THE DEGREE OF STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN SELECTED MARKETING COURSES

by

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There are many definitions for the word involvement. Most of the explanations use this term as a verb, such as "to preoccupy or absorb fully." The definition that we will refer to is when involvement is used as an adjective. We will assume that one does not have to be "fully involved" because in the area of consumer behavior this most often is not the case. There have been many methods with which one could study involvement. In both social and consumer psychology, there is considerable agreement that high involvement messages have greater relevance and consequences and elicit more personal consequences or elicit more personal connections than in low involvement messages (Sherif and Hovland 1961; Krugman, 1965; Petty and Cacioppo, 1979; Engel and Blackwell, 1982). In essence, the more involved or interested the person is in the subjects or product, the higher the level of processing that will occur.

Background

The theories of involvement are many and varied. Perhaps the dominant notion in social psychology stems from the social judgement theory developed by Sherif et al. (1965). Their notion is that on any given issue, highly involved persons exhibit more negative evaluations of a communication because high involvement is associated with an extended latitude of rejection.
Thus, incoming messages on involving topics are thought to have an enhanced probability of being rejected because they are more likely to fall within the unacceptable range of a person's implicit attitude continuum. This is demonstrated by a study in which people were approached with a new product. If the products claims were too unbelievable, the concept fell beyond the person's latitude of acceptance. When trying to introduce some new idea, one has to be certain that the person is accepting all parts of the idea. If just one issue is too unbelievable, then the result is a loss for the demonstrator.

Krugman (1965) has proposed an alternative view that has achieved considerable recognition among consumer researchers. According to this view, increasing involvement does not increase resistance to persuasion, but instead shifts the sequence of communication impact. Krugman argues that under high involvement, a communication is likely to affect cognitions, then attitudes, and then behaviors.

A third alternative view stems from the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of attitude change (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981). One would assume that if you wanted to change someone's attitude, you would probably begin with communication. The basic tenet of the ELM is that different methods of inducing persuasion may work best depending on whether the elaboration likelihood of the communication situation is high or low. The model presents a continuum from elaborate (central) to nonelaborate (peripheral) processing. The degree of elaboration depends on the relevance of the message to the consumer. When the elaboration likelihood is high, then the central route to persuasion is shown most effective. But when the elaboration likelihood is low, the peripheral route should show better results. The central route is a process in which a person thinks carefully about a communication and is influenced by the strength of its arguments.
Whereas, the peripheral route is a process in which a person does not think carefully about a communication and is influenced instead by cues that are peripheral to the message itself. Petty and Cacioppo found that involved consumers are more likely to be influenced by the quality and strength of the message (central cues).

Less involved consumers are more likely to be influenced by stimuli that are peripheral to the message. A highly involved consumer would be interested in the facts of the message and would find the aesthetics of the message to hold no meaningful information. On the other hand, the lower involved consumer would only find the aesthetic part of the message as valuable or interesting and the informative section would not be adhered to. In summary, the route selection depends on whether receivers have the ability and the motivation to take the central route or whether they rely on peripheral cues instead for the information they desire.

To understand the conditions that lead people to take one route or the other, it is helpful to view the persuasive communication that involves three input factors: the source, the message, and the audience. If there is a bright and captive source that cares deeply about the message, then the audience will be willing and able to take the effortful central route. But if the source speaks at a rate too fast to comprehend, is not considered credible, if the message is unimportant, or if the audience is distracted or uninterested, then the less strenuous peripheral route will be taken.

Research in social psychology has supported the view that different variables affect persuasion under high and low involvement conditions (Petty and Cacioppo, 1979; Petty, Cacioppo, and Heesacker, 1981). On the other hand, peripheral cues such as the expertise or attractiveness of a message source (Rhine and Severance, 1970; Chaiken, 1980; Petty, Cacioppo,
and Goldman, 1981) have had greater impact on persuasion under conditions of low rather than high involvement. In summary, under high involvement conditions people appear to exert the cognitive effort required to evaluate the issue-relevant arguments presented and their attitude are a function of this central route. Under low involvement conditions, attitudes appear to be affected by simple acceptance and rejection cues in the persuasion context and are less affected by argument quality.

There is a small body of research in the area of involvement and attitude with regard to the teaching of Marketing. Attitudes are obviously very related to level of involvement. Gueseman (1985) sampled an introductory marketing class and investigated the attitudes of the students based on class size. He found that the students preferred the smaller classes and as a result, more students declared their major of study as marketing. Another study conducted by Williams, Beard, and Ryma (1991) found that when students were given a choice to either work alone or with a team on a project that they preferred the team project option. Team projects can provide comprehensive realistic experiences in marketing. This is because team projects are oriented to marketing careers and they motivate students more effectively than the individual assignments. Dommeyer (1986) also found that team projects were preferred. The students view the group work as their best work and are less likely to receive incompletes. Another method used to increase the involvement of students is the use of videotapes. Researchers found that by instructing students via video tapes they learned distribution concepts more rapidly and the involvement level was very high. (Stock, Hughes, Wahl, & Portwood, 1990).

