

**CLEARING THE CONCEPTUAL AND MEASUREMENT CONFUSION  
BETWEEN ENDURING PRODUCT INVOLVEMENT AND PRODUCT  
IMPORTANCE: A CRITICAL REVIEW AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Consumers' arousal and concern in the product is a reflection of its perceived self expressive and hedonic values, which are the main components of enduring product involvement. Many previous studies have confirmed the existence of these two components of enduring involvement and pointed out that most of the other components that were mentioned in past studies were either confused with involvement antecedents and behavioural outcomes, or were implied and included in the hedonic and self expressive dimensions of enduring involvement. Other misconceptions of the components of enduring involvement included the consideration of some situational and purchase decision factors as components of enduring involvement, as well as the adoption of the product importance concept as an equivalent or a component of enduring product involvement. The present study provides the theoretical and empirical evidences to prove that product importance is an outcome, rather than a component, of enduring product involvement.*

**KEYWORDS:** Enduring Involvement, Product Importance, Discriminant Validity, Measurement Scale, Consumer Behavior, Hedonic Consumption, Self-Expression.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The concept of involvement refers to the perception of personal relevance for an object, activity, or event, to the individual in terms of her/his basic values, goals, and self-concept (Bloch & Richins 1983, Blackwell, et al. 2001). Enduring product involvement is regarded as a dynamic construct that emerged due to socialization and symbolic influences endemic to the product class (Bloch, et al. 2009). Another common definition of enduring involvement refers to consumer's enduring perceptions of the importance of the product category based on the consumer's inherent needs, values, and interests (Mittal, 1995; Zaichkowsky, 1985). The primary problem in defining the involvement construct, according to Laaksonen (1994) was that numerous antecedents and consequences of involvement have been confused with involvement itself.

Researchers' understanding of the involvement construct was complicated by many theoretical and operational problems. For example, an early review by Costley (1988) indicated that previous research results have differed according to the definition of involvement used by researchers. The comparison of involvement effect sizes (among previous studies), on the dependent variables that were investigated, indicated that the effect of involvement was not consistent across the studies. Costley (1988) explained that this result was not surprising given the variety of conceptualizations of the involvement construct. Some of these conceptualizations of the previous involvement constructs were also reviewed by Higie & Feick (1989), who noticed that product interest and product importance along with several behavioural outcomes of

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involvement, were frequently referred to as “measuring dimensions” of involvement scales in some previous studies. Higie & Feick (1989) argued that using behavioural outcomes to measure enduring involvement is largely questionable.

Andrews et al (1990) also criticized the confusion about measuring the involvement construct in the literature and questioned the uni-dimensionality of some general product involvement measures (as used by Zaichkowsky 1985, 1987), and noticed that some involvement antecedents (e.g., risk) or consequences (e.g., consumption behaviour) were measured as product involvement constructs. In line with Higie & Feick (1989) earlier view, Andrews et al (1990) further confirmed the inappropriateness of inferring the level of involvement by measuring involvement antecedents or consequences. Rather, they stressed that measures tapping the state of involvement should be used. This opinion was later confirmed by O’Cass (1996) who also noticed that most of the involvement researchers inferred the concept of involvement from its proposed antecedents or consequences with no direct measure of the construct of involvement itself.

### **Behavioural Consequences of Product Involvement**

Tigert, et al (1976) and Bloch (1981) assumed that people with enduring product involvement engage in ongoing product-related information search and transmission because of their ongoing interest and concern for the product or activity. Turnbull & Meenaghan (1980) suggested that opinion and advice giving occur when the continuous involvement with the product is put into the service of self-affirmation by the consumer, to reassure herself in front of significant others and to confirm her assessment of the product or service.

