

PURCHASE DECISION INVOLVEMENT: EVENT MANAGEMENT SEGMENTS AND RELATED EVENT BEHAVIOR

Rodney B. Warnick, Ph.D.
Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management
University of Massachusetts at Amherst

David C. Bojanic
University of Texas at San Antonio

Abstract.—The goal of this research was to examine the relationships between different levels of event purchase decision involvement (PDI) segments and their respective event behaviors (e.g., expenditures, travel behavior, event consumption and satisfaction). The specific purpose was to answer two major research questions: 1) Can PDI identify different levels or segments of event attendees?; and 2) Do the PDI segments differ by their tendency to travel, spend, and consume at an event? Three segments of attendees were identified based on PDI and there were significant differences among these segments in both categorical and continuous variables.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Special events are characterized by important purchase decisions, planning, and consumptive behavior. From a marketing perspective, the success of the event depends on attracting attendees and influencing their expenditures, length of stay, and overall event satisfaction. Because special events attract followers or consumers who have high interest levels in the event's attractions, it is appropriate to measure involvement in order to differentiate and segment attendees.

The measurement of involvement over the past two decades has become more complex while its application is still lacking (Reagan et al. 2009). Substantial development of "involvement theory" in the leisure research field has drawn from marketing, consumer behavior, and social psychology, and has evolved over time (Havitz and Mannell 2005).

However, the literature on involvement in the tourism field is scarce according to Cia et al. (2004) and is especially lacking in the study of event management (Getz 2008).

The goal of this research was to examine the concept of purchase decision involvement (PDI) among special event attendees. Two major research questions were posed: 1) Can PDI identify different segments of event attendees?; and 2) Do the certain types of PDI segments differ by their tendency to travel, spend, and consume at an event?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Havitz and Mannell (2005) suggested that the involvement literature could be "cross-fertilized" with situation-specific leisure and tourism research in order to make more profound and operational applications of the various involvement constructs. The present research grew out of that idea. From an operational perspective, an event professional or researcher should consider the measures of involvement including: the media used and the time spent in searching for events; the energy, effort, or financial commitment invested in researching and attending events; the number of event alternatives examined or considered; and the extent of the decisionmaking process. Event pre-trip or pre-event planning and decisionmaking need to be examined as part of the process (Clawson and Knetsch 1966). From a marketing perspective, associations also play a vital role in securing corporate and/or private sponsorships for events ranging from the Olympics to regional First Night celebrations. Cornwell and Maigan (1998) and Speed and Thompson (2000) note that little is known about how effective marketing activities are at attracting attendees to such events. At the same time, researchers have not developed theoretical frameworks to guide investigations of consumers' reactions to event marketing and sponsorships.

2.1 Involvement Theory and Application to Special Events

The concept of involvement has been heavily researched since 1962 when it was introduced through the works of Zaichkowsky (1986). Involvement is typically defined as a “state of motivation, arousal, or interest” (Havitz and Dimanche 1997, 1999; McWilliams and Crompton 1997). The consumer behavior and social psychology literature uses the concept of involvement to explain a variety of behavioral and decisionmaking processes (Havitz and Dimanche 1990, 1997). There are three ways to view involvement: 1) ego or psychological involvement; 2) situational or purchase involvement; and 3) response involvement. There are excellent summaries of involvement research by Cai et.al (2004), Engell and Blackwell (1982), Havitz and Dimanche (1990, 1999), Kim et al. (1997), Michealidou and Dibb (2008), and Zaichkowsky (1986).

The application of situational involvement has varied across the fields of tourism, hospitality, recreation and leisure settings. Situational involvement has not been studied or refined as closely or intently as enduring or ego involvement despite its advantages for direct application as a theoretical construct or as a segmentation and/or marketing tool.

2.2 Situational Involvement and Purchase Decision Involvement

PDI was conceptualized and developed through the works of Mittal (1989) and Park and Mittal (1985) and is generally classified as “situational involvement” (Michealidou and Dibb 2008). PDI represents the consumer’s mental state as manifested in temporary concern with a stimulus object—in this case a special event. Park and Mittal (1985) posited that involvement is an individual’s “goal-directed arousal capacity,” which is governed by both cognitive and affective motives. Cognitive aspects are represented by the cost-benefits of functional performances of the product, service, or event, while the affective aspects relate to symbolic benefits such as self-image or self-esteem.