Clayson and Haley (1990) found the effort that students put into a class has been found to influence the teaching evaluations negatively. Meaning, the more effortful a class is and the
more involved the students are, the more positive the evaluation will be. Therefore, this may lead to one more objective argument about what is actually being measured in these evaluations. When students were asked to list the qualities that they felt a good educator should possess, it was found that students value marketing educators who possess strong communication skills, are genuinely caring, and interject a real-world perspective into their classes. (Kelley, Conant, & Smart, 1991). Again, this is common sense to most as the more involved the students feels, the more positive feelings will emerge and thus a higher level of learning prevails.

The last research finding points toward a method for increasing the involvement of the students and their own satisfaction. Anderson (1987) developed the idea of a psychological contract. This entails the professor clearly stating what they expect from the students and the course. This is much more personalized and thorough than a typical syllabus. The students in turn, request what they expect from the professor and the manner in which these expectations will be achieved. Anderson found that although this contract takes a great deal of work to specialize for each class, the overall attitude and involvement level of the students’ is worth it. This process can clearly counteract the findings of Ortinall & Bush (1987). They found that students tend to modify significantly their initial overall expectancy beliefs toward the course’s main components in a general downward fashion as they gain more exposure to the course. The students isn’t feeling fulfilled and it will show in the overall grades and involvement.

A specifically targeted research finding involved the attitudes of students toward advertising. Dubinsky and Hensel (1984) found that the students feel advertising serves a purpose but they question the implementation of it. This can lead to disinterest and an overall negative feeling toward this field. The researchers feel that these attitudes should be discussed
and the professor should focus specifically on the criticisms of advertising’s social impacts and the explication of realities of advertising implementation.

Methods

This study used a survey instrument designed by Jacquelyn Zachiowsky (1985) and adapted by the researchers. The questionnaire consisted of an explanation of the proper procedures in which to complete the semantic-differential scale. Following the scale, there was a short demographic section. All of the participants were informed that they were in no danger and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Eighty-three students were sampled, all of whom were members of either Marketing 372, 378, or 472. Of the 83 people sampled, 34 were females and 45 were males.

The general purpose of the research was to determine the students’ level of involvement of the class content. The score that the person was awarded was dependent on responses to the 19 item involvement questionnaire. The dependent variables or class rank, gender, grade point average and major were analyzed to determine if these variables had any influence on the degree of reported involvement in the course.

The response categories were in the form of a seven point scale. The demographic questionnaire items required responses concerning the participant’s last four digits of their social security number, gender, classification, overall g.p.a., major, minor, and any reasons for taking the class (see Appendix 1). The statistical program SAS was used to analyze the responses. The
final analysis correlated the score that was calculated according to their level of involvement with the dependent variables (to be completed at a later date).

Results

This section profiles the total responses of the participants in the selected marketing classes. The responses in this section are summated to describe the overall data obtained from the questionnaire.

Several general statistics provided interesting perspectives on the characteristics of the person taking the class and their reasons for doing so. Based on the calculation of the participants score and the classification, 55% of the senior students reported medium involvement while only 10% of the sophomore and junior students reported medium involvement (see Graph 1). When the involvement score of the participant, was compared to the reason for taking the class, 24% of those in the medium involvement range reported taking the class because they thought it would be interesting, which is reason 3. In the high involvement classification 15% reported this reason also (see Graph 2). The score of the participant was then compared to the class section that they were enrolled in. In Marketing 372, only 5% of the 31 participants rated themselves as highly involved while Marketing 378 reported 16% of highly involved students. However, Marketing 372 contained 30% of the medium involved and Marketing 378 contained 19%. The Marketing 472 class reported 2% highly involved students and 16% medium involved of 18 total students (see Graph 3).
When comparing the GPA to the major, Marketing held 11%, 8 students, of those with g.p.a's 3.0' and higher and 19 students, 23%, reported a grade point average of 2.51 to 2.99. The category of "other" business reported 19 of the 31 students having a GPA of 1.5 to 2.5. Five students in the "all other" category reported a GPA of 3.0 to 4.0 (see Graph 4). The female participants with a GPA of 3.0 to 4.0 was 15% while the males only held 6%. The students with a grade point average of 1.5 to 2.5 consisted of 28% males and the females only 15%. Nineteen males, 24% reported a grade point average of 2.51 - 2.99 and ten females which is 12% (See graph 5).

The majority of the females participating, 19% reported marketing as their major and "other" business and "all other" majors both reported 11%. Thirty-two percent of the 48 males reported marketing as their major of study and 27% of the 48 males reported "other" business as their major (see Graph 6).