Goldsmith (1996) explained that when consumers are aroused by a product category in which they are interested, they pay more attention to information about that category, process the information more deeply, and have better memory of the information. Therefore, he agreed with Laaksonen (1994) that the "responses" in the response-based involvement approach, are the consequences of involvement rather than involvement itself. In Dholakia's (1998) study, enduring involvement caused higher levels of information seeking and opinion-leadership, and higher probability of continuous product-related information reception and acquisition. The results also indicated that the information-seeking behaviour of situationally involved consumers who are not enduringly involved is likely to temporarily imitate enduringly involved consumers. This later finding, in particular, came in line with an earlier explanation by Richins & Bloch (1986) that enduring and situational involvement could be distinguished only by the temporal duration because their behavioural outcomes are the same. However, Dholakia's (1998) results also indicated that while the level of information-search for such situationally involved consumers is high, the reasons underlying the search might be different. Situationally involved consumers may use information-search as a risk-reduction strategy while enduringly- involved consumers may obtain information for hedonic or recreational purposes or to develop expertise.

### **Components of Product Involvement**

Lastovicka & Gardner (1979) identified familiarity, commitment, and importance as the three factors of involvement. The self-expressive component of involvement was supported by Bloch's (1982) research which concluded that the magnitude of enduring

involvement is positively related to the extent to which an individual perceives such involvement as a vehicle for self-expression or enhancement. Bloch (1982) argued that, consumers use enduring involvement as a vehicle for self-expression. He emphasized that being highly involved with a product that carries a symbolic meaning provides a way to project and enhance parts of one's self-image.

Park & Young (1983) identified two primary components underlying the involvement construct; the utilitarian component (functional attributes) and the value expressive component (aesthetics and expression of self-image). Zaichkowsky (1985) developed the personal involvement inventory (PII) scale, which was based on the uni-dimensional conceptualization that involvement is an index of product/product importance that reflects its personal relevance. Contrary to the previous view, the empirical identification of the hedonic component and the symbolic (or the self-expressive) component of enduring product involvement was one of the major contributions of Mittal & Lee (1989) research which was in line with Higie & Feick (1989) view that emphasized the existence of both the self-expressive and hedonic components of enduring involvement.

Higie & Feick (1989) also discussed McQuarrie & Munson (1987) Revised Personal Involvement Inventory (RPII). Higie & Feick (1989) argued that the factor analysis reported by McQuarrie & Munson, which resulted in a three-factor solution (where the pleasure and self-expressive items loaded on one single factor) re-emphasizes the importance of distinguishing enduring involvement as a unique construct that is conceptually different from product importance and situational risk factors. Building on this view, Higie & Feick (1989) criticised Bloch, et al (1986) earlier study which measured enduring involvement using "product interest," "time spent thinking about product" and "average importance of the product to the performance of social and career roles".

Higie & Feick (1989) argued that product interest is related to the hedonic component of enduring involvement, whereas the importance of the product performance in social and career role is related to the self-image component of enduring involvement. Time spent thinking about the product, however, is a behavioural outcome, and the appropriateness of using behavioural outcomes to measure enduring involvement is questionable according to Higie & Feick (1989), who explained that behaviours such as time spent thinking or searching for information, can occur for reasons other than enduring involvement, like individual concerns with a pending or previous purchase. In sum, Higie & Feick (1989) concluded that previous studies of the enduring involvement construct fell short of adequately measuring its original motivating factors; the self-expressive and the hedonic components which are the only two components of enduring involvement.

### **Enduring Product Involvement and Product Importance**

Bloch & Richins (1983) were the first to notice the confusion between product importance and product involvement, when they emphasized that perceived product importance and involvement refer to conceptually distinct phenomena, because importance is a perceptual judgment, and involvement is a feeling. Antil (1984) used the term product importance in a non-functional meaning to refer to enduring product involvement when he argued that the degree of involvement is equal to the level of

perceived personal importance, which is determined by the psychological satisfaction the consumer gains from interacting with the product. Such perspective of product importance is obviously not related to product functionality or performance; alternatively, it refers exactly to the concept of enduring product involvement. Therefore, there is no need to use the term product importance in the first place.