Developed by Mittal (1989), the scale used in this study focuses on the interest and concern that an individual brings to bear on the purchase decision task. It includes four dimensions: 1) the degrees of caring about which types of and brands of the product exist; 2) the differences among the types and brands of the product; 3) the importance of the right choice of the product; and 4) the concern of the outcome of the actual product choice decision. Subsequent research by Mittal (1995) suggested that one item, perceived brand differences, showed excessive item error. Thus, the brand difference item was not measured in this study.

2.3 Purchase Decision Involvement as a Segmentation Variable

Research by Arora (1982), Laurent and Kapferer (1985), and Zaichkowsky and Sood (1989) suggests that involvement provides a promising basis for market segmentation. Dimanche et al. (1993) found three unique segments in a study of tourists’ involvement with five tourism activities. McIntyre and Pigram (1992) identified four unique segments of vehicle-based campers. Havitz et al. (1994) uncovered six different segments of fitness participants. Kyle et al. (2002) found three distinct segments of runners in their analysis of road races, but they also found that the level of involvement varied across activities and that the type and level of involvement varied across segments of participants within an activity. They concluded that distinct and meaningful target markets could be identified through involvement profiles.

In their study of PDI, Cai et al. (2004) found that information was perceived and valued differently by those with different levels of purchase decision involvement. The researchers made three specific recommendations based on their findings. First, the value of PDI information should be considered by destination marketing organizations (DMO) in the promotional process. Second, PDI information is critical in determining the specific type(s) of information to be included in marketing messages. Third, the differences among market segments

also affect which advertising or promotional media should be used and how different types of destination information should be presented in advertising layouts. Perhaps most important in their findings was the impact that PDI could have upon segmentation.

2.4 Special Event Research and Marketing Applications

Special event management research has increased in the last decade largely because more academic programs and journals are covering this topic. At the same time, one type of special event, air shows, has grown in popularity both worldwide and in the U.S. An air show is, in essence, a sporting event where flying performances are showcased with thrilling aerobatics, competitions, and displays of aerial feats that are not easily seen in any other setting.

The International Council of Air Shows (ICAS 2009) collects data on the demographics and travel behaviors of air show spectators throughout North America. The spectator base of a typical air show represents a relatively affluent cross-section of North America, with 54.3 percent of survey respondents reporting an income in excess of \$50,000 (ICAS 2009). ICAS's most recent data indicate that 75 percent of all air show attendees travel 49 or fewer miles to these events (53 percent travel less than 20 miles and 22 percent travel 21 to 49 miles). Travel characteristics are often used to establish the extent to which visitors' bring "outside money" to the local economy where they event is located. Thus, examining both involvement profiles and market segments is important for understanding the economic impacts of special events, and for improving the measures and marketing applications of segmentation strategies in professional event management.

Relatively few academic journals have reported research about air shows. A comparative study in the "Journal of Vacation Marketing" by Nicholson and Pearce (2001) examined four different events including an air show in New Zealand's South Island and found that all of the events attracted significantly

different visitors. They concluded that, of the four events (a country music festival, a wine and food festival, a foods festival and an air show), the air show was more characteristically a "tourism event" by the nature of the visitors it attracted. They also concluded that event participant profiling needs to go beyond the typical socio-demographic variables to examine other means of segmentation.

3.0 METHOD

This study was conducted during the Great New England Air Show (GNEAS) on September 6 and 7, 2008. The GNEAS has been staged 20 times over the past four decades at the Westover Air Base in Chicopee, Massachusetts. The event is coordinated by the local host organization, the Galaxy Council, and is jointly sponsored by the U.S. Air Force, the Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau, and numerous corporate sponsors. Despite its long history, there has been no detailed attempt to understand the value of the air show's contributions to the regional economy or to study the attendees who travel from around the region. The two-day event is one of the largest special events in New England, attracting over 300,000 visitors during one weekend in the early fall.

A comprehensive survey instrument was developed and divided into six distinct parts: 1) interest in the GNEAS and previous experience with air shows; 2) motivation to visit the GNEAS and the Pioneer Valley region of Massachusetts; 3) purchase decision involvement regarding air shows in general and the GNEAS in particular; 4) travel behavior related to the GNEAS and to the Pioneer Valley region; 5) spending behavior and analysis; 6) demographic profile of visitors. A seventh section invited visitors' open-ended comments. These questions provided a basis for measuring the level of PDI and helped measure other parameters that are crucial in segmenting the overall market by visitor dynamics and event-related behaviors. Chi-square analysis and ANOVAs were conducted to determine if significant differences existed at the .05 level.

