A Taxonomy of Leisure Purchase Decision Paradigms Based on Level of Involvement

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Level of involvement has emerged as a key variable in understanding leisure behavior. Five decision-making paradigms incorporating the influence of involvement are identified and discussed. They are: hierarchy-of-effects, dissonance-attrition hierarchy, alternative attribution hierarchy, low involvement hierarchy, and single or integrated hierarchy. Differences in involvement level and ability to differentiate between attributes of service alternatives lead to differences in sequencing of the cognitive, affective and conative components of the decision process. These different sequences differentiate the five alternative paradigms. It is suggested that recent work postulating involvement as a multidimensional rather than a unidimensional construct, is unlikely to affect the form of the five decision-making paradigms. Nine research propositions are offered to guide future involvement research efforts, and implications for service providers of identifying users' decision-making paradigms are discussed.

**KEYWORDS: decision-making, paradigms, leisure services, involvement.**

Over the past 40 years, the involvement level that people have with the products and services they purchase has steadily gained recognition as being an important variable in explaining purchase behavior. The concept of involvement was first introduced in psychology (Sherif & Cantril, 1947), then in consumer behavior (Krugman, 1965) and more recently in leisure behavior (Bloch & Bruce, 1984a; Jacob & Schreyer, 1980). The definition of involvement proposed by Rothschild (1984) has received wide acceptance: Involvement is an unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest. It is evoked by a particular stimulus or situation, and has drive properties. Its consequences are types of searching, information-processing and decision-making.

Involvement research has primarily focused upon identifying possible differences between high and low involvement purchases. Generally, researchers (Rothschild, 1979b; Zaichkowski, 1985) have concluded that when purchase of a product, or a leisure service, is considered to be important to a participant's ego, self esteem, or needs, or when there is a high level of financial, social or psychological risk, then a high involvement state is likely to exist. This leads to evaluative processing of relevant information about the product or leisure service, and to a relatively complex decision-making process. A participant with a high involvement level is likely to seek out and use information about the choice alternatives and follow a comprehensive process of decision-making (Assael, 1981; Kassarjian, 1981). On the other hand, when the service is not important or relevant to participants'
self-esteem, values, or needs, and perceived to have minimal risk associated with it, then they tend to gather little or no evaluative information about choice alternatives and follow relatively simple, non-comprehensive decision-making processes (Rothschild, 1979b; Zaichkowsky, 1985). A low involvement response is likely to be characterized by (a) a relative lack of active information seeking about the available product or leisure services, (b) little comparative evaluation between available choice alternatives, (c) a perception that all the choices are similar, and (d) the individual having no special preference for a particular product or leisure service (Zaichkowsky, 1985). As a result of the low level of involvement, an individual tends to participate in alternatives that are satisfactory or “good enough” rather than the optimum decisions sought when high involvement is present (Lastovicka, 1979; Wright, 1974).

This paper introduces a taxonomy of five decision-making paradigms that describe how participants make decisions about purchasing a leisure service. The typology clarifies and explores two independent variables purported to determine which of the paradigms is used in a decision: the participant's level of involvement with the purchase, and his or her ability to differentiate salient attributes of available choices. The intent of the typology is to guide future research efforts that examine the relationship between these independent variables and the decision-making paradigms.

The variability of involvement levels has led researchers to conceptualize involvement as being on a continuum, ranging from high to low (Gensch & Javalgi, 1987; Mowen, 1988; Rothschild, 1984; Zaichkowsky, 1984, 1985). It is generally believed that most daily purchases fall at the low end of this continuum because they are low risk, routine decisions (Bloch & Bruce, 1984a; Furse, Punj, & Stewart, 1984; Granbois, 1977).

A substantial volume of research focusing on the concept of involvement has been reported over the past thirty years in the marketing and social psychology literatures. More recently, several scholars have suggested that involvement is a central component of leisure experience and behavior (Backman & Crompton, 1991; Bloch & Bruce, 1984a, 1984b; Bryan, 1977, 1979; Buchanan, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Dimanche, Havitz, & Howard, 1991).

In their review of the underlying components of ego involvement Selin and Howard (1988) concluded that each of five components: centrality, importance, pleasure, interest, and self-expression, were applicable to leisure behavior. Ego involvement was defined as "the state of identification existing between an individual and a recreational activity, at one point in time, characterized by some level of enjoyment and self-expression being achieved through the activity" (p. 237). In addition, Selin and Howard (1988) concluded that five currently used involvement scales could be used to measure involvement with leisure, "... it would be a simple task to change the object to leisure behavior" (p. 247).

