



# The relationships between four concepts (involvement, commitment, loyalty, and habit) and consistency in behavior across leisure and tourism



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 23 September 2014

Accepted 12 November 2014

### Keywords:

Involvement

Commitment

Habit

Loyalty

Leisure-tourism consistency

## ABSTRACT

Lack of clarity in conceptualizing involvement, commitment, habit, and loyalty has led to confusion in their applications in the study of leisure and tourism. This paper traces their classical meanings and analyzes their theoretical and conceptual similarity and dissimilarity. Relationships among the concepts were also examined in the context of understanding consistency in patterns of leisure and tourist behavior. Data were collected online using convenience sampling, yielding a usable sample of  $N = 706$ . Multiple regression analyses demonstrate that involvement, commitment, habit, and loyalty have different relationships with consistency (i.e., participating in a favored leisure pursuit in tourism contexts). Since the four concepts were found to have their own attributes and psychological processes, it is suggested that they should not be used interchangeably, and in practice, different marketing strategies should be adopted, even when applied to those who show consistency in their leisure and tourism activities and behaviors.

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## 1. Introduction

Involvement, commitment, habit, and loyalty are considered to be important concepts in understanding consistency in the leisure and tourism behaviors of individuals. However, over the years, leisure and tourism researchers have tended to use these concepts interchangeably without adequately identifying their underlying attributes. For example, from the earliest applications of these concepts, some scholars have conceptualized involvement and commitment as having the same meaning (Bryan, 1979; Wellman, Roggenbuck, & Smith, 1982) and others have used commitment and loyalty (Alexandris, Kouthouris, Funk, & Tziouma, 2013; Pritchard, Howard, & Havitz, 1992; Quester & Lim, 2003) or habit and loyalty (Assael, 1998) as synonyms. Moreover, some researchers in operationalizing involvement, commitment, habit, and loyalty have used the same items to measure each construct. For example, the items developed by McIntyre (1989) and Siegenthaler and Lam (1992) to measure involvement were used to measure commitment by Kim, Scott, and Crompton (1997). Similarly, although Gahwiler and Havitz (1998) and Iwasaki and Havitz (2004) regarded the centrality of a leisure activity in an individual's life as a component of involvement, Kim et al. (1997) viewed centrality as a component of commitment. Several researchers have also included position involvement (i.e., a judgmental process evaluating the

extent to which a specific brand is consistent with internal values and self-images) as a component of commitment (Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004; Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004; Pritchard, Havitz, & Howard, 1999). However, these concepts have different meanings, and their own unique attributes based on different theories, even though all these have been used to explain consistency in leisure behavioral patterns.

Recently, there has been a growing realization about the connection between leisure and tourism activities as individuals choose to take part in their favorite leisure pursuits while on vacation (Carr, 2002; Smith, Pitts, & Litvin, 2012). Indeed, Cohen and Cohen (2012) suggest that as part of the “postmodern turn” in tourism studies, there has been a blurring of the distinctions between life domains and a growing focus on understanding tourist behavior as part of individuals' overall lifestyles. Along this line of thinking, while not necessary from a postmodernist perspective, several researchers have proposed that individuals' values, attitudes, and deep-rooted habits in leisure-based contexts (home-based) affect their choice of tourism behaviors (away from home), which in turn encourages them to develop behavioral consistency as they choose to participate in their preferred leisure activities in tourism contexts (Brey & Lehto, 2007; Carr, 2002; Currie, 1997; Ryan & Robertson, 1997). While Brey and Lehto (2007) found that there was greater consistency in leisure and tourism contexts involving physical activity, Robinson and Gammon (2004) suggested an added consideration, that taking part in preferred leisure activities in tourism contexts could be either the primary purpose of a trip or the non-primary purpose. Moreover, in a study examining the connection between leisure and tourism choices within a paddling context,

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Chang and Gibson (2011) not only confirmed that the primary and non-primary purpose of a trip was important, but they also found that enduring involvement was influential in these decisions, with the highly involved more likely to exhibit behavioral consistency across leisure and tourism contexts. Therefore, the purpose of this study was first to trace the origin, application, and relationships of involvement, commitment, habit, and loyalty with a review and analysis of the classic literature and recognition of the contemporary applications and second to investigate empirically the conceptual relationships among them and their relevance in understanding consistency between leisure and tourism behaviors.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Involvement

Involvement is a belief structure in which ego value-oriented perception encourages intense attitudes, giving rise to the term ego-involvement. Sherif and Cantril (1947) described ego-involvement as a structure in which individuals affirm their self-value from the objects through which they project their self-concept. Researchers in marketing and leisure studies have used the concept of involvement in many ways including the prediction of purchasing behaviors (Bloch, 1981) and understanding different participation patterns in specific leisure activities (e.g., Cheng & Tsaur, 2012; Havitz & Dimanche, 1990; Kyle et al., 2004; Lu & Schuett, 2014). In particular, Bloch and Bruce (1984) introduced the concept of enduring involvement to describe the attachment to an activity or object individuals develop from long-term participation. Enduring involvement has been used as an important variable in examining a wide range of leisure activities. Refining enduring involvement, McIntyre (1989) described it as the degree to which a leisure activity is central to a person's life. Drawing upon involvement scales developed by Arora (1982), Bloch and Bruce (1984), and Laurent and Kapferer (1985) in consumer research, McIntyre developed a leisure involvement scale measuring three dimensions: attraction, centrality, and self-expression but not risk, which he argued was part of situational involvement and as such, not associated with leisure activities.

