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Salam A.F

*University of Louisville, salam@acsu.buffalo.edu*

Pegels C.C

*Jacobs Management Center, SUNY at Buffalo, pegels@acsu.buffalo.edu*

H.R Rao

*Jacobs Management Center, SUNY at Buffalo, mgmtrao@acsu.buffalo.edu*

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# **An Exploratory Investigation Of The Internet Involvement: Instrument Development, Measurement And Implications For Electronic Commerce**

[A. F. Salam](#)\*, [C.C. Pegels](#)\*\* and [H.R. Rao](#)+

\*salam@acsu.buffalo.edu, \*\*pegels@acsu.buffalo.edu, mgmtrao@acsu.buffalo.edu

\*College of Business Administration, University of Louisville, Kentucky 40292

\*\*+Jacobs Management Center, SUNY at Buffalo, NY 14260

+Corresponding author: Ph: (716) 645-3425 Fax: (716) 645-6117

## **Abstract**

With the advent of the Internet or the World Wide Web, economic entities such as business firms and consumers are converging to the new frontier for economic exchange: Electronic Commerce. Businesses are investing in infrastructure, content and transaction specific relationships paving the way for electronic commerce over the Internet. But the antecedent of any consumer related activities over the Internet requires a fundamental understanding of the "Involvement" construct as related to the Internet. The concept of involvement has played a significant role in explaining consumer behavior in the marketing literature as well as in developing and formulating marketing strategies and policies. In this paper, we focus on developing and validating the "Involvement" construct as related to the Internet from an electronic commerce perspective. Data was collected for this purpose and initial analysis reveals that the construct is likely to be multi-dimensional and each dimension taps into two aspects of Internet Involvement. One representing the aesthetic or fascinating aspect of the Internet such as animations, Java applets, fancy graphics, etc., and the other representing the value creating aspect of the Internet such as easy access to interesting and valuable information, product or service offerings, knowledge enhancements etc. This paper contributes to the literature by investigating a crucial concept underlying many consumer behaviors such as exposure to media, processing of advertising information, response to persuasive messages, word-of-mouth communications about new products or services, etc. in the context of electronic commerce.

## **Introduction:**

By the year 2005, over a billion people will be connected to the electronic network commonly known as the Internet and the network constitutes a whole new marketplace in its own right. (Paterson and Brown, 1996 Internet Research). Forrester Research Inc., a market research firm, predicted that this increase in market size will be accompanied by an increase in gross revenues. In 1994, gross revenues from online services and the Internet totaled \$200 million (Rowley, 1996). Advertising, subscriptions, and retail commerce from "desktop distribution" over the Internet will total \$4.6 billion in 2000 (The Yankee Group, 1996)

The Internet is emerging as the pivotal access for the global information infrastructure. In the space of less than five years, the Internet has transformed rapidly from a research-

oriented electronic mail network connecting technical academic, defense and relevant corporate groups into the most powerful global network on the planet linking people and organizations from all walks of life (Pattinson and Brown, 1996). In the face of the huge popularity enjoyed by the Internet, in general, and the World Wide Web (WWW) ,in particular, many companies today find it almost obligatory to maintain a Web site (Harper, 1996). According to the Morgan and Stanley Internet Report (1996), corporate web pages have become the most popular means of distributing corporate information to Internet users.

One of the compelling reasons for corporate initiative to reach customers through this new media is the astonishing growth of Internet users. The Internet has enjoyed a historical sustained growth rate of 100 percent per year over the past five years (Internet Report, 1996). In short, the Internet has presented itself as an alternate marketing and advertising medium for corporations to reach potential customers.

The Internet allows marketers to target and communicate with highly involved and interested consumers, domestic and global (Mehta, 1995). To reach on-line buyers, advertisers have to create an information-rich, interactive form of marketing for a personalized sales approach (Janal, 1995).

According to Weltz (1996), Internet advertising is turning out to be a lot less like print and TV advertising than many people in the marketing and advertising industry had anticipated. Brueckner (1996) explains this phenomenon by stating that most people think about the Web in terms of a medium they already understand, and the medium they understand best is television. The conceptualization process is similar to the appearance of the first automobiles which were called "horseless carriages" because people needed a comfortable frame of reference for something that did not yet have a category of its own.

The traditional advertising -TV, radio, and print-always operated on the broadcast model. One important difference between Television (TV) advertising and Web advertising is the motivation or curiosity of the viewer to view the advertising. In case of TV advertising, the advertising enters the potential buyers environment in an *uninitiated* way. The potential buyer can ignore it or choose not to view it, but it is still there. In the case of Web advertising, the potential buyer must initiate the access to the corporate Web pages. Hence, Web as advertising media demands a much stronger access motivation and/or involvement on the part of the consumer than traditional modes of advertising.

