

Buying Behaviour

For many products, it is easy to identify the buyer. Men normally choose their shaving equipment and women choose their pantyhose. Other products involve a decision-making unit consisting of more than one person. Consider the selection of a family automobile. The teenage son may have suggested buying a new car. A friend might advise the family on the kind of car to buy. The husband might choose the make. The wife might have definite desires regarding the car's size and interior. The husband might make the financial offer. The wife might use the car more often than her husband.

Thus we can distinguish five roles people might play in a buying decision:

- **Initiator:** A person who first suggests the idea of buying the particular product or service.
- **Influencer:** A person whose view or advice influences the decision.
- **Decider:** A person who decides on any component of a buying decision; whether to buy, what to buy, how to buy, or where to buy.
- **Buyer:** The person who makes the actual purchase.
- **User:** A person who consumes or uses the product or service.

A company needs to identify these roles because they have implications for designing the product, determining messages, and allocating the promotional budget. If the husband decides on the car make, then the auto company will direct advertising to reach husbands. The auto company might design certain car features to please the wife. Knowing the main participants and their roles helps the marketer fine-tune the marketing programme.

Consumer decision-making varies with the type of buying decision. There are great differences between buying toothpaste, a tennis racket, a personal computer, and a new car. Complex and expensive purchases are likely to *involve* more buyer deliberation and more participants.

Involvement is the perceived importance or personal relevance of an object or event. It is about

the degree to which the consumer feels attached to the product or brand, and the loyalty felt towards it. Involvement has both cognitive and affective elements: it plays on both the brain and the emotions. For example, a car owner might say, 'I love my old Ambassador [affect] because it never lets me down [cognition]. There can be 3 levels of involvement:

- Low level of involvement occurs if attributes are irrelevant to consequences
- Medium level of involvement occurs if the attributes only link to *function*
- High product involvement will come about if the consumer feels that product attributes are strongly-linked to *end goals* or *values*. Although it is the behaviour of the decision-maker that determines the level of involvement of a decision, there are 3 common factors, which increase the likelihood of high involvement. These are:
 - i. The cost of purchase relative to income
 - ii. The amount of time for which the purchase will be owned
 - iii. The extent to which the purchase reflects the self-image

High-involvement purchases are those products, which figure greatly in the consumer's lifestyle. In other words, they involve decisions which is important to get right, preferably first time. Typically, the products with which the consumer is highly involved will also be the ones which the consumer knows most about, and about which he or she has strong opinions.

Following table compares high-involvement, medium-involvement and low involvement considerations.

Comparison of involvement levels

High Involvement	Medium involvement	Low involvement
Attributes strongly linked to end goals	Attributes only link to function	Attributes irrelevant to consequences
Important to get it right first time	Need to have reasonably reliable results	Results perceived to be the same whichever product chosen
Consumer has in-depth knowledge and strong opinions	Consumer has knowledge of the product group, no strong feelings	No strong feelings, knowledge of product group irrelevant
Discrepant information ignored or discounted	Discrepant information considered carefully	Discrepant information ignored

For example, a technology-savvy IT professional might have very strong views on which PC would give the best performance. Discrepant information (a salesperson's attempt to persuade him to try another brand, for example) is discounted and disparaged, and may even lower the esteem of the source of the information (the IT professional will think the salesperson is stupid, or is trying to unload an inferior brand of computer). On the other hand, a computer novice is less likely to have formed a close involvement with a product and hence is more likely to be prepared to listen to what the salesperson has to say. This means that high-involvement consumers are hard to persuade; they are not be easily swayed by advertising or even by persuasive sales pitches.