In Zaichkowsky's (1987) study, the FCB model for product classification was used as a framework for testing the use of the PII (Zaichkowsky, 1985). The consistent misclassification, according to Zaichkowsky (1987), was in the product category of personal computers. Personal computers were perceived as high involvement products, and while they were expected to have a great thinking or cognitive component, they apparently were seen to have a great emotional or affective component by respondents. As a possible explanation Zaichkowsky (1987) suggested that the average student respondent viewed personal computers as an exciting, fascinating product category. However, Zaichkowsky (1987) did not provide an explanation why they might do so. The only viable explanation for Zaichkowsky (1987) finding might be reached through the application of Higie & Feick (1989) conception of involvement, instead of Zaichkowsky's (1987) product importance perception of involvement. Personal computers have high hedonic and self expressive value and that is why they were perceived as high involvement products with a great affective component due to their self expressive and hedonic values which are purely emotional. The consistency of such misclassification, as reported by Zaichkowsky (1987), supports this explanation. Consumers see the product to be important because they are involved in it and not vice versa. Therefore, product importance is an outcome of product involvement and not an antecedent or even a component of it. Zaichkowsky's (1987) usage of product importance as an index of involvement led her to overpass the emotional component of personal computers involvement, and therefore consider such finding as misclassification with no convincing explanation.

In line with this opinion, Higie & Feick (1989) explained that product importance cannot be used in a measure of enduring involvement since it confounds the importance concept which is based on functional necessity. Higie & Feick (1989) argued that product interest is related to the hedonic component of enduring involvement, and that the importance of product performance in social and career role is related to the self-image component of enduring involvement. Indeed, if McQuire & Munson's (1992) interest component items (exciting/unexciting, dull/neat, boring/interesting, fun/not fun, appealing/unappealing) were compared with Higie & Feick's (1989) hedonic component items (interesting, fun, fascinating, exciting, and appealing), the conclusion would be clear that the interest component is already included in the hedonic component of product involvement.

Higie & Feick (1989) discussed the Personal Involvement Inventory (PII) generated by Zaichkowsky (1985), which taps attitude toward the product, product importance, and a hedonic component. They argued that because of the inclusion of the first two factors and the exclusion of the self-expression factor the PII should not be used to measure enduring involvement, but the hedonic items in PII, however, are useful in measuring one component of enduring involvement. Higie & Feick (1989) re-emphasized the need to develop and refine a reliable scale to measure the enduring involvement construct which is distinct from the product importance and risk factors.

Divine & Page (1994) argued that enduring involvement reflects an intrinsic interest in a product which motivates people to perform product related tasks because such activities are self-rewarding. Building on this logic, Divine, & Page (1994) emphasized that product importance is not at all consistent with enduring product involvement since there are many products that consumers consider important but not intrinsically interesting. Furthermore, the importance construct does not address the affective evaluative aspects typically associated with the enduring involvement construct.

In line with Antil's (1984) earlier work, Goldsmith (1996) explained that consumers describe products as important because they perceive them to be instrumental in achieving desired goals. Many products are thus important to consumers, but not all important products are also involving simply because they do not elicit excitement or interest in consumers. They explained that although enduringly involved consumers are motivated by their emotions, similar emotional responses might be triggered by other causes which operate in addition to involvement, but they should not be confused with involvement itself.

Dholakia (1998) further supported Antil's (1984) opinion, when he viewed enduring product involvement as a stable perception of importance resulting from the product's relatedness to the self-concept and identity. Dholakia (1998) explained that a product is perceived as causing enduring involvement when importance perceptions are based on the product's ability to intrinsically satisfy consumers' enduring needs, rather than on specific purchase or usage goals.

In sum, product importance was viewed from three different approaches. The first approach viewed product importance as a component of enduring product involvement (Zaichkowsky 1985, 1987; McQuarrie & Munson 1992). The second approach viewed product importance as an equivalent to the level of personal relevance of products in the enduring product involvement construct (Antil 1984; Goldsmith 1996; Dholakia 1998). However, according to this view there is no real distinction between both constructs because they refer to the same phenomenon therefore, there is no practical need to use the term product importance to refer to an existing concept anyway. The third approach viewed product importance as a completely distinct and different concept from enduring product importance (Bloch & Richins 1983; Higie & Feick 1989; Divine & Page 1994). According to this view product importance is not consistent with the enduring product involvement construct and it does not address the affective component of enduring product involvement therefore, product importance is not a component of, nor an equivalent to, the enduring product involvement construct. In fact, according to this approach, product importance is seen as an outcome of enduring product involvement. Therefore, the current study is adopting the following hypotheses:  
H1: Consumer's product importance is not a component of her/his enduring product involvement.