Tinsley and Tinsley (1986), Mannell (1980), and Neulinger (1974) have all suggested that importance of a leisure activity to the individual, (in other
words the involvement level the individual has with a leisure activity), is directly related to experiencing a leisure state. Tinsley and Tinsley (1986), in their comprehensive review of the leisure experience, stated that some form of personal commitment (involvement) is necessary in order to experience leisure. Both Mannell (1980) and Neulinger (1974) have conceptualized a leisure experience as a pleasurable, highly involving state. Neulinger has defined leisure as engaging in an activity “which gives one pleasure to the very core of one’s being” (p. 11). He sees it as central to one’s values and highly involving. In addition, Csikszentmihalyi’s (1975) concept of flow, which is considered the optimal experience state sought in leisure, is defined as a high involvement holistic sensation. Flow, according to Csikszentmihalyi (1975) is “the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement” (p. 36).

Given the conceptualization that an individual must be highly involved with an activity to experience a state of “true” leisure, it is surprising that the influence of involvement upon leisure behavior has not received more empirical emphasis in the leisure literature. A limited number of recent studies have examined involvement, or concepts similar to involvement, as an independent variable in such areas as: leisure specialization (Bryan, 1977, 1979; Wellman, Roggenbuck, & Smith, 1982); commitment (Bloch, Black, & Lichtenstein, 1989; Buchanan, 1985); customer loyalty (Backman & Crompton, 1991); and pricing (McCarville, 1990).

The concept of leisure specialization (Bryan, 1977, 1979) and Buchanan’s (1985) concept of commitment in leisure both incorporate the notion of a high state of involvement. It seems that specialization in, and commitment to, a leisure activity requires not only extensive past experience, skills and knowledge of the activity, but also a high degree of personal involvement with the activity and relevance of the activity to an individual’s centrally held values. This relationship between involvement and commitment was explored by Bloch, Black, and Lichtenstein (1989), who proposed a model of the relationship between involvement with sports equipment and commitment to the sport.

Customer loyalty, an issue related to specialization and commitment, has also been shown to be related to a participant’s level of involvement. In a study that explored the utility of personal and environmental variables in explaining participant loyalty to two recreation services, Backman and Crompton (1991) found that the most important variables were level of involvement, extrinsic reward motivation, and personal competence.

There is evidence suggesting that level of involvement influences decisions about leisure choices. For example, as part of a leisure choice model, Williams (1984) reported that an individual’s level of involvement with a leisure activity had an influence on its likelihood of being selected for participation; activities with higher involvement were preferred over those with which there was a lower level of involvement. Jacob and Schreyer (1980) also reported that low involvement resulted in only occasional participation in a leisure activity and that it could be an indication of proclivity
to substitute another activity. Bloch and Bruce (1984a, 1984b) supported this relationship when they reported that leisure hobbyists such as collectors, wine connoisseurs, or car buffs had a high level of involvement with the activity. In his investigation of cognitive processes and pricing changes, McCarville (1990) reported that “the (decision-making) process is influenced by personal variables such as level of involvement...” (p. 78). Involvement’s influence on the decision process was also investigated by Manfredo and Bright (1991) who reported that involvement level had no effect on the information persuasion process.

Involvement appears to be an important variable in explaining variation in participants’ decision making processes. The involvement-commitment model of Bloch, Black, and Lichtenstein (1989) provides some insight into the relationship between involvement and decision making. Havitz and Dimanche (1990) conceptually explored this relationship and offered a number of research propositions, while Watkins (1986) reported that this relationship was positive in that when level of involvement increased so did the amount of prepurchase search effort.

**Alternative Involvement Decision Making Paradigms**

A variety of decision-making paradigms incorporating the influence of level of involvement on decision-making have been proposed in both the consumer behavior and the leisure literature (Finn, 1982; Fishbein, 1963; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Palda, 1966; Ray et al., 1973; Smith & Swinyard, 1980; Wortzel, 1982). These are summarized in the taxonomy shown in Table 1. They are differentiated by the level of involvement that a participant has with a leisure service and the participant’s ability to differentiate between attributes of the service alternatives. In Table 1 both the involvement level of the participant and the ability of the participant to perceive differences in the service alternatives are classified as either high or low. Because it is difficult to measure and to investigate a continuous variable, such as involvement, when it is used as an independent variable, a discrete set of involvement values—a dichotomy—is preferred (Rothschild, 1984).

The alternative decision process paradigms have been conceptualized by their proponents to consist of different components, but these various components can all be categorized under the summary headings of cognitive, affective and conative (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961). Their distinguishing characteristics are described below.

**Cognitive Component.** Individuals have antecedent information about a service and its purchase which may be derived from their past experience with the service or from social influences such as family and peer groups. This antecedent knowledge is the basis for forming beliefs about the service. For example, a belief would be that at a price of $8.00 a fitness program is inexpensive.