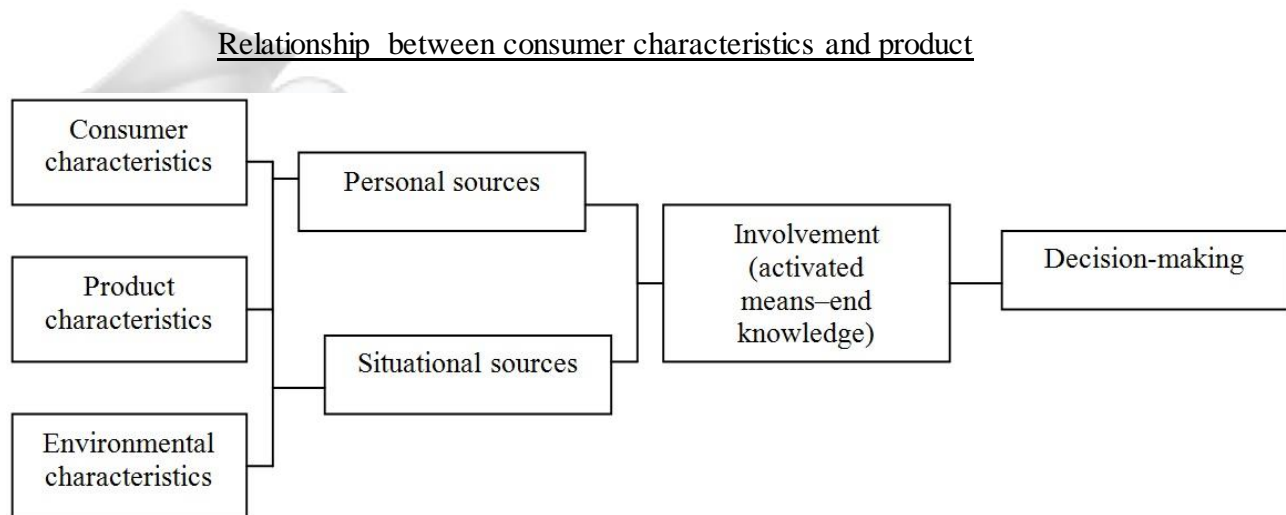
Levels of involvement are influenced by two sources: *personal sources* and *situational sources*.

1. Personal sources: Personal sources, also called *intrinsic self-relevance* are the means-end knowledge stored in the individual's memory, and area influenced both by the person and by the product. Consumers who believe that the attributes of the product link strongly to important end goals are likely to be more heavily involved with the product because the importance of the end goals mean that it is essential to get the product (the means to the end) right first time. For example, an individual who believes that wearing a good quality branded formal shirt to a job interview is a sure way of getting the job, will take particular care in choosing a shirt if the job is particularly desirable. But it should also be taken into consideration that the involvement does not necessarily rely on the outcomes being positive. Sometimes involvement is greater if there might be negative consequence, since the consumer will take care to choose a product that will help to avoid an unpleasant outcome. For example, a salesperson travelling all over day will chose a good quality deodorant to keep himself fresh so that he would not feel uncomfortable for his body odour while meeting with clients.

Since there is always a risk with any purchase behaviour, and high involvement goods in particular are the ones that are most important to the consumer, consumers will usually engage in extended problem-solving behaviour when first purchasing high-involvement goods. Having taken the risk of choosing a brand, the highly involved individual will not want to switch brands later unless absolutely necessary (for example, if the favourite brand goes out of production).

When brand switching becomes necessary, the consumer will again go through the extensive problem solving routine.

2. Situational sources: Situational sources of involvement are concerned with aspects of the immediate social or physical surroundings of the consumer. Sometimes a change in *social circumstances* will increase involvement; for example, most people give considerable thought to how they will dress on a wedding celebration. *Physical environment* issues are about the circumstances that arise in the surrounding environment rather than those involving people. For example, the experience of cold weather might cause an individual to become strongly involved with a leather jacket. Following figure shows the relationship between the characteristics of consumers and products, and the routes by which these generate involvement and, ultimately, a purchase (or non-purchase) decision.



Marketers may be able to manipulate some of the environmental aspects in order to increase consumer involvement in some way. For example, a salesperson might explain the possible consequences of buying the wrong type of air conditioner (showing that not all ACs have the same cooling qualities). This may make the customer aware that the end result (having paid out a lot of money for AC that does not keep the room cold) could be highly self-relevant.