According to Brueckner (1996: pp. 60) "Right now too much of the Web's appeal is novelty (flashy graphics, labored Shockwave and Java animations, Real Audio, digital video) and too much of the Web marketers' time is spent trying to mimic television. When the novelty wears off, as it inevitably will, where will the value reside?"

To understand what constitutes 'value' for the consumer in using the Internet from an electronic commerce perspective, it is essential to discern what constitutes consumer involvement with the Internet. The concept of involvement has played a significant role

in explaining consumer behavior in the marketing literature as well as in developing and formulating marketing strategies and policies.

### **Brief Literature Review**

Conceptualizing and measuring involvement has been a consuming endeavor of consumer behavior researchers and social psychologists for more than twenty years (Higie and Feick, 1989). Additionally, a rich paradigm of research has also accumulated regarding user involvement in the information systems field (Barudi and Olson, 1985, Barki and Hartwick, 1989, 1991 and 1994; Kappelman and McLean, 1991, 1992 and 1994). As there are no known (to our knowledge) theoretical or empirical research papers regarding involvement as related to the internet, this paper builds on previous research in marketing, information systems, consumer research and social psychology pertaining to the involvement construct.

Research on involvement dates back to Sherif and Cantril's (1947) early work. They expounded the concept of "ego involvement" to emphasize the personal and emotional nature of involvement. Though the involvement concept has been researched extensively over the past several decades, substantial ambiguity as to its nature exists (Gensch and Javalgi, 1987). The concept appears to be both multidimensional and multifaceted. The lack of agreement on what constitutes involvement is acknowledged throughout the literature (Arora, 1982; Engel and Blackwell, 1982; Laurent and Kapfirer, 1985; Ray 1985; Robertson, 1976). Lasvicka and Gardner (1979, pp. 48) state that there is "no clear statement or agreement on what this concept of involvement represents." Similarly, Tyebjee (1979, pp. 298) observed that "there is little agreement on what this concept of involvement represents." Muncy and Hunt (1981) summarized the literature on involvement and noted that the agreement on the nature of the involvement construct does not exist at present because involvement is defined variously depending upon the context. In their extensive review of the involvement concept, Chiseler, Collins, and Miller (1969) called it a pot-pouri concept which may encompass several independent elements. Rothschild (1979) concluded that no single indicator of involvement could satisfactorily describe, explain, or predict involvement.

A multitude of conceptualizations are available in the literature: enduring/situational involvement, cognitive/affective involvement, instrument/responsive involvement (Jain and Srinivasan, 1990). This diversity of views provides a very rich perspective of the construct. Much of the diversity in definitions adopted by researchers in the involvement area begins at the conceptual level.

In this paper, we review the current state of knowledge about the "Involvement" construct in various related disciplines and based on past research, we develop and adapt existing instruments to measure "Internet Involvement" in the context of electronic commerce. The objectives of this research are two fold: one to develop and then validate a measurement instrument for "Internet Involvement" and two, to apply this instrument to discern certain consumer behaviors regarding electronic commerce. Another objective of this research is also to provide a foundation for further investigation into consumer

behavior as "Involvement" is recognized as a crucial construct underlying many consumer behaviors in marketing and consumer research literature.

### **Instrument Development, Pilot Study and Some Preliminary Results:**

In this study we propose the following definition of Internet Involvement:

Internet involvement is an unobservable state of motivation of a person regarding the Internet and is his or her perceived relevance related to the Internet based on inherent needs, values, interests, goals and objectives.

In this research, we conceptualize Internet Involvement to be multi-dimensional rather than unidimensional. Unlike products or services that were the focus of study in the marketing or consumer behavior literature, it is our contention that the Internet represents means to as well as ends with multifarious objectives. In this sense we have adopted Zaichkowsky's (1985) Personal Involvement Inventory, a well accepted and widely studied and validated instrument from the consumer behavior literature. Using a sample of 112 undergraduate business students, we proceeded to investigate both scale reliabilities and multi-dimensionality of the construct using factor analysis. Our preliminary results of factor analysis are shown in Table 1. Our scale reliability alpha with 19 items is 0.9568 is quite promising. Our factor analysis suggests that the multi-dimensional structure of the Internet Involvement construct is more tenable and that consumers may have a two dimensional involvement with the Internet: one dealing with flashy graphics, animations and fascinating aspects and the other dealing with value creating aspects such as finding important information related to products services or career or job opportunities etc. But our study needs to be carried out further with a larger sample from a more diverse population with careful evaluation of each item in the instrument.

### **References:**

References available upon request.

Factor 1	Factor 2
Essential	0.82632
Needed	0.76307
Desirable	0.75972
Exciting	0.75590
Interesting	0.75536

Vital	0.75406
Significant	0.74614
Fascinating	0.69443
Important	0.68315
Wanted	0.66872
Of Concern to me	0.64305
Relevant	0.60675
Interested	0.87313
Valuable	0.83042
Beneficial	0.78261
Matters to me	0.76199
Useful	0.64752
Means a lot	0.64051
Appealing	0.61390