**Affective Component.** Beliefs determine a person’s attitude or “learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner
with respect to a given object" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 6). An attitude is a statement of affect, or like or dislike, or how one feels about the service in question. For example, a statement of positive affect is that a fitness offering is an excellent high quality program.

**Conative Component.** As a result of having a positive attitude toward the fitness program, a potential participant develops an intention to purchase it which, given accessibility and availability, may result in it being actually purchased.

Differences in involvement level and in ability to differentiate between attributes of service alternatives, lead to differences in sequencing of these three components. The differences in sequencing define the alternative decision paradigms shown in Table 1, which are described and discussed in the body of this paper.

**Hierarchy-of-Effects**

The hierarchy-of-effects paradigm has been endorsed by a number of writers and researchers (Palda, 1966; Ray et al., 1973). It was labelled the “learning hierarchy” by Ray et al. (1973) and “hierarchy-of-effects” by Palda (1966), since each of its steps was perceived to be a necessary but insufficient condition for the succeeding step. The six steps (Table 2) originally postulated by Lavidge and Steiner (1961) are:

- **Awareness:** Potential participants become aware of a leisure service’s existence. They do not acquire detailed information about such things as service attributes, pricing, or scheduling.
- **Knowledge:** Based on initial information acquired during the awareness step a potential participant is motivated to actively search out additional and more complete knowledge of the service.
- **Liking:** Using the knowledge gained about the service, an affective direction or attitude toward the service is formulated which determines whether the notion of purchasing it is rejected or whether the potential participant progresses to the next step.
- **Preference:** The individual’s favorable attitude evolves to the point where one leisure service is preferred over all alternatives.
- **Conviction:** Preference for one service is coupled with a desire to buy and the confidence “that the purchase would be wise” (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961).
- **Purchase:** The positive conviction to purchase is translated into actual participation in the leisure program.

Variations of the hierarchy-of-effects paradigm have been proposed by Strong (1925), Rogers (1962) and Campbell (1966), each of whom gave different titles to describe their schemata. It has been suggested that differences between them may only be semantic (Kotler, 1984), because they all follow the cognitive, affective, conative sequence of Lavidge and Steiner (1961).

The components in the hierarchy-of-effects paradigm are not equi-distant, and the difficulty and time involved in progressing to the next
### TABLE 1
A Taxonomy of Leisure Service Purchase Decision Paradigm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involvement Level</th>
<th>Perceived Service Differentiation</th>
<th>Sequence of Components</th>
<th>Purchase Decision Paradigms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Dissonance-Attribution Hierarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>No Differentiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Evaluative (Trial or Nontrial)</td>
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<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Affective</td>
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<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Conative</td>
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<td>Low</td>
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<td>Low</td>
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<td>Conative</td>
<td>No Differentiation</td>
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<td>Low</td>
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<td>Affective</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
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<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Conative</td>
<td>Conative</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


TABLE 2
Components of the Hierarchy of Effects Paradigm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Hierarchy-of-Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Liking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preference</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behavior or Conative</td>
<td>Conviction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purchase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lavidge and Steiner, 1961

component will depend both on the attributes of the leisure service and the characteristics of the participant. However, proponents state that each component is necessary and the apparent skipping of components is really a collapse of the hierarchy into a shorter time frame (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961).

The hierarchy-of-effects paradigm is based on the cognitive psychology perspective that leisure participants are rational, that is, they think before they act (Assael, 1981). This perspective has been conceptualized to follow five steps: (a) antecedents, (b) beliefs, (c) attitude formation, (d) intention to act, and (e) behavior (Fishbein, 1963, 1967; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), within the three general components of cognitive–affective–conative.

In this rational view, attitudes toward a leisure service are learned, based on information acquired from media, the service supplier, social groups, and/or past experience with it. The way in which attitudes have been traditionally defined as "precursors of behavior" or as "learned predispositions to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object" is reflective of the perspective that attitude formation precedes, guides, and influences a leisure service purchase decision. Cohen (1964) stated:

Most of the investigators whose work we have examined make the broad psychological assumption that since attitudes are predispositions, they have consequences for the way people act toward others, for the programs they actually undertake, and for the manner in which they carry them out. Thus, attitudes are seen as precursors of behavior, as determinants of how a person will actually behave in his daily affairs (pp. 137-138).

Krugman (1965) suggested that this rational cognitive-affective-conative sequence is only applicable under conditions of high involvement and there is empirical support for this view (Mowen, 1988; Palda, 1966; Ray et al., 1973; Rothschild, 1984). McGuire (1968, 1974) supported the notion that the hierarchy-of-effects sequence occurred under conditions of high involvement, but he also identified differentiation between choice alternatives as another criterion which must be present (Table 1). For the
hierarchy-of-effects sequence to occur, not only must potential participants be highly involved, but they must also be able to clearly differentiate between the service alternatives of which they are aware. This position was supported by Ray et al. (1973).