Several items dealt with the demographics of the participant. The results are displayed in Table 1. The participants were asked their gender and 58% were male and 34% female. The respondents were asked to reveal information regarding their student classification at Sam Houston State University. Twenty-six percent were sophomore or junior in rank and 74% were seniors.

The respondents were asked the reasons that they took the class and to "required", 57 responded "yes", 19 responded "yes" to "fit in my schedule", 48 reported "no" to "thought it would be interesting", and 60 responded "no" to "needed and elective"(see Table 1).
Graph 1
Classification & Involvement

Percent

soph & junior

senior

low involvement
Medium Involvement
High Involvement
Graph 2
Reason & Involvement

Percent
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0

low
medium
high
level of involvement

Reason 1
Reason 2
Reason 3
Reason 4
Graph 3
Course & Involvement

Percent

372 378 472

Low Involvement
Medium Involvement
High Involvement
Graph 4
G.P.A. & Major

Number of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>G.P.A.</th>
<th>1.5-2.5</th>
<th>2.51-2.99</th>
<th>3.0-4.0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Marketing**
- **Other Business**
- **All Other**
Graph 5
Gender & G.P.A.

Males
Females

G.P.A. | 1.5-2.5 | 2.51-2.99 | 3.0-4.0
---|---|---|---
Percent | | | |
Graph 6
Gender & Major

Percent

Females
Males

all other  Marketing  Other Business
Table 1

Basic Demographic questions asked of the Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. GENDER</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Male</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Female</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II. CLASSIFICATION</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sophomore or Junior</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Senior</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>III. OVERALL G.P.A.</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 1.5 - 2.5</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 2.51 - 2.99</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 3.0 - 4.0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV. MAJOR</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Marketing</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Other business</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. All other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V. REASONS FOR TAKING CLASS</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Required yes</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fit into my schedule yes</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Interesting yes</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Elective yes</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 1

The purpose of this study is to measure your involvement or level of interest in this marketing class. To take this measure, we need you to judge your perception of the course content of this class against a series of descriptive scales according to how YOU perceive the class. It is very important that you indicate your rating according to the class content, not the professor or his/her teaching style. Here is how you are to use these scales:

If you feel that the marketing class content is very closely related to one end of the scale, you should place your check mark as follows:

Unimportant_x:___:___:___:___:___:___:___ Important
OR
Unimportant:___:___:___:___:___:___:___:___\_x:___ Important

If you feel that the marketing class content is quite closely related to one of the other end of the scale (but not extremely), you should place your check mark as follows:

Appealing:___:___:___:___:___:___:___:___ Unappealing
OR
Appealing:___:___:___:___:___:___:___:___\_x:___ Unappealing

If you feel that the marketing class content seems seems only slightly related (but not really neutral) to one end of the scale, you should place your check mark as follows:

Uninterested:___:___:___:___:___:___:___:___ Interested
Uninterested:___:___:___:___:___:___:___:___\_x:___ Interested

IMPORTANT
1. Be sure that you check every scale; do not omit any
2. Never put more than one check mark on a single scale.

Make each item a separate and independent judgement. Work at fairly high speed through this questionnaire. Do not worry or puzzle over individual items. It is your first impressions, the immediate feelings about the items, that we want. On the other hand, please do not be careless, because we want your true impressions.

Any Questions?
Marketing Class Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>important</th>
<th>Unimportant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>of no concern</td>
<td>of concern to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>irrelevant</td>
<td>relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>means a lot to me</td>
<td>means nothing to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>useless</td>
<td>useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>valuable</td>
<td>worthless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trivial</td>
<td>fundamental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beneficial</td>
<td>not beneficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>matters to me</td>
<td>doesn't matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uninterested</td>
<td>interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>significant</td>
<td>insignificant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vital</td>
<td>superfluous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boring</td>
<td>interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unexciting</td>
<td>exciting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appealing</td>
<td>unappealing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mundane</td>
<td>fascinating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>essential</td>
<td>nonessential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>undesirable</td>
<td>desirable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wanted</td>
<td>unwanted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please complete the following information concerning yourself.

1. Last four digits of your SS# __ __ __ __.

2. Gender M __ F __

3. Classification: __ Freshman
   __ Sophomore
   __ Junior
   __ Senior

4. Overall G.P.A
   __ 1.5-1.99
   __ 2.0-2.5
   __ 2.51-2.99
   __ 3.0-3.5
   __ 3.51-4.0

5. Major ___________________ Minor ___________________

6. Reasons for taking this marketing class:
   (Check all that apply)
   __ required for my curriculum
   __ fit into my schedule
   __ thought it would be interesting
   __ needed an elective
   Other ___________________
REFERENCES