Consumers frequently develop close relationships with brands and products. Examples are aftershave, perfumes, jeans, cars and cigarettes. Although most smokers cannot identify their favourite brand in blind taste tests, it would take considerable persuasion to make them switch

brands; likewise, drivers develop affective relationships with their car. Consumers can be categorised according to their level of involvement, as the following table shows.

Categories of consumer according to involvement

Types of consumers	Characteristics
Brand loyalists	Usually they tend to have strong, affective link to the product category to the provision of personally relevant consequences. These are people who go for the 'best brand' for their needs, but also feel that the product category itself is an important part of their lives.
Routine brand buyers	These people have low personal sources of involvement, but have a favourite brand. These consumers are more interested in the types of consequence associated with regular brand purchases (it is easier to buy the same one each week, and it is at least reliable). They are not necessarily looking for the 'best brand'; only a satisfactory one will do.
Information seekers	These people have positive means-end information about the product category, but no one brand stands out as superior. They use a lot of information to help them find a suitable brand from within the product category.
Brand switchers	This type involves low brand loyalty with low personal involvement. These people do not see that the brand used has any important consequences, even if the product category is interesting. Usually they do not have a strong relationship with the product category either. This means that they are easily affected by environmental factors such as sales promotions.

The classifications, of course, will apply only to a particular product category. A consumer may be staunchly loyal to a brand of whisky, while not caring which brand of soda water goes in it. While it is undoubtedly true that some people will be heavily involved with a lot of different brands while others do not pay much attention to branding, there is no evidence that high involvement in one brand will lead to high involvement in another brand from a different product category.

High involvement always has a strong affective component, and this does not necessarily mean a high cost commitment. People also fall in love with cheap products. So involvement does not always equate to price. A high-involvement good is not necessarily a high-priced one, nor is a low-involvement good necessarily a cheap one. Smokers can become very involved with their brand of cigarettes costing very few (Take the example of *bidi* or Charminar cigarette). Conversely, some people may not get involved deeply with a highly costly 5-star hotel.

Assael distinguished four types of consumer buying behaviour based on the degree of buyer involvement and the degree of differences among brands.

Purchasing high-tech consumer durables

Consumer durables such as stereo equipment, cameras, video recorders and computers are frequently high-involvement purchases. This is because there is usually a high level of personal relevance when somebody is contemplating the purchase of an expensive and highly visible piece of equipment. This could be because of the social values applied (friends or relatives being envious or admiring: remember Onida's "neighbour's envy, owners pride" campaign) or perhaps because of situational change. The consumer contemplating a high-tech purchase is likely to have acquired or be acquiring extensive means-end knowledge.

Factors in the decision-making framework might include the following:

- *Self-image consideration:* Does this piece of equipment fit into the kind of image the buyer has of him or herself, or the kind of image to be projected to others?
- *Situational sources of involvement:* Does this piece of equipment meet an immediate need? For example, a consumer might need to purchase a computer that will run software compatible with that used in work.
- *Product-related considerations:* How long will the equipment last? Consumer durables are usually bought only rarely and therefore there is a strong incentive to buy products that will suit the purpose for they will be around for a long time.
- *Information considerations:* Purchasers will probably be information seekers, since frequency of purchase is low, and the high-tech products change frequently. Personal sources of information are therefore likely to be obsolete. Marketers can adopt a *rational, information-based* approach to promotion, since the purchasers are likely to be information seekers.
- *Financial risk.* This is fairly high, since high-tech goods are usually expensive.
- *Social risk:* This can also be high, since high-tech goods are often bought by 'cognoscenti', whose friends and associates might be contemptuous of a poor purchase decision.

Typically, marketers of hi-fi equipment produce very detailed, highly technical brochures and information. Occasionally consumers criticise these, but many hi-fi purchasers not only understand all the jargon in the brochures, but also they welcome it as an indication of their membership of an elite group.