The applicability of the hierarchy-of-effects paradigm to the purchase of services has been questioned. Zeithaml (1981) and Young (1981) reject it as a decision paradigm that is followed when people purchase services. They argued that the intangibility of services makes it difficult for participants to define, learn about and mentally grasp (Berry, 1980) the nature of the service, which inhibits the sequential flow of the paradigm (Bateson, 1977; Zeithaml, 1981). Young also suggested that because services are predominantly intangible, most of a service participant’s knowledge must come from actual experience with the service. Therefore, prepurchase knowledge about the service is too limited for it to be effectively evaluated and for an attitude to be formed prior to purchase (George & Kelly, 1983).

Despite these reservations, there is conceptual support for the hierarchy-of-effects paradigm in the leisure literature. Iso-Ahola’s (1980) comprehensive conceptualization of how leisure attitudes are formulated and related to leisure choice is based on the Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) cognitive-affective-conative sequence. Bergier (1981) presented a conceptual model of leisure time choice behavior that depicts attitudes towards a leisure activity as developing before behavior and influencing it. Heberlein (1973) postulated that attitudes were the causal element and predictor of behavior, when “all else is equal.” In their study of the influence of persuasive messages on the propensity to purchase public or private recreational services, Havitz and Crompton (1990) assumed a hierarchy-of-effects paradigm: “one assumption underlying this study is that attitudes have some affect on choice behavior” (p. 72). Other conceptual support for the paradigm in the context of leisure services comes from Crandall (1979), Manfredo (1989), and Neulinger and Breit (1969).

Young and Kent (1985) offered empirical evidence that affective development occurred prior to behavior in a study of camping. Camping behavior was significantly related to intention to camp, and intention to camp was significantly related to attitude toward camping. Harris, Driver, and Bergersen (1984) based their cognitive model of leisure site choice on the hierarchy-of-effects, and their empirical test of the model showed that anglers did evaluate site attributes and formulate attitudes prior to the actual choice of the reservation site. In another study that empirically examined the role of attitudes in site choice decision, Murphy (1975) showed that a potential participant’s attitude toward a site played an important role in site selection, illustrating the affective-conative sequence of the hierarchy-of-effects paradigm.

These empirical verifications were not linked to level of involvement, nor were distinctions made between repeat and first-time participants. Nevertheless, there appears to be sufficient evidence to conclude that in high involvement situations, the cognitive-affective-conative hierarchy-of-
effects model is likely to accurately reflect the decision process of a proportion of leisure participants.

The Dissonance-Attribution and the Alternative Attribution Hierarchies

Ray et al. (1973) proposed a second high involvement paradigm, "dissonance-attribution," in which the components of the hierarchy-of-effects are reversed, so the sequence is conative-affective-cognitive (Table 1). According to Ray et al. (1973) both dissonance (Aronson, 1969) and attribution (Kelley, 1973) theorists have proposed that behavior can precede attitude development and cognitive learning. Ray et al. (1973) state that participants will follow this order when they are highly involved, but are unable to clearly differentiate between service alternatives. Consumers following either the dissonance-attribution or alternate attribution hierarchies "believe that there are significant differences among alternates but that they will not be able to distinguish among them" (Wortzel, 1982, p. 68). This inability to differentiate between alternatives may occur either because individuals are unable to distinguish salient from non-salient service attributes, or because they cannot identify those alternatives which have the attributes they believe are salient (Wortzel, 1982). This lack of relevant information forces an individual to make a choice with few beliefs and no affective or attitude component. Once the choice is made, an attitude is formed toward the experienced service "to bolster that choice" (Ray et al. 1973, p. 152). Post-purchase information from the leisure agency or through service experience provides the basis of that attitude formation through either dissonance reduction or by attribution (Ray et al., 1973).

Wortzel (1982) recognized the appropriateness of the conative-affective-cognitive sequence in dissonance situations in which a participant purchased a leisure service, formed a positive attitude toward the service, then through post-purchase information and evaluation learned about it. However, he also specified an alternative attribution sequence. This hierarchy would "be chosen when the source of the difficulty is externally generated" (Wortzel, 1982, p. 68). When a participant has difficulty, prior to purchase, identifying alternatives that possess predetermined salient attributes. Wortzel (1982) suggests the conative-cognitive-affective sequence (Table 1) is followed. For example, information on the quality of a fitness service is often difficult to obtain prior to purchase. In this case, a participant may purchase the fitness service then gain information about its salient attribute, quality, while using it. The post-purchase behavior of participants is focused on learning about the product or service. Wortzel (1982) states the post-purchase behavior of those who follow the dissonance-attribution hierarchy is defensive, while the alternate-attribution hierarchy represents empirical behavior. The alternate attribution hierarchy is so named because a participant makes judgements about the service by observing it in action (Wortzel, 1982). Based on the post-purchase information (cognition) a service attitude (affect) is formed.
Neither the dissonance-attribute hierarchy nor the alternative attribution hierarchy, with their "do" or conative step occurring prior to affect formation, has received empirical support. Both Ray et al., (1973), and Rothschild (1974, cited in Rothschild & Houston, 1977) reported that their findings were unable to support these paradigms. Strong (1974, cited in Ray et al., 1973) reported the dissonance-attribute hierarchy was supported "to some extent." Strong's study did not measure involvement levels, but alluded to high involvement by using popular products which it was believed represented high involvement.