4.0 SELECTED RESULTS

The response rate for the study was 37.3 percent. Of 3,078 surveys emailed, 3,072 were successfully delivered and 1,145 were completed. Six surveys were not deliverable due to incorrect email addresses, and 89 surveys were discarded for being incomplete. On average, the respondents were middle-aged (mean 45 years), middle-income (\$50,000 to \$100,000 gross household income before taxes), and traveling with families or friends (average 3.65 people in the party).

Respondents, on average, were 'somewhat involved' in the air show; on the one involvement-measuring question, the average score was 5.31 on a 7-point scale with 7 being very highly involved). They traveled an average of 45 miles (one-way) to attend the show, stayed 1.5 nights away from home, and spent an average of \$29.17 per person at the event. Nearly 38 percent had learned about the air show on the Internet while word-of-mouth from family, friends, and the military was another important source of information. Print ads, broadcast ads, and direct mailers were mentioned less frequently as information sources. The two primary points of interest at the GNEAS in general were the aircraft (mentioned by 57 percent) and the event as a source of entertainment (32 percent mentioned this).

A large number of respondents (83 percent) had visited the region before and 63 percent had been to the GNEAS in the past, but more than half (60 percent) would not have visited the area if not for the air show. The air show visit was a day-trip for most; only 15 percent indicated that they had lengthened their stay in the area and the average length of stay was less than two days (1.41 days average). The respondents tended to be satisfied with their GNEAS experience (they gave an average score of 5.96 out of 7 on the satisfaction question where 7 indicated being extremely satisfied). They also indicated a high likelihood of returning to the GNEAS event in the future, with an average score of 6.09 on a 7-point scale where 7 meant very likely to return.

The PDI scale did identify three distinct levels of involvement: High (n=403, 35 percent), Medium (n=392, 34 percent), and Low (n=350, 31 percent). In subsequent analyses, involvement level was a significant segmentation variable for 6 of 10 categorical variables and 8 of 15 continuous variables.

There were significant differences between the PDI segments (high, medium, or low) on the following categorical variables (Table 1):

1. air show information sources, chi sq (18, N=1,145) = 46.006; $p > .000$;
2. interest in air shows, chi sq (6, N=1,145) = 108.886, $p > .000$;
3. been to show before, chi sq (2, N=1,145) = 13.992, $p > .001$;
4. length of stay, chi sq (4, N=369) = 10.524, $p > .032$;
5. gender, chi sq (2, N=1,111) = 30.152, $p > .001$; and
6. age, chi sq (8, N=1,104) = 27.804, $p > .001$.

There were no significant differences on the following categorical variables: visitation to Pioneer Valley in the past, visitation to the Pioneer Valley if not for the GNEAS, education level of respondents, and income of the respondents.

ANOVA also found significant differences among PDI segments for the following variables (Table 2):

1. times attended GNEAS;
2. group size;
3. time spent at GNEAS;
4. nights away from home at the event;
5. number of days at event;
6. number of hours per day at the event;
7. likelihood of return;
8. satisfaction level;
9. travel distance;
10. total expenditures per person; and
11. transportation costs per person.

Variables that were not different by PDI segments were lodging expenditures, attractions visited, size of party, and children in party.

Table 1.—Chi-Square analysis of selected categorical variables and involvement levels

	High Involvement (n=350)	Medium Involvement (n=392)	Low Involvement (n=403)	DF	Chi-Square	P-value
Prompted Interest in GNEAS?				6	108.886	0.000
% Aircrafts	42.7	36.7	20.6			
% War Vet	46.8	35.5	17.7			
% Armed Forces	34.3	32.9	32.9			
% Entertainment	31.8	29.9	50.0			
Been to GNEAS Before?				2	13.992	0.001
Yes	38.1	35.1	26.8			
No	30.4	32.7	36.9			
Hear About GNEAS?				8	46.006	0.000
Publicity	34.8	34.8	30.4			
Paid Advertising	32.1	29.4	38.5			
Internet – Web site	43.6	34.4	22.0			
Word of Mouth Referrals	27.3	34.2	38.4			
Local/ Other	27.7	41.5	30.8			
Would you have visited the area if there were no GNEAS?				2	1.614	0.446
Yes	31.9	35.6	32.5			
No	35.7	34.7	29.6			
GNEAS Affect Stay Length				4	10.524	0.032
Stayed Longer	47.3	32.7	20.0			
Stayed Same Length	28.3	35.0	36.7			
Stayed Shorter Length	41.9	29.0	39.0			
Been to Pioneer Valley Before?				2	0.934	0.627
Yes	35.0	35.1	30.0			
No	37.1	31.4	31.4			
Gender				2	30.152	0.000
Male	39.6	35.1	25.3			
Female	26.4	33.5	40.1			
Income				6	9.132	0.166
< \$50K	34.5	36.6	28.9			
\$50-\$74.9K	36.5	31.4	32.1			
\$75-99.9K	30.4	41.3	28.3			
\$100K+	39.3	31.0	29.7			
Age				8	27.804	0.001
<30	38.7	27.9	33.3			
30-39	27.4	33.3	39.3			
40-49	33.2	38.5	28.3			
50-59	39.8	36.4	23.7			
60+	45.1	29.9	25.0			
Education				2	4.055	0.132
Some College or Less	37.5	35.0	27.3			
College Graduate	33.1	34.1	32.8			