H2: Consumer's enduring product involvement has a positive direct effect on her/his product importance construct.

In order to investigate Higie & Feick's (1989) proposition that product importance is related to both hedonic and self-image components of enduring involvement, the current study aims to test the following hypothesis:

H3: The hedonic and self expressive components of consumer's enduring product involvement have a single and a simultaneous positive direct effect on her/his product importance construct.

### Research Methodology

This study has chosen cars as a general product category to investigate. In line with Bloch's (1982) product selection recommendations for involvement research, cars were chosen because consumers typically are very familiar with them and because it is assumed that respondents would exhibit a relatively wide range of enduring involvement levels with respect to this product.

The sampling frame for this study consisted of university students in a private university in Kuwait. A convenient sample of 650 was drawn and a total of 516 usable questionnaires were retrieved in data collection which is considered to be an appropriate sample size according to Hair et al (1998) recommendations of 100 observations or larger and a minimum of 20 cases for each variable to factor analyze a sample.

### The Enduring Product Involvement Scale

This study defines enduring product involvement as consumer's perceived level of continues self relevance of the product which is reflected by the product's hedonic and self expressive perceived value to the consumer. Higie and Feick (1989) developed the adopted scale of the study which included ten items or questions. The first five items constituted the hedonic factor, while the second five items constituted the self-expressive factor, of the enduring involvement scale. Higie and Feick (1989) have demonstrated the discriminant and predictive validity of their enduring involvement scale and its components. They have also reported a reliability Cronbach's alpha index of 0.89 for their enduring involvement scale items. This scale was later considered to be the most reflective of the enduring involvement construct according to Jain and Srinivasan (1990) who assessed all previous involvement scales by replicating them and concluded that Higie and Feick's (1989) enduring involvement scale accounted for the largest explained variance (77%) among all previous measuring scales. The first five items (the hedonic factor) of the enduring product involvement scale which was adopted from Higie & Feick (1989) is a semantic differential 5 point scale. Respondents were instructed to circle the corresponding number for each item that best describes their opinion about cars (for example; if they think that cars are ... Extremely interesting = 5 or Not at all interesting = 1) as shown in Table 1.

<i>I think that cars are...</i>	<i>Extremely</i> .....				<i>Not</i>
	<i>at all</i>				
1. Interesting	5	4	3	2	1
2. Fun	5	4	3	2	1
3. Fascinating	5	4	3	2	1
4. Exciting	5	4	3	2	1
5. Appealing	5	4	3	2	1

**Table 1 The hedonic factor items of the enduring product involvement scale.**

The second five items (the self expressive factor) of the enduring product involvement scale which was adopted from Higie & Feick (1989) is an interval Likert type 5 point

scale. Respondents were instructed to indicate their opinion about each statements by marking (X or ✓) in the choice that corresponds to their level of agreement, or disagreement, with each of the statements shown in Table 2.

<i>I think that my car...</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
1. Portrays an image of me to others.	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
2. Is part of my self-image.	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
3. Tells others about me.	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
4. Helps others to judge me.	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
5. Tells me about a person.	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

**Table 2 The self expressive factor items of the enduring product involvement scale**

### The Product Importance Scale

The present study defines product importance as the level to which the product is perceived to be important to the consumer. The adopted scale of the study included five items or questions that were derived from McQuarrie & Munson’s (1992) revised product involvement inventory (RPII) measure. The two sub-scales of product importance and product interest measures constituted the (RPII) scale. The individual reliability index of the product importance sub-scale was not reported by the researchers. However, the overall Alpha indexes that were computed over the nine products included in their study ranged from 0.80 to 0.95 and the dimensionality of the importance sub-scale items were confirmed through exploratory factor analyses with varimax rotation. Discriminant validity of the importance sub-scale were demonstrated through significant correlation with the attitude measure (R = 0.74). Criterion validity for the (RPII) as a whole, was demonstrated through the prediction of ten outcomes of involvement.