These paradigms have received some conceptual support in the context of purchasing services. For example, Zeithaml, (1981) hypothesized that because of the "experience qualities" of services, service participants rely more on post-purchase rather than pre-purchase evaluation and information. Although Iso-Ahola (1980) based his analysis of leisure attitude formulation and its influence on leisure decision making on the hierarchy-of-effects paradigm, he did recognize that a sequence similar to the dissonance-attribute and alternate attribution paradigm may exist. Iso-Ahola stated that in a first purchase situation where the potential leisure participant lacks information about a service, and is therefore unable to form a pre-choice attitude, he or she may purchase and participate in the service first and then, based on information generated from that purchase, form an attitude toward the service. The hierarchy to which he alludes appears to be either a conative-affective or a conative-cognitive-affective sequence.

It seems likely that the dissonance attribution and alternative attribution paradigms of Ray et al. (1973) and Wortzel (1982) could be supported in cases of high involvement levels with leisure services where there is little information search prior to the purchase (Bloch & Bruce, 1984b; Furse, Punj, & Stewart, 1984; Stewart, Hickson, Ratneshwar, Pechmann, & Altmeier, 1985). This distinguishes it from the decision process used in the hierarchy-of-effects paradigm, which is based on an active information search and knowledge of choice alternatives.

**Low Involvement Hierarchy**

The first three paradigms assumed high involvement, but it has been suggested that most purchases, including leisure services, are likely to be low involvement (Bloch & Bruce, 1984a; Hupfer & Gardner, 1971; Kasarjian, 1978). In such situations, the hierarchy-of-effects, dissonance-attribute, and alternative attribution paradigms, are inappropriate. Considerable conceptual support has been given to the notion that in low involvement situations, behavior (conation) precedes attitude (affective) development. Lovelock and Weinberg (1984) differentiated between the hierarchy-of-effects and low involvement hierarchy paradigms by summarizing hierarchy-of-effects as "learn-feel-do" and low involvement as "learn-do" or "learn-do-feel." Because a potential participant does not have
any strong beliefs or perceive a strong relationship between the leisure service and self-identity or self-esteem, he or she does not develop any attitude toward the service (Assael, 1981; Lovelock & Weinberg, 1989; Ray et al., 1973; Rothschild, 1979a). Since beliefs and attitudes about the service are weak or nonexistent, the participant is unable to differentiate between alternatives so the service attributes and alternatives are neither salient nor differentiated (Ray et al., 1973; Robertson, 1976). Under these conditions of low involvement and non-differentiation, the cognitive-conative-affective sequence occurs (Table 1).

A potential participant becomes aware of a leisure service through a process of passive learning (Krugman, 1965, 1967). This “learning without involvement” (Krugman, 1965) or “indirect catching” (Lastovicka, 1979) is incidental and has little effect on an individual’s beliefs or attitude. It is stored subconsciously in memory, but there is no interpretation or comprehension of the service’s attributes. When a need for the service arises, an individual purchases it based on this subconscious passive learning. A like or dislike (attitude) toward the leisure service is formed after participation. Moscovici (1963) noted:

When attitude is changed first, the aim is to cause a change in behavior. On the other hand, if the behavior changes first, a change in attitude is involved and serves to give meaning to the already achieved behavior. Attitude may thus be viewed either as a mechanism directing behavior, or as a modality which confers on behavior its meaning (pp. 249-250).

One of the implications of this paradigm is that definitions of attitude which position it as a precursor or predisposition to behavior should be revised. The evaluative or affective component has been identified as the most distinguishing feature of attitudes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), so if the low involvement paradigm is accepted, attitude may more appropriately be conceptualized as the amount of affect for or against some service (Muncy, 1986). Such a definition of attitude would permit the sequencing of attitude formulation after behavior.

The low involvement hierarchy paradigm is widely accepted in the consumer behavior literature. Kotler (1980), for example, states that repeated marketing communications create awareness “but not attitude change” which occurs after use. The key variable is exposure. Since the learning from each communication exposure is often minimal, frequency of exposure is the key to passive learning (Lovelock & Weinberg, 1984; Robertson, 1976).