Table 2.—Mean PDI levels and event attributes as measured by ANOVA

Variable	High Involvement	Medium Involvement	Low Involvement	F-value	Significance
Times Attended GNEAS	3.39	3.24	2.64	6.242	0.002***
Number of Adults in Party	2.55	2.30	2.29	4.881	0.008***
Number of Children in Party	1.20	1.27	1.33	.770	0.463
Total Size of Party	3.74	3.57	3.63	.636	0.530
Hours Per Day at GNEAS	6.13	5.64	4.60	36.415	0.000***
Days of Trip to GNEAS	3.08	2.41	2.13	63.924	0.000***
Nights Stayed Away for Event	1.13	1.41	2.08	63.951	0.000***
Attractions Visited	0.94	0.41	0.35	1.988	0.137
Distance from Event (miles)	37.89	45.56	50.78	2.370	0.094*
Likelihood of Return (7 pts.)	5.80	6.03	6.40	19.440	0.000***
Level of Satis-faction (7 pts.)	5.65	5.92	6.27	16.109	0.000***
Transportation Cost (\$)/ Person	6.36	7.76	9.52	6.150	0.002***
Lodging Expenditures/ Person	2.23	3.23	4.82	2.282	0.103
Total Expenses/ Person	22.04	27.49	36.84	13.392	0.000***
Total Expenditure/ Group	70.51	83.03	126.36	15.998	0.000***

Significance Level: *** at 0.001 level; ** at 0.05 level and * at 0.10 level.

In terms of specific reasons for visiting the GNEAS, those who were more highly involved were most interested in the aircrafts (43 percent of high involvement respondents versus 21 percent of low involvement respondents) and war veteran-related attractions (47 percent of high involvement versus 18 percent of low involvement). On the other hand, the low involvement participants were more likely to be motivated by the entertainment value of the event (50 percent of low involvement respondents versus 32 percent of high involvement respondents). High involvement participants were more likely than low involvement participants to have been to the GNEAS before (38 percent versus 27 percent, respectively). High involvement participants were also more likely than low involvement participants (44 percent versus 22 percent, respectively) to hear about the event through the Internet Web site. Low involvement participants used word-of-mouth referrals more frequently (38 percent) than high involvement participants (27 percent). High involvement participants were also more likely to stay in the area longer (47 percent) because of the GNEAS than low involvement participants (20 percent), but the GNEAS did not differentiate by involvement level on previous visits to the area in general or likelihood of visiting the area were it not for the air show.

There were some differences among responses by gender. About 40 percent of males but only 25 percent of females were high involvement attendees; 40 percent of females were low involvement attendees. Two segments of attendees were different from the others by age: about 39 percent of young adults, 40 percent of those age 50-59, and 45 percent of those over age 60 were high involvement attendees while just 29 percent, 24 percent, and 25 percent of those same groups (respectively) were low involvement attendees. There were no significant differences across the different involvement levels based on income and education attainment.

When the dynamics of past and current travel behavior were examined, there were significant differences by number of times attending the event in the past and the amount of time spent at the event. As expected, high involvement participants were significantly more likely to have attended the air show in the past (3.39 times on average) than low involvement participants (2.64 times on average). High involvement participants were also likely to be part of a group an average of 2.55 adults while low involvement participants tended to be part of groups with a significantly lower number of adults (2.29). The high involvement segment spent significantly more hours per day (6.13) at the air show

and more days per trip (3.08) than low involvement segments (4.60 hours per day, 2.13 days per trip). On the other hand, low involvement participants spent a higher average number of days away from home (2.08 nights) versus the high involvement participants (1.13 nights).