The product importance measure which was adopted from McQuarrie & Munson (1992) included five items in a semantic differential 5 point scale. Respondents were instructed to circle the corresponding number for each item that best describes their opinion about cars (For example; if they think that **cars** are certainly important = ⑤...or certainly unimportant = ①) as shown in Table 3.

I think that cars...				
➤ <i>Are Important</i> .....				<i>Unimportant</i>
5	4	3	2	1
➤ <i>Are Relevant</i> .....				<i>Irrelevant</i>
5	4	3	2	1
➤ <i>Mean a lot to me</i> .....				<i>Mean nothing to me</i>
5	4	3	2	1

➤ <i>Matter to me</i> ..... <i>Don't matter to me</i>					
5	4	3	2	1	
➤ <i>Of concern to me</i> ..... <i>Of no concern to me</i>					
5	4	3	2	1	

**Table 3 The product importance scale items.**

### Data Analysis

The first hypothesis of this research states that consumer's product importance is not a component of her/his enduring product involvement. In order to prove this hypothesis, discriminant validity between both constructs should be established to confirm that product importance and enduring product involvement are completely distinct and different constructs. Discriminant validity between the two constructs is established in two different ways. Firstly, the ten items of enduring product involvement scale and the five items of product importance scale are submitted all together to varimax rotated factor analysis. Exploratory factor analysis produced a three factor solution explaining 75.8% of the variances, as Table 4 indicate.

Items	1	2	3
HED1			.832
HED2			.843
HED3			.725
HED4			.787
HED5			.722
SELF1		.764	
SELF2		.762	
SELF3		.835	
SELF4		.852	
SELF5		.790	
IMPRT1	.761		
IMPRT2	.728		
IMPRT3	.821		
IMPRT4	.841		
IMPRT5	.819		

**Table 4 Factor analysis of the enduring product involvement and product importance items**

The results confirmed the difference between product importance and enduring product involvement constructs. All the items related to the self-expressive component of enduring product involvement highly loaded on the second factor and all the items related to the hedonic component of enduring product involvement highly loaded on the third factor, while all product importance items highly loaded on the first factor. Therefore, it is concluded that none of the components of enduring product involvement is included in, or can be measured by, any of the constituents of the product importance construct, and vice versa.



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A second and stronger test of discriminant validity between the product importance and enduring product involvement constructs, as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Chaudhuri (2000) is that the average variance extracted for each construct should be higher than the squared correlation between both constructs. The results indicate that the variance of the product importance construct is .777 and the variance for the enduring product involvement construct is .586 and the squared correlation between both constructs is .487 which proves that both constructs are theoretically and empirically different and distinct from each other. Therefore,  $H_1$  which states that consumer's product importance is not a component of her/his enduring product involvement is accepted.

The second hypothesis of this research states that consumer's enduring product involvement has a positive effect on her/his product importance construct. Regression analysis revealed that enduring product involvement had a positive effect on product importance, with positive coefficients ( $\beta = .698$  and  $b = 0.803$   $P = .000$ ) explaining about 49% (adjusted  $R^2 = .487$ ) of the product importance variance. The pure contribution of enduring product involvement to predict product importance was assessed through the partial correlation coefficient which was significant ( $R_P = .384$   $P = .000$ ) and indicated a positive pure direct effect of enduring product involvement on product importance. Therefore,  $H_2$  which states that consumer's enduring product involvement has a positive effect on her/his product importance construct is accepted.

The third hypothesis of this study states that both the hedonic and self expressive components of consumer's enduring product involvement have a single and a simultaneous positive direct effect on her/his product importance construct. Regression analysis revealed that the self expressive dimension of enduring product involvement, when entered alone into a simple regression equation, had a positive effect on product importance, with positive coefficients ( $\beta = .622$  and  $b = .659$ ,  $P = .000$ ) explaining about 39% (adjusted  $R^2 = .387$ ) of the product importance variance.

