this study)

Although the cognitive and state definitions potentially form an adequate basis for studying involvement in the area of consumer behaviour, two issues have to be considered. These are:

- 1) How to develop a conceptualisation and operational measure that it is selective enough to differentiate the level of involvement for a given object, and that separates involvement from its antecedents and consequences.
- 2) What is the most appropriate scope of involvement in consumer behaviour.

Given the above analysis and classification of involvement, it is necessary to provide a theoretical foundation for the conceptualisation and measurement of involvement in this study.

3.6.1 Theory development in this study

Although accuracy is maintained at all times the paramount aim is that of “explanation” as opposed to definition. To quote Alt (1990): “Definitions are the last refuge of a scoundrel; what is needed is an explanation” (Hooley & Hussey 1994 p4).

The objective here is not to provide a one sentence definition of involvement that is all encompassing yet so vague it actually describes nothing but the confused nature of the construct, as has been so evident in past definitions (Arora 1983; Parameswaran & Spinelli 1984; Poiesz & de Bont 1995 and Zinkhan & Muderrisoglu 1985). Besides construct clarification, a theoretical framework or model for involvement is needed that clearly explains the construct and its boundaries. It is only after this kind of theoretical explanation and analysis that the empirical measurement of involvement can and should be carried out. For the potential of involvement as an important mediator affecting consumer behaviour to be realised, it needs to be submitted to more stringent and rigorous, programmatic theoretical and empirical examination. The objective here is to explain the construct of involvement and hopefully, through explanation, better define it.

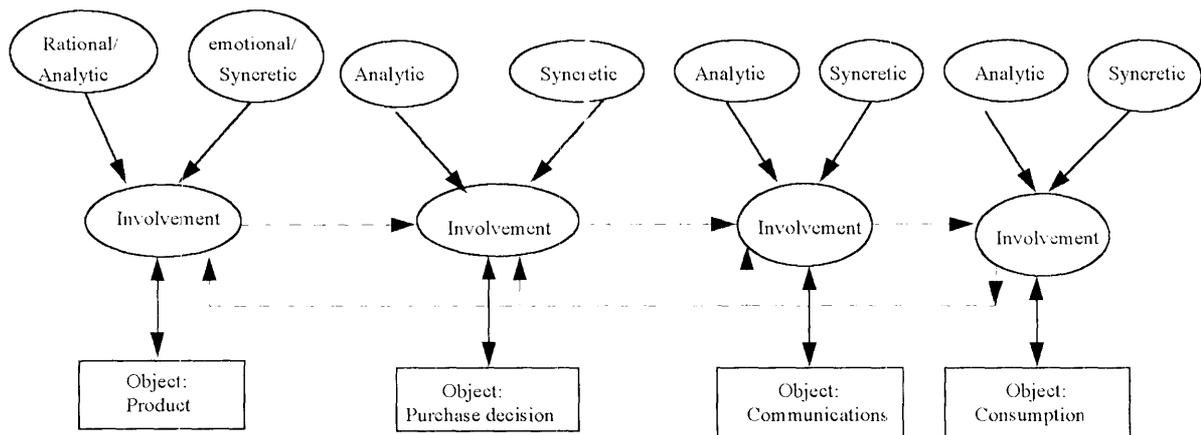
In this study involvement is viewed as a construct linked to the interaction between an individual and an object and it is seen as referring to the relative strength or intensity of the cognitive structure related to a focal object held by a consumer. Further, when studying the complexities of consumers' purchasing and consuming behaviours, the different types of involvement that are operative and relevant have to be determined and placed suitably within a single explanation.

3.6.2 Involvement focus in consumer behaviour

It is argued here that a consumer can be involved not only with a product but also with consumption of the product and purchase decision for the product (or the process of purchasing) and advertisement or communications for the product. Accordingly, 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). It has been assumed that together these different involvement types can form the overall product involvement included in a purchasing and consumption occasion and/or they can be treated as separate types of involvement. It should be noted that the different types of involvement are relevant only in a purchasing and consumption context and it can be assumed that the primary reason for their development has been an attempt to account for the complexity in the consumer's environment and the task of making purchase and consumption decisions. The key types or manifestations are seen here to be product involvement, purchase decision involvement, communications involvement and consumption involvement. Together, these four focal forms of involvement yield an overall profile called consumer involvement. These are represented in Figure 3.10, which shows the cognitive inputs into involvement as discussed previously using Buck's notion of cognition. Figure 3.10 shows the inputs, object and relationships between the focal types of involvement.