It was noted earlier, in discussion of the dissonance-attribute theory high involvement paradigm, that because of the intangible and experiential attributes of leisure services, Zeithaml (1981) suggested that participants are likely to rely more on post rather than pre-purchase evaluation. Since she did not relate this hypothesis to involvement level, it may equally apply to the low involvement hierarchy. Similarly, Iso-Ahola’s (1980) observation that in initial purchases of leisure services, attitude development often follows purchase behavior did not refer to level of involvement, so this
sequencing could be interpreted as support for the low involvement paradigm. Iso-Ahola and Weissinger (1990) included low involvement as one of their descriptors of boring leisure experiences, but again their study did not include any measurement of involvement level.

Howard (1985) concluded that “The consumer profile that emerges from these data is that the typical recreation participant is not a highly involved consumer” (p. 3). His results suggest that the purchasers of public recreation services follow the low involvement paradigm in service decision making. Howard based his conclusion on the limited amount of external information search that public recreation consumers undertook prior to the purchase of four public recreation services: (a) fitness and aerobics, (b) cultural arts, (c) outdoor recreation, and (d) non-league sports. Almost 82% of his survey respondents indicated that they did not search for information about the service prior to its purchase, and approximately 70% indicated that they did not consider any alternative suppliers for the service despite the existence of numerous private and quasi-public agency suppliers. However, the legitimacy of concluding that the low involvement hierarchy was dominant was tempered by two caveats. First, the study measured consequences of involvement, that is, the search effort, rather than antecedents of involvement such as the activity’s relationship to the purchaser’s values and ego. Second, repeat purchasers accounted for 63% of his sample and they are unlikely to engage in an active information search if they were satisfied with their previous experience.

Given the important role that involvement appears to play in leisure experiences (Backman & Crompton, 1991; Mannell, 1980; Neulinger, 1974; Tinsley & Tinsley, 1986) and that self-identity and self-expression are important in leisure (Selin & Howard, 1988), it is possible that the low involvement hierarchy may not be applicable to a large proportion of participants purchasing leisure services. Leisure activities may command a higher involvement level than other products or services (Havitz & Dimanche, 1990; McIntyre, 1989; Selin & Howard, 1988).

**Single or Integrated Hierarchy**

It has been suggested that the low involvement paradigm, cognitive-conative-affective, is really the first three stages of a four stage “single” (Finn, 1982) or “integrated” (Smith & Swinyard, 1980, 1982) hierarchy, in which the conative stage is really trial behavior. This trial behavior is used to acquire information and evaluate the opportunity, which leads to formation of an attitude. Attitude about the leisure service will lead to either commitment to the purchase and continuance, which is the fourth stage, or to immediate termination of participation in the service.

The four stage hierarchy proposed by Smith and Swinyard (1980) consisted of cognition-conation (trial)-affect-conation (commitment). To avoid confusion between the two conation stages, Finn (1982) used a different nomenclature: cognition-evaluative behavior (trial or nontrial)-affect-purchase decision (commitment).
The "trial" (Smith & Swinyard, 1980) or "evaluative behavior" (Finn, 1982) stage has been hypothesized by both Smith and Swinyard (1980, 1982) and Finn (1982) to include more than trial. They suggested that other information generating activities such as vicarious trial (demonstrations) and word-of-mouth information is included. They both believed that trial purchase would tend to be used in low involvement purchase situations and that extensive nontrial search and evaluation, such as demonstrations and word-of-mouth information, is more likely to be used in high involvement purchase situations. Hence, they hypothesized that both low and high involvement purchase situations follow the same single or integrated decision making paradigm. The only difference is in the information gathering and evaluation methods by which the affective component is formulated.

Trial behavior may lead to the formation of stronger beliefs than are formed from other sources of information, since it is processed directly into the senses (Smith & Swinyard, 1982, 1983; Young, 1981). For example, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) stated, "Direct experience with a given object results in the formation of descriptive beliefs about that object. Since the validity of one's own senses is rarely questioned, these descriptive beliefs are, at least initially, held with maximal certainty" (p. 132).

Empirical support for the single (Finn, 1982) or integrated (Smith & Swinyard, 1980) hierarchy being applicable to both high and low involvement purchase situations has been reported in the consumer behavior literature (Antil, 1988; Smith & Swinyard, 1983). In the context of leisure Iso-Ahola's (1980) argument that for there to be continued participation in a leisure activity a positive attitude towards it must occur first, appears to be consistent with the four stage single or integrated hierarchy paradigm, if the behavior is defined as the final or "committed" behavior.