Unsought goods

So far, we have been looking at the consumer's behaviour when seeking out goods to meet a recognised need. While most goods fall into the category of being sought out as solutions to a need, there is a category of *unsought goods*, which consumers do not go looking for. Unsought goods are those goods for which consumers will recognise a need, but which they tend to avoid buying. The most common example of such type of products is insurance policies.

If consumers do not seek for these products, two questions arise: first, why don't people seek them out when they have already recognised that there is a need and second, how should such products be marketed?

The possible reasons for not seeking out the products are as follows:

- Consumers do not like to think about the reasons for needing the products. For example, people do not like to think about old age and death, so they prefer not to think about insurance and pensions.
- The products are often expensive or require a long-term commitment and consumers do not like to take the risk of making a mistake.
- There is usually no urgency about seeking a solution. The consumer may think that his retirement is a long way off.
- The consumer may not see any immediate benefit. In the case of death insurance, the insured person never benefits directly, since the policy is effective only after the death. Even in case of pension policy, the effect is only due after the retirement, which may be long years for a young person.
- Some unsought goods are new on the market, so the level of knowledge about them is

low and the consumer will automatically consider himself as non-interested although there may be a need for it. Hence, trust in both the product and the brand needs to be established first.

Marketers can overcome these problems with a series of tactics, but the main one is to use salespeople to explain the benefits of the product and close the sale. These salespeople usually have to overcome an initial resistance to the idea of spending time listening to a presentation, since the consumer of unsought goods is not engaged in an information search and is unprepared for spending any time or resources on it. The salesperson will therefore need to employ a tactical device to gain the customer's attention for long enough to activate the need for the product.

Assael's model of buying behaviour

Level of Significances Between Brands	High Involvement	Low Involvement
Significant	Complex Buying Behaviour	Variety-seeking Buying Behaviour
Few	Dissonance-reducing Buying Behaviour	Habitual Buying Behaviour

Complex Buying Behaviour

Consumers go through complex buying behaviour when they are highly involved in a purchase and aware of significant differences among brands. Consumers are highly involved when the product is expensive, bought infrequently, risky and highly self-expressive. Typically the consumer does not know much about the product category and has much to learn. For example, a person buying a personal computer may not know what attribute to look for. Many of the product features like "16K memory" "disc storage", "screen resolution" carry no meaning to him or her.

This buyer will pass through a learning process characterized by first developing beliefs about the product, then attitudes, and then making a thoughtful purchase choice. The marketer of a high-involvement product must understand the information-gathering and evaluation behaviour of high-involvement consumers. The marketer needs to develop strategies that assist the buyer in learning about the attributes of the product class, their relative importance, and the high standing

of the company's brand on the more important attributes. The marketer needs to differentiate the brand's features, use mainly print media and long copy to describe the brand's benefits, and motivate store sales personnel and the buyer's acquaintances to influence the final brand choice.

Dissonance-Reducing Buying Behaviour

Sometimes the consumer is highly involved in a purchase but sees little difference in the brands. The high involvement is again based on the fact that the purchase is expensive, infrequent, and risky. In this case, the buyer will shop around to learn what is available but will buy fairly quickly because brand differences are not pronounced. The buyer may respond primarily to a good price or to purchase convenience.

After the purchase, the consumer might experience dissonance that stems from noticing certain disquieting features of the product or hearing favourable things about other brands. The consumer will be alert to information that might justify his or her decision. The consumer will first act, then acquire new beliefs and end up with a set of attitudes. Here marketing communications should aim to supply beliefs and evaluations that help the consumer feel good about his or her brand choice.