Figure 3.10 shows that involvement has both analytical and syncretic inputs into involvement. It also shows a relationship between the various objects of involvement. This relationship is represented by the dashed lines with double headed arrows in the model where, objects such as the product, purchase decision of the product, consumption of the product and communications for the product are related. The figure also shows that involvement and the object are interactional in their relationship as depicted by the two headed arrows from involvement to the objects. Therefore we see involvement as the interaction between an individual and an object.

Figure 3.10 Four Forms of Involvement



(Source: Developed for this study)

It has been argued by Brown (1996) that involvement is a distinct psychological construct. In a given sphere of consumer activity, involvement refers to the extent to which the consumer views the focal activity as a central part of their life, a meaningful and engaging activity in their life and important to them. It denotes the intensity with which a product gestalt is embedded in and driven by the consumers' value system. High involvement implies greater relevance to the self. Due its interactional nature (consumer-object), it is possible that involvement can account for differences in selected aspects of consumer behaviour both between and within individuals for objects.

Similar to Bloch (1981), Bloch and Richins (1986) and Fairhurst, Good and Gentry (1989), involvement is conceptualised as enduring in nature and it is theorised that characteristics of the performance system (environment) and temporary situational changes do not directly produce changes in or affect involvement levels. For example, temporary characteristics of the purchasing situation and single responses to them do not necessarily have an effect on a consumer's involvement in a focal object. 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. This is linked with the views of Lewin, Dembo, Festinger & Sears (1944) in their aspirational studies.

Although involvement is argued to be a stable and enduring phenomenon, it is theoretically feasible that the experience of successful consumption behaviours related to a focal object and/or changes in the importance of certain values may stimulate tendencies to increase in involvement with the stimulus object. Unsuccessful experience and changes in values

structure may also stimulate tendencies toward a decrease in involvement over time. 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 was indicated by Lewin's aspiration level studies which found that people tended to raise their level of aspiration following successful goal attainment (Lewin, Dembo, Festinger & Sears 1944). It does, however, preclude the notion of dramatic and fluctuating levels of involvement from period to period or situation to situation as alluded to in situational or response approaches to involvement. Involvement with an object should be stable whilst still allowing for situational fluctuations in certain underlying involvement components such as, for example, consumer perception of importance or interest 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 (Bloch 1982). This is important, because it is the combination of these 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.

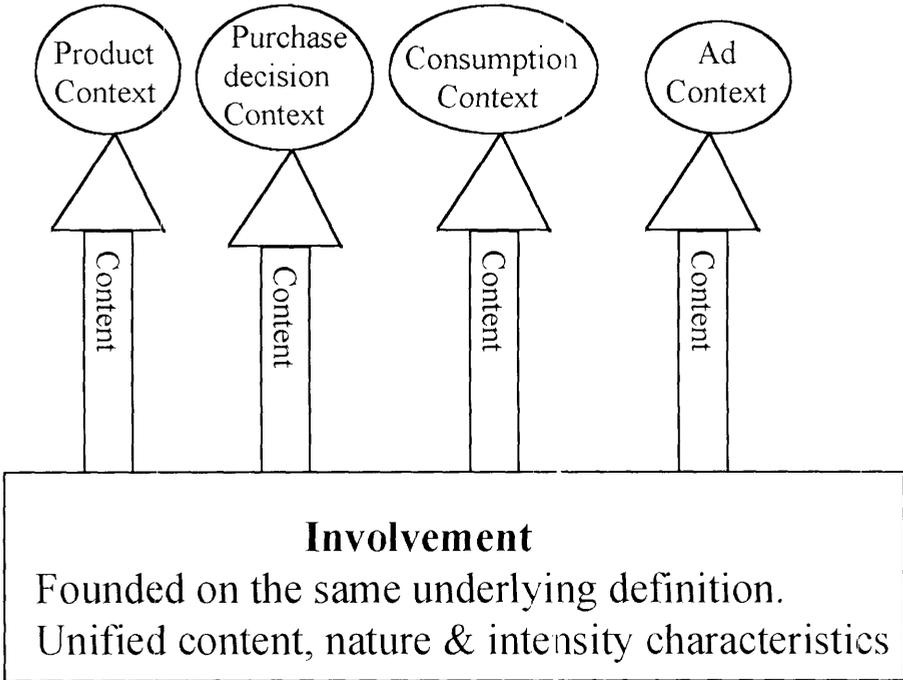
The cognitive and enduring characteristic of involvement has not always been evident in the treatment of involvement within consumer behaviour, especially when determining involvement through goals and consequences associated with a purchasing situation or information processing occasion. Within this context, the enduring nature of involvement may be easily overlooked or neglected. The confusion arises from the fact that, in consumer behaviour, the prime focus of interest has often been on temporary processes, such as information processing and decision making (exceptions are Bloch's 1981a, 1981b, 1982 studies dealing with enduring involvement).