Instances in which individuals appear to purchase a leisure service immediately after they become aware of it, without attitude development, may represent purchase of a trial in order to discover first hand the attributes of the unknown service. Godbey (1985) notes, "One of the ironies of leisure behavior is that individuals often do not know if they will like a new form of leisure experience until they have tried or been socialized into it" (p. 5). When confronted with a new leisure service opportunity, individuals often have no other basis except trial for forming the affective component. This perspective is consistent with the argument that behavior, including the purchase of leisure services, cannot occur without prior affective development.

One issue that acceptance of the single or integrated hierarchy paradigm highlights is the trialability (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971) of the potential service, that is, a potential participant's ability to evaluate and to form an affective component about the service through a trial. While trial may be a preferred information source (Smith & Swinyard, 1980, 1982, 1983) given affordability and accessibility, there are some leisure services which, because of their lack of tangibility, do not lend themselves to easy
trial. For example, services such as fitness or swimming require a long period of learning and experience by a participant before the service's attributes can be fully appreciated. Giving potential participants a trial visit to a swimming pool or a fitness class, will not necessarily be effective in conveying to them the true attributes of the fitness or swimming experience when the skill has been mastered.

The Multidimensionality of Involvement

The five purchase decision paradigms in the taxonomy discussed in this paper have been developed by writers and researchers who have generally assumed that involvement is a unidimensional construct. Most early conceptualizations and endeavors to measure involvement were based on this unidimensional perspective. Early involvement measurement techniques consisted of indirect measures of behavior consequences, direct single-item scales, and unidimensional multi-item scales (Dimanche, Havitz, & Howard, 1991; Zaichkowsky, 1985). However, recent research, based on the work of Laurent and Kapferer (1985) has suggested that involvement is a multidimensional, rather than a unidimensional, construct. Laurent and Kapferer (1985) postulated that involvement should be considered a profile derived from four dimensions: (a) interest in, or perceived importance of the product; (b) the hedonic or pleasure value of the product; (c) the symbolic or sign value attributed by the participant; and (d) the perceived risk associated with the product or service purchase.

Support for this multidimensional perspective of involvement is accumulating. McIntyre (1989) concluded that enduring involvement with camping behavior was best measured by three scales or dimensions: attraction, self-expression, and centrality. Although based on Laurent and Kapferer's (1985) work, McIntyre (1989) did not include risk which was their fourth dimension. In their study of linkages between recreation commitment and equipment involvement Bloch, Black, and Lichtenstein (1989) suggested that recreation equipment involvement was composed of at least two conceptually distinct and unrelated dimensions: perceived product importance and product knowledge. As a result of their extensive literature review, Havitz, and Dimanche (1990) suggested that the involvement construct is most appropriately measured by multidimensional, rather than unidimensional scales. Based on their multidimensional involvement analysis of participants in six recreation and tourism activities, Dimanche, Havitz and Howard (1991) concluded that a multidimensional profile of involvement provided a much clearer picture of a participant's relationship to the activity than did a unidimensional measure. The only dissenting voice has been that of Mittal (1989) who has argued that the four dimensions suggested by Laurent and Kapferer (1985) are the antecedents of involvement, rather than separate dimensions.

The multidimensional measurement of involvement postulated by Laurent and Kapferer (1985) has not been extensively used for two reasons:
(a) the measurement scale was not fully published, and (b) the inaccuracy of the translation of the original scale into English from French raised questions of validity (Dimanche, Havitz, and Howard 1991). The multidimensionality of the involvement construct appears unlikely to affect the form of the five decision-making paradigms discussed in this paper. Kapferer and Laurent (1985) noted that multidimensional involvement still exists on a low to high continuum: minimal (low) involvement (low scores on all dimensions) to maximum (high) involvement (high scores on all dimensions). Whether an individual is low or high in involvement, as measured by a multiple-item unidimensional scale or a multiple-item multidimensional scale may be moot. The decision-making paradigm would be defined by the ability to differentiate salient features of choice alternatives and level of involvement, whether measured by uni or multidimensional scales.

Future Research

The literature that has examined the relationship between involvement and decision-making paradigms in the context of leisure, does have conceptual and empirical shortcomings. Many of the studies that conceptually and empirically supported the occurrence of the hierarchy-of-effects paradigm in the leisure field have not linked the paradigm to the level of involvement (Harris et al., 1984; Murphy, 1975). Researchers investigating the relationship between involvement level and decision-making in leisure have sometimes assumed involvement, rather than actually measured involvement level (Harris et al., 1984; Iso-Ahola & Wessinger, 1990). In some cases where involvement was purported to be measured, it was the behavioral consequences of involvement such as time and effort spent in information search, rather than antecedents of involvement that were measured (Ajzen & Driver, 1990; Howard, 1985). Most of the reported studies have failed to consider and measure participants' ability to differentiate salient features of choice alternatives, which has been identified as the other key characteristic that distinguishes between the alternative decision making paradigms (McGuire, 1968, 1974). Some studies (Howard, 1985; Murphy, 1975; Young & Kent, 1985), have not differentiated between the purchase decision paradigms of repeat and first time leisure purchasers, which is likely to be important in determining when attitudes are formed. The sequencing of the affective component has not been empirically considered in most of the reported studies.