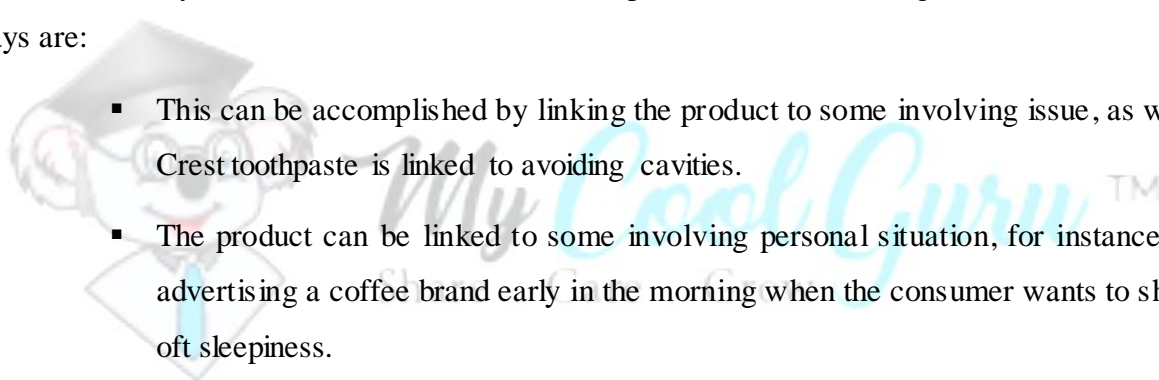
Habitual Buying Behaviour

Many products are bought under conditions of low consumer involvement and the absence of significant brand differences. Consider the purchase of salt. Consumers have little involvement in this product category. They go to the store and reach for the brand. If they keep reaching for the same brand, it is out of habit, not strong brand loyalty. There is good evidence that consumers have low involvement with most low-cost, frequently purchased products. Consumer behaviour in these cases does not pass through the normal belief/attitude/behaviour sequence. Consumers do not search extensively for information about the brands, evaluate their characteristics, and make a weighty decision on which brand to buy. Instead, they are passive recipients of information as they watch television or see print ads. Ad repetition creates *brand familiarity* rather than *brand conviction*. Consumers do not form a strong attitude towards a brand but select it because it is familiar. After purchase, they may not even evaluate the choice because they are

not highly involved with the product. So the buying process is brand beliefs formed by passive learning, followed by purchase behaviour, which may be followed by evaluation.

Marketers of low-involvement products with few brand differences find it effective to use price and sales promotions to stimulate product trial, since buyers are not highly committed to any brand. In advertising a low-involvement product, a number of things should be observed. The ad copy should stress only a few key points. Visual symbols and Imagery are important because they can easily be remembered and associated with the brand. The ad campaigns should go for high repetition with short-duration messages. Television is more effective than print media because it is a low-involvement medium that is suitable for passive learning. Advertising planning should be based on classical conditioning theory where the buyer learns to identify a certain product by a symbol that is repeatedly attached to it.

Marketers can try to convert the low-involvement product into one of higher involvement. The ways are:

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- This can be accomplished by linking the product to some involving issue, as when Crest toothpaste is linked to avoiding cavities.
 - The product can be linked to some involving personal situation, for instance, by advertising a coffee brand early in the morning when the consumer wants to shake off sleepiness.
 - The advertising might seek to trigger strong emotions related to personal values or ego defense.
 - An important product feature might be added to a low-involvement product, such as by fortifying a plain drink with vitamins,

These strategies at best raise consumer involvement from a low to a moderate level; they do not propel the consumer into highly involved buying behaviour.

Variety-Seeking Buying Behaviour

Some buying situations are characterised by low consumer involvement but significant brand differences. Here consumers are often observed to do a lot of brand switching. An example occurs in purchasing cookies. The consumer has some beliefs, chooses a brand of cookies without much evaluation, and evaluates it during consumption. But next time, the consumer may reach for another brand out of boredom or a wish for a different taste. Brand switching occurs for the sake of variety rather than dissatisfaction.

The marketing strategy is different for the market leader and the minor brands in this product category. The market leader will try to encourage habitual buying behaviour by dominating the shelf space, avoiding out-of-stock conditions, and sponsoring frequent reminder advertising. Challenger firms will encourage variety seeking by offering lower prices, deals, coupons, free samples and advertising that presents reasons for trying something new.



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