Fundamentally, the level of involvement varies according to the strength of the object-related higher order cognitive structure. This orientation is founded on the cognitive interaction of a consumer with an object. On the basis of the direction (object) of involvement, it is possible to examine product involvement, purchasing involvement, communications (advertising) involvement and consumption involvement as depicted in Figure 3.10. A consistent explanation and conceptualisation is possible across various objects of involvement, because all involvement no matter what the object is founded on the

same underlying conceptualisation. All four forms of involvement can be determined by the extent to which the consumer's value system is engaged in any one or all of these objects. Thus, involvement becomes the relationship between the consumer's values system and the object.

Figure 3.11 displays the view that the underlying nature and content of involvement is the same no matter what the object is. All involvement emanates from the same source, it is only oriented toward a different context of focal stimulus-object. The context, nature and intensity characteristics should be seen as the determinant elements of involvement definitions under such a view. The view proposed here, is that we do not need a different definitions for different objects. For example we do not need a separate definition for product involvement, purchase decision involvement or consumption involvement. The view proposed here is that the content, nature and intensity characteristics are same, only the focus of involvement changes. Therefore, a unified, single definition applicable to different objects is argued here to be the most theoretically appropriate way to proceed in redeveloping the construct of involvement.

Figure 3.11 Model of Single Definition Suitable for Different Contexts



(Source: Developed for this study)

When defining the bases of involvement, the centrality dimension of a consumer's cognitive organisation needs to be stressed. The centrality notion denotes an object's position in a consumer's value system. According to Rokeach (1972), the parts within a cognitive structure are arranged along a central-peripheral dimension, where the more central parts are more salient or important (Sherif and Hovland 1961). This means that involvement exists when an object is related to a central value, to a value that represents "I, me, and mine" experiences in a consumer (Lastovicka & Gardner 1979).

The strength of the product relationship to a consumer's values has also been emphasised by Bloch (1981a) when he determined the bases for enduring involvement. It is assumed that the more strongly a cognitive structure is related to a consumer's value system the more resistant it is to change and thus the more enduring it is. Bloch's (1981a) argument can also be extended to cover the focal or stimulus object's relationship to an individual's values. This broadens the context to include the four types of involvement proposed here: product, consumption, purchase decision and communications involvement.

Accordingly, the view taken here, is that involvement is the relationship between the values system of the consumer and the object. The construct of involvement characterises the interactional relationship between an individual and a stimulus object. Thus, involvement always has a direction and intensity (Mitchell 1979 and Cohen 1983) and the directions to be considered are product, purchase decision, communications and consumption as defined in the four forms of involvement (Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter 1990), and intensity refers to the strength attached to the cognitive relationship by the consumer between their values system and an object.

3.6.3 Benefits obtained from the approach to involvement presented here

In general, the approach to involvement taken here has advantages over the previous state or response approaches, primarily because the object and direction of involvement is well-specified and tightly focused on the cognitive structure resulting from the interaction of the individual and the stimulus. For example, the level of involvement will not be affected by a single purchase occasion or by a single advertisement. However, advertising will influence

the level of arousal. Further, the domain and boundaries of involvement become delimited. The cognitive approach allows for an improvement in our understanding of involvement. Importantly, because involvement is not seen here as situation-specific we can, on an a priori basis, determine the level of involvement a consumer has with a focal object.

Importantly, consumers will differ in the degree to which they are likely to become involved with a focal object as a function of their characteristics, background and personal situations. A consumer will become involved with products that allow them control of life events and an opportunity to use important expressive abilities and personality aspects through the product.

The cognitive conceptualisation is different from the previous response or state views because involvement is treated here as a relatively enduring phenomenon rather than a short-term situationally-invoked condition. Examples of enduring product involvement that have appeared in the literature are the fashion conscious consumer (Fairhurst, Good & Gentry 1989) or the car enthusiast (Bloch 1985).

In the theoretical framework developed here involvement has been viewed as fairly enduring in nature and it also has the dimensions of direction and intensity. Direction refers to the object of involvement and answers the question involvement in what? Intensity refers to the degree of involvement, that is, to the relative salience of the cognitive structure of the consumer's association with the stimulus. It is proposed that the amount of involvement may vary both across individuals for a given stimulus and across different objects within the same consumer. Such objects can in marketing terms can be products, purchases, consumption and communications.

