

3.3: Low-Involvement vs. High-Involvement Decisions

How Involved Are You?



You're at the grocery store, looking at the dog food selection. How long does it take you to choose a product, buy it, and get out the door?

Change of scene.

You're on a car sales lot, looking at the selection of vehicles for sale. How long does it take you to choose a product, buy it, and drive off the lot?

For most people these scenarios are worlds apart in terms of the time, effort, emotional, and psychological work it takes to make a purchasing decision.

When a purchasing decision involves a low-cost item that is frequently bought—such as bread or toothpaste—the buying process is typically quick and routinized. Buying a new car is quite different. The extent to which a decision is considered complex or simple depends on the following:

- Whether the decision is novel or routine
- The extent of the customers' involvement with the decision

High-involvement decisions are those that are important to the buyer. These decisions are closely tied to the consumer's ego and self-image. They also involve some risk to the consumer. This may include financial risk (highly priced items), social risk (products that are important to the peer group), or psychological risk (the wrong decision may cause the consumer some concern and anxiety). In making these decisions, consumers generally feel it is worth the time and energy needed to do research and consider solution alternatives carefully. The full, six-stage, complex process of consumer decision making is more likely to happen with high-involvement product purchases. In these cases, a buyer gathers extensive information from multiple sources, evaluates many alternatives, and invests substantial effort in making the best decision.

Low-involvement decisions are more straightforward, require little risk, are repetitive, and often lead to a habit. In effect, these purchases are not very important to the consumer. Financial, social, and psychological risks are not nearly as great. In these cases, it may not be worth the consumer's time and effort to search for exhaustive information about different brands or to consider a wide range of alternatives. A low-involvement purchase usually involves an abridged decision-making process. In these situations, the buyer typically does little if any information gathering, and any evaluation of alternatives is relatively simple and straightforward. Consumers are diligent enough to get a product they want, but they generally spend no more time or effort than is needed.

There are general patterns about what constitutes a high-involvement decision (buying cars, homes, engagement rings, pets, computers, etc.) versus a low-involvement decision (buying bread, chewing gum, toothpaste, dishwasher detergent, trash bags, etc.). However, the real determinant is the individual consumer and how involved they choose to be in solving the problem or need they have identified.

Marketing Considerations About Consumer Involvement

Let's imagine another couple of scenarios.



Situation 1: You have just moved in with roommates for the first time. Excitement about your new independence temporarily dims when you scour the kitchen and find just three forks, four spoons, and zero table knives. On your way to Walmart, you stop off at Goodwill, and you are delighted to pay less than \$4 for an unmatched service for eight.

Situation 2: You are a soon-to-be bride. You have spent days looking through magazines, browsing online, and visiting shops to find the perfect silverware to match the dishes on your wedding registry. It gives you pause, though, when you learn that your dream flatware costs \$98 per place setting. Still, you rationalize that you only get married once—or at least that’s your plan.

In each of these situations, the consumer is making a purchasing decision about the same product: silverware. But the level of involvement in each situation is very different. The new roommate wants to spend as little time and money as possible to get a product that will get the job done. The soon-to-be-bride is pinning her future happiness on selecting the right pattern. Who is more involved?

Now suppose you are a marketer trying to promote the flatware designs your company makes. Which of these consumers will pay any attention to the full-page ads you have placed in seven popular women’s magazines? Which of these consumers will click on the paid search listing Google placed in their search results for new silverware patterns? Which one is most likely to come to a store to see the beautiful sheen of your new product line and feel its perfectly balanced weight with her fingertips?

As a marketer you should recognize high-involvement versus low-involvement consumers of your products and strategize accordingly. It is entirely possible for your target segments to include a mix of both. When you recognize the differences in how they make decisions, you can create a marketing mix designed to impact each type of consumer. For the customer who wants little involvement, your marketing mix can simplify their buying process. For the consumer who is highly involved, you can provide the information and validation they seek.

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