This behavior may be partially explained by travel distance to the event. Low involvement participants travelled further, an average of 50.78 miles one-way versus 37.89 miles one-way for high involvement participants. Expenditures by involvement type also revealed significant differences in four expenditure categories. Low involvement participants spent more money overall on the event by group (\$126.36 on average) and by person (\$36.84 per person) and more on transportation (\$9.52 per person) than high involvement participants (who spent \$70.51 overall per group; \$22.04 overall per person; and \$6.36 for transportation per person). There were no significant differences among involvement segments with regard to expenditures for lodging.

This study also found that high involvement participants were harder to please and less likely to return. On scales where 7 was the highest score, low involvement participants recorded high satisfaction scores (average 6.27) and higher likelihoods to return scores (average 6.40) than high involvement participants (average satisfaction score of 5.65 and average likelihood to return score of 5.80).

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Purchase decision involvement was found to be a viable segmentation variable. Three levels of involvement were found in this study—high, medium and low, as suggested by Mittal (1989). There were significant differences by PDI on categorical variables such as info sources, interest in air shows, previous air show attendance, length of stay at the air show, gender, and age. There were also significant differences by continuous variables such as number of times respondents had attended the show, group size, and nights away from home. PDI was not significant for lodging expenditures, attractions visited, overall size

of the group, children in the group, education level, and previous travel to the area.

Two of the critical outcome variables, likelihood to return to the GNEAS and event satisfaction were also found to be significantly different by PDI segments. Furthermore, high versus low PDI groups reported visiting the air show for different reasons. High PDI attendees were more interested in the planes and the show specifics while low PDI attendees were most interested in family entertainment. Men were more likely than women to be high PDI members. The high involvement group also used different media sources and wanted more details about the event than lower PDI groups. The low PDI group spent more money overall, but not in every category. It appears that knowledge of the event and costs associated with it are experience-based—those who have high involvement and more experience know best how to prepare for and spend (save) money on the event.

There are a number of applications for and recommendations from the results of this study. PDI is useful from a marketing perspective. Clearly, the air show event serves different purposes for different attendees, and the event organizers need to be aware of this. Detailed information about the event's schedule and featured acts is important to high PDI individuals who are likely to search the Internet for information about the show. However, low PDI and first-time attendees have a stronger need for specific information about the nature of the event itself, how to get to there, and when it is held. First-time attendees are primarily in the low PDI group, have different levels of expectations, and express higher levels of satisfaction with their air show experience.

Within the high involvement group, there appear to be two major age segments: young adults (under age 35), and older adults (over age 50). This may be related to the military aspect of the GNEAS; the younger cohorts may be currently enlisted military and the older group may be retired military. In any case, the show must appeal to both groups. Furthermore, "involvement" and even the more detailed types of involvement may

in fact differ by these age-related subgroups. While not measured here, “ego or enduring involvement” may vary considerably by these two age-related subgroups. In addition, the study data may be confounded by involvement in the military (the attendee survey did not collect data on military involvement). On ground observation at the event confirmed that there were a large number of military families.

Finally, a limitation to this study was the economic reality of the timing of the event. This was a large regional event held during a time of particularly high gasoline prices in the summer of 2008 (the cost exceeded \$4 per gallon) and attendees sought out events that offered high value and low costs.

Other important practical lessons of this study include that it was effective to conduct the survey online versus a traditional mailed or telephone survey; the response rate was high by survey standards while costs were kept to a minimum. Incentives were also helpful in increasing the response rate. Events like the air show would also benefit from an online registration process to speed entry or provide different types of information to different segments. For future research, a larger sample of air show attendees could yield information that is highly valuable to event planners and could be used in pitches to potential corporate sponsors. Although not analyzed in this study, the ability to obtain open-ended qualitative research information is potentially enhanced by an online survey. The responses to the open-ended questions in this study were extensive.

This research does have limitations, and future research is still needed. Obtaining a representative sample is a challenge when the organizers desire is to measure the economic impact or significance of an air show event. An online registration process could be a potential recruiting tool, but we recommend that future air show research use an intercept recruiting process in order to get a sample that is more representative of the population of attendees. While PDI was a viable segmentation tool, other types of involvement and attributes of the event itself also need to be

measured and studied. Event loyalty and other aspects of likelihood to return are important and should be investigated further. A more detailed analysis of information search behaviors of attendees and their use of media sources would be helpful. Finally, we learned that air shows do appear to provide a rich sample of “involved individuals” for research and operational applications.

6.0 LITERATURE CITED

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