3.7 Conclusions for the theoretical propositions presented on involvement

From a marketers 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 should 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) 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 psychologically. 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 object, whereas no or very low involvement implies a loss of individuality and separation (apathy or automaticity) of the self from the object (or stimulus).

Fundamentally, consumers become involved in a particular object or stimulus when they perceive its potential for satisfying salient higher-order psychological needs. Understanding the psychological processes that determine involvement is important for marketers.

As indicated previously, when we define and operationalise involvement, one of the basic premises is that involvement is the degree to which the total consumption situation is a central life interest. That is, the degree to which it is a major source for the satisfaction of important values within the values system. This occurs when one focuses on the degree to which a consumer perceives their total consumption situation to be an important part of their life and to be central to their identity because of the opportunity it affords them to fulfill central life values. Further four key elements of consumer involvement include: 1) When consumption of the focal object is a central life interest; 2) When the consumer actively participates in product related activities; 3) When the consumer perceives their performance related to the focal object as central to their self esteem; 4) When the consumer perceives the performance relevant to the focal object and its use as consistent with their values system.

Based on the above, involvement is conceived of as the degree to which the self, experienced and expressed through the consumer's values system and self-concept, is reflected in the individual's consumption experience related to the focal stimuli. It is the

degree to which the person identifies with the object, actively utilises (participates in) it and considers their product-related performance important to their self worth. Theoretically consumer involvement can be conceptualised as a second-order construct which underpins four first-order constructs (product involvement, communications involvement, purchase decision involvement and consumption involvement). These first-order constructs in turn underpin specifically targeted and measured indicators.

3.8 Conclusion

After approximately 35 years of work on involvement in consumer behaviour, many are still asking 'what is it'. As Muncy (1990) stated:

when involvement first started out, a number of people were asking the question, "what is it?". After a tremendous amount of work was done attempting to define involvement (Antil 1984; Muncy and Hunt 1984 and Stone 1984) Rothschild (1984) called for people to quit trying to define it" (p 144). Arguing "we don't need more [definitions] at this time. Let's call a ten year moratorium on definitions on involvement; lets go collect data on interesting aspects of involvement and then in ten years, see if we can (or need to) devise a better definition (p 217).

Now after ten years, there is still no definitive answer to what involvement is and there is still no unequivocal definition. But there is a vast array of divergent, conflicting and ambiguous data on aspects of involvement. If involvement is to have value in consumer behaviour, then there is a need to improve its meaning and define its boundaries through better definitions and exploration of involvement in a broader nomological net of key individual difference variables. The words of Muncy (1990) foreshadowed the objectives of this study when he said;

I hope the researchers continue to do work in this area, but I implore them to move on from measuring involvement to discovering relationships between consumer behavior and ... involvement (p 144).

The proposition raised by Dimanche, Havitz and Howard (1991) is valid when they said “further work is also needed to conceptualise and refine the understanding of the various dimensions purported to underlie the construct of involvement” (p 63). Further, the view that involvement is a complex and intriguing concept (Dimanche, Havitz & Howard 1991) rings true to this day. Therefore, the driving force and long-term goal of this study is the development of better a conceptualisation of involvement and a valid and reliable scale to measure the construct of involvement itself. That is, involvement will not be derived through measures of antecedents or consequences. But the developed theory and measure will be placed and validated in a broader nomological net to establish nomological validity.

It is argued here that involvement is an important and necessary concept in consumer behaviour, but its conceptualisation needs refinement to reduce ambiguity in the current problems regarding its content, antecedents and consequences. Improved conceptualisation should allow for improved operationalisation and measurement and integration into the broader domain of consumer behaviour. Further, involvement needs well-defined and clear boundaries to alleviate the confusion that has arisen in the past from the presentation of such a wide array of definitions and measures. Because of the prevailing heterogeneity of conceptualisations and measures, the theoretical content of involvement needs to be closely examined to establish its nomological net in an attempt to provide a refocusing of involvement’s research direction.

It seems relevant before moving on to the discussion of the constructs that will be examined in the nomological network with involvement to leave the reader with an apt summation of the state of involvement in the following quotes.

While we acknowledge the contribution of past research endeavors in the involvement area, we also recognize that much remains to be learned about involvement . . . Continued investigation of . . . involvement seems warranted. In addition, future research should continue to make an effort to clearly establish the conceptual and operational properties . . . of involvement
(Muehling, Laczniak & Andrews 1993 p.53)