In contrast to much of the prevailing focus on enduring involvement in recreational activities at this time (e.g., Bryan, 1979; McIntyre, 1989; Schreyer & Beaulieu, 1986), Havitz and Dimanche (1990) focused on the situational aspects of involvement such as risk probability and consequences related to purchase and promotional stimuli (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). Although involvement associated with purchasing goods may include risks, the utility of risk in leisure and tourism contexts may depend on the type of activity and the associated time and monetary considerations. Laurent and Kapferer's (1985) Consumer Involvement Scale (including the risk domain) has been applied to the study of various leisure activities (e.g., Havitz, Dimanche, & Howard, 1993; Havitz, Green, & McCarville, 1993), risk was not found to be that relevant to understanding involvement in leisure contexts. For example, Madrigal, Havitz, and Howard (1992) included the risk domain in their study of involvement in relation to family vacations. The authors worked with the hypothesis that family vacations could be construed as a high-involvement purchase decision; however, the findings showed no support for this supposition. Indeed, the risk domain was not positively associated with any of the other involvement domains and ultimately Madrigal et al., excluded it from further analysis.

More recently, there has been a resurgence in attention on enduring involvement as researchers have tended to regard identity and social components as more prominent features of involvement (Havitz, Kaczynski, & Mannell, 2013; Jun et al., 2012; Kyle, Absher, Norman, Hammitt, & Jodice, 2007; Kyle & Chick, 2002). In particular, social identity and self-identity have been deemed important. In the social identity process, individuals' judgment of who they are is anchored in the value placed on them by the social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Thoits & Virshup, 1997), whereas in the self-identity process,

individuals' judgment of who they are is based on whether their current and future attitudes and behaviors are consistent with their past attitudes and behaviors (Heider, 1958).

### 2.2. Commitment

In terms of the relationship between involvement and commitment, Cooper and Duncan (1971) originally found that a belief based on ego-value is not a component of commitment; however, despite this, various researchers have identified self-value beliefs with commitment (e.g., Crosby & Taylor, 1983; Gahwiler & Havitz, 1998; Zaichkowsky, 1985; Zaltman & Wallendorf, 1983). In the commitment process, attitudes emerging from action itself are regarded as important in developing consistent behavior (Buchanan, 1985; Gerard, 1968). More specifically, commitment is a process whereby individuals bond with certain behaviors to reduce their internal dissonance which in turn may give rise to costs or regrets. Originally, the concept of commitment stemmed from cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) in which a person strives to decrease dissonant states that occur when he/she holds two or more inconsistent thoughts. Later, using the concept of commitment as a parameter to study dissonance (Brehm & Cohen, 1962), Kiesler and Sakumura (1966) and Kiesler (1968) defined commitment as a binding of individuals to behavioral acts. The authors explained commitment as a process whereby individuals seek to make their current attitudes consistent with their past behavior, or individuals rationalize their behavior by developing relevant attitudes to support their behavior. For example, in situations where individuals are faced with working toward a goal they perceive as unattractive, as they go through the process, they may gradually change their minds and view the goal more positively and begin to value it (Albarracin, Johnson, & Zanna, 2005).

Alternatively, another component of commitment, that of perceived irrevocability, may come into play (Gourville & Soman, 2001). Perceived irrevocability describes a situation whereby individuals feel they have invested time or money and they continue to participate in an activity or situation because they do not want to waste their effort, time, or money. Thus, some psychologists have found that commitment is related to post-decision regret in a cost-reward system rather than attitudinal conviction or a motivational desire to make a decision (Aronson, 1968; Gerard, 1968). However, in contrast to the original psychological assumptions associated with commitment, consumer behavior researchers have tended to use commitment to mean attitudinal conviction (Hennig-Thurau & Klee, 1997), preference (Crosby & Taylor, 1983), loyalty (Beatty & Kahle, 1988), or even involvement (Robertson, 1976).

In the field of leisure studies, taking into account conceptual definitions and theories from both sociology (e.g., Becker, 1960) and psychology (e.g., Kiesler, 1968), Buchanan (1985) defined commitment as a binding of individuals to a specific leisure behavior producing emotional involvement and relevant roles and behaviors. Buchanan did not clearly explain what he meant by emotional involvement and why it is an important component of commitment; however, his notion that commitment should not be considered as a motivational attribute is critical to understanding it. The bottom-line in distinguishing commitment from other concepts is that behavioral action gives rise to consistent attitudes, thereby reducing dissonance. The perceived cost, perceived irrevocability, expected regret if stopped, and other relevant activities developed from a leisure activity should be attributed to commitment.

### 2.3. Loyalty

Loyalty is another concept that has been used to explain consistency in behavior and has been specifically used in consumer behavior research to explain why consumers purchase the same product or brand repeatedly. Initially, the concept of brand insistence was

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