Similarly, when the hedonic dimension of enduring product involvement, was entered alone into a simple regression equation, it had a positive effect on product importance, with positive coefficients ( $\beta = .614$  and  $b = .609$ ,  $P = .000$ ) explaining about 38% (adjusted  $R^2 = .377$ ) of the product importance variance. Multiple regression analysis revealed the simultaneous positive effect of both dimensions of enduring product involvement on product importance. Together, both independent variables explained about 49% (adjusted  $R^2 = .488$ ) of the product importance variance, as table 5 indicates.

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient B	Standardized Coefficient Beta	Sig.
IMPORTANCE	SELF	.428	.404	.000
	HED	.382	.385	.000

**Table 5 Regression analysis for the effects of enduring product involvement components on product importance.**

Multicollinearity between the independent variables was assessed through tolerance and VIF values. Tolerance value equalled 0.678 and VIF value equalled 1.474 which

confirmed the non-existence of multicollinearity between the independent variables. The pure contribution of each independent variable to predict product importance was assessed through partial correlation. The partial correlation coefficient between the self expressive dimension of enduring product involvement and product importance was positive and significant ( $R_p = .242$   $P = .000$ ), and it was also positive and significant ( $R_p = .281$   $P = .000$ ) between the hedonic dimension of enduring product involvement and product importance. The results of data analysis confirm that both dimensions of enduring product involvement have pure direct (single and simultaneous) effect on product importance. Therefore, the third hypothesis is acceptable.

### **Research Conclusion**

The present study has critically reviewed previous research papers on enduring involvement and identified many previous studies that confused involvement components with its behavioural outcomes. The outcomes of involvement that were considered by some researchers as components included; importance (Rothschild & Ray 1974; Lastovicka & Gardner 1979; Parameswaran & Spinelli 1984; Zaichkowsky 1985; Jensen, et al 1989; and Jain & Srinivasan 1990), commitment (Rothschild & Ray 1974; Lastovicka & Gardner 1979; and Jensen, et al 1989), innovativeness (Tigert, et al 1976), interpersonal communications (Tigert, et al 1976; Bloch 1981), knowledgeability and familiarity (Tigert, et al 1976; Lastovicka & Gardner 1979; Parameswaran & Spinelli 1984; and Jensen, et al 1989), awareness (Tigert, et al 1976), reaction to change (Tigert, et al 1976), attachment (Bloch 1981), product preference (Jensen, et al 1989) and attitude (O'Cass 1996).

The current study provided theoretical explanation that is supported by empirical evidences to explain the relationship between enduring product involvement and product importance and to clear the measurement and conceptual confusion that existed between them in previous research. The present study has proved that product importance and product enduring involvement are two distinct and different concepts; therefore, product importance is not a component of enduring product involvement. This conclusion is in line with Bloch & Richins (1983) opinion that perceived product importance and involvement refer to conceptually distinct phenomena, and it is also in line with Higie and Feick (1989) statement that importance cannot be used as a measure of enduring involvement since it confounds the importance concept which is based on functional necessity. The results also support, Divine & Page (1994) point of view that importance construct does not address the affective evaluative aspects typically associated with the enduring involvement construct. Such conclusions, however, does not support other researchers' (Rothschild & Ray 1974; Lastovicka & Gardner 1979; Parameswaran & Spinelli 1984; and Jensen, et al 1989) argument that the importance construct is a component of involvement. The present study also proved that product importance is an outcome of enduring product involvement which supports Goldsmith (1996) explanation that all product categories that consumers find involving, are important to these consumers precisely because they find these product categories interesting and exciting. The results of this study also refute Zaichkowsky's (1985) uni-dimensional conceptualization of involvement as an index of importance. Data analysis also revealed that both components of enduring product involvement, the hedonic and self-expressive, have simultaneous positive direct effects on product importance which supports Higie & Feick's (1989) opinion that both dimensions of enduring involvement

produce product importance because of consumers' feelings of product interest and the social and career roles related to the product.

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