It is hoped that this paper will stimulate further research into the relationship between level of involvement, ability to differentiate, and the alternative decision-making paradigms in the leisure field. To this end, nine research propositions are offered which may be useful in guiding future research efforts. Some of these propositions are reflected in some of the fifteen propositions developed by Havitz and Dimanche (1990) in their generic paper relating to testing the involvement construct in recreational and tourism contexts.
Proposition 1. Purchasers of leisure services will demonstrate a range of involvement, from low to high. However, their overall levels of involvement will tend to be high compared to those reported for other products and services.

Proposition 2. The relationship between level of involvement and an individual's ability to perceive differences in salient features of choice alternatives, will be positive. A highly involved individual is likely to differentiate important attributes of choice alternatives, while those exhibiting a low level of involvement are likely to be less able to differentiate.

Proposition 3. The development of a valid and reliable standardized instrumentation is required to operationalize an individual's ability to differentiate salient features of alternate leisure service choices.

Proposition 4. Valid and reliable instrumentation, is also required to operationalize where in the decision-making paradigm attitude development occurs, both when individuals purchase a leisure service for the first time and when they make repeat purchases.

Proposition 5. Purchasers who exhibit a high level of involvement with their leisure service and a high ability to differentiate features of choice alternatives will make decisions consistent with the hierarchy-of-effects paradigm. These individuals will develop a higher extensity of attitude development prior to service purchase than those who report a low level of involvement and ability to differentiate.

Proposition 6. Those purchasers who exhibit a low ability to differentiate the salient features of choice alternatives, no matter what their level of involvement, will follow the single or integrated hierarchy paradigm. These participants will utilize the initial service trial to evaluate the service prior to confirming the purchase.

Proposition 7. The cognitive-conative-affective sequence represents the first three components of the four stage single or integrated hierarchy. The second conative stage of the low involvement hierarchy does not represent a final purchase, it represents the evaluative or trial component of the single or integrated hierarchy.

Proposition 8. High involvement purchasers of leisure services when compared to those low in involvement, will report: (a) a greater number of choice alternatives, (b) using a greater number of service attributes, (c) spending a greater amount of time and effort in the search, the evaluation and participation in the activity.

Proposition 9. Multidimensional measures of involvement will provide greater insight and understanding of the role of involvement in purchasing leisure services. However, those individuals who display high or low overall levels of involvement on multidimensional measures will follow the same decision making paradigms proposed in the paper.

Implications for Service Providers

Although there is not full agreement on the definition of involvement or on the techniques used to measure it, there is general agreement on the
importance of the involvement construct in understanding and explaining leisure experience, leisure behavior, and the decision-making process in the context of leisure services. Level of involvement, together with a decision maker's ability to differentiate, influence the way in which people make decisions about their leisure purchases.

Identification of which decision-making paradigm most participants are likely to follow when purchasing a particular leisure service would provide leisure providers with a basis for developing more successful marketing strategies and practices. Promotional programs, service development, and service delivery should differ according to participant decision-making paradigms. Involvement level and ability to differentiate could be used to segment leisure markets on the basis of decision-making paradigms. For example, a promotional campaign to facilitate purchase of a leisure service by participants who follow the single or integrated hierarchy, would differ greatly from that developed for participants following the hierarchy-of-effects paradigm. The message content, length, media, repetition, extent of personal selling, and other aspects would differ.

Another important implication is the concept of the initial service trial for those who follow the single or integrated hierarchy. It suggests that leisure service providers should view many of their "purchasers" as trialists and must therefore use the opportunity to convince them to become confirmed purchasers. Trial inducements such as guest passes and free trials become increasingly important. Once participants purchase on a trial basis, leisure providers must develop exceptional service quality techniques for building commitment and service evaluation in the first few service encounters. Such strategies would result in more effective service promotion and development, which should lead to increased initial purchases and increased participant retention.

The hierarchy-of-effects paradigm encourages leisure providers to focus only on a participant's decision process leading up to the purchase decision. The low involvement, and the single or integrated paradigms emphasize that a decision to purchase is usually the culmination of a process which may start before the actual purchase takes place, but continues long after first use of the service. This should encourage leisure providers to highlight past purchase customer satisfaction and communication, and to ensure that a high level of service quality is maintained throughout the entire length of the service.

References


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