

## **A Path Analytic Model of the Relationships between Involvement, Psychological Commitment, and Loyalty**

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This paper outlines antecedents of involvement and mediating roles of developmental processes leading to participants' behavioral loyalty (i.e., involvement → psychological commitment → resistance to change → behavioral loyalty). We propose that individuals go through sequential psychological processes to become loyal participants including: (a) the formation of high levels of involvement in an activity, (b) the development of psychological commitment to a brand, and (c) the maintenance of strong attitudes toward resistance to change preferences of the brand. Furthermore, because not all individuals show the identical processes in the development of participants' loyalty, we propose that both personal characteristics and social-situational factors moderate the developmental processes.

**KEYWORDS:** *Involvement, psychological commitment, loyalty*

### **Introduction**

Recent leisure research on the constructs of involvement, psychological commitment, and loyalty has contributed to conceptual and methodological advancements and has provided coherent, but largely independent, sets of knowledge. A next logical step is to explore the relationships between the constructs. Though acknowledging potential relationships between involvement, psychological commitment, and loyalty, most studies to date have superficially addressed the issue or have examined the three constructs independently (e.g., Backman & Crompton, 1991; Havitz & Dimanche, 1997; Muehling, Lacznia, & Andrews, 1993; Pritchard, Howard, & Havitz, 1992). Until recently, involvement, commitment, and loyalty research has not addressed dynamic processes between the constructs. Likewise, conceptual clarification of the distinctions or similarities between the constructs has been elusive (e.g., Buchanan, 1985; Pritchard et al., 1992).

Improved understanding of these relationships has two important conceptual advantages. First, it may facilitate an understanding of psychological

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processes or mechanisms in the development of behavioral loyalty to leisure activities (e.g., running or golf), or to brands. In leisure contexts, brand loyalty may refer to an agency (e.g., YMCA), a site (e.g., a specific golf course), or even to a specific event (e.g., the Boston Marathon). It may also relate to a brand of equipment such as a specific company's running shoes or golf clubs. We propose that developmental processes driven by levels of involvement and psychological commitment explain participants' behavioral loyalty. Second, it is important to examine the conditional nature of the involvement-commitment-loyalty relationships. We argue that individuals demonstrate unique trajectories in the development of behavioral loyalty according to differences in individual characteristics and social-situational circumstances. It is important to understand when, how, and why participants develop behavioral loyalty to brands.

Recently, Park (1996) argued that "attitudinal loyalty and involvement contribute independently to the prediction of different measures of behavioral loyalty" (p. 246). Working in the context of fitness activities, Park found that attitudinal loyalty better predicted duration of participation, whereas involvement better predicted intensity and frequency of participation. However, Park acknowledged several limitations of his study. First, he used summative indices for both involvement and attitudinal loyalty which precluded analyses of individual facets of these constructs. Evidence to date also suggests that different facets of involvement are likely to influence different facets of behavioral loyalty (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997). Second, because of correlational nature of his study, presumed causal roles remain untested. Park's correlational research did not determine whether involvement precedes loyalty.

More recently, Kim, Scott, and Crompton (1997) tested a model examining the influence of leisure involvement (which they called social psychological involvement), commitment, and past behavior (which they termed behavioral involvement) on future intentions in the context of bird-watching, concluding that relationships did exist. However, they added that "additional research is needed to understand the empirical linkages among psychological involvement, behavioral involvement, and commitment. In this study we presented a rather simplistic model. A more sophisticated model could be readily developed and tested that may show that psychological involvement precedes both behavioral involvement and commitment" (p. 338).

Understanding of issues underlying the development of behavioral loyalty has important practical implications, because participants' loyalty is an important, but elusive, goal of many recreational agencies (e.g., Howard, Edginton, & Selin, 1988). For example, though research evidence suggests that it is more desirable and up to six times as efficient for practitioners to retain current participants than to seek new ones (O'Boyle, 1983), Gahwiler (1995) noted that annual retention rates of only 50% are standard within membership-based fitness facilities. In addition, Howard (1992) found that only 2% of American adults accounted for 75% of annual participation in

six leisure activities including golf and running. Such ratios are undesirable from a societal perspective, but do highlight the salience of customer retention strategies.

Thus, the purposes of this paper are to advance the conceptual clarification of the multifaceted constructs of leisure involvement, psychological commitment, and behavioral loyalty, and to clarify the relationships among them. The focus is on theoretically clarifying the causal roles of involvement, psychological commitment, and loyalty from a path analytic perspective. Specifically, we attempt to postulate psychological processes in the development of participants' behavioral loyalty, and the conditional nature of the involvement-commitment-loyalty relationship, providing a theoretical framework for further research. In comparison to the parsimonious model presented by Kim et al. (1997), our model is, we believe necessarily, complex. Throughout, we will illustrate the model using examples related to running and golf, two leisure activities which provide distinct contexts within which to discuss relationships between the constructs. Perspectives of four specific (fictional) individuals will be included:

Carrie is a 57 year-old Toronto area suburbanite. She lives with her husband, a non-runner. Their two children recently completed university and moved to other cities. Carrie works in retail sales at a mall. She has run "regularly, but not religiously for the past 17 years", usually in the company of two close friends. They especially enjoy the changes in seasons and discussing resultant effects on the courses which they run. The three women "compete" once a year in a local 5 kilometre race. Carrie views running as a pleasurable, healthy social experience and a reward to herself after long days at work and time spent caring for her elderly parents who live nearby.

Lisa is a single, 28 year-old Atlanta business professional. A perfectionist and intense competitor with respect to both work and leisure, Lisa abandoned aerobics three years ago in favor of cross-training and competing in triathlons. She prefers to run and swim alone, but usually bikes with a close friend from her health club. She competes in a half dozen carefully selected triathlons each year, plus an additional four to six road races. Lisa views running as being functional and highly symbolic. "I probably enjoy competing more than I enjoy running. But I must say that my running expresses both who I am and who I aspire to be".

Hideo is a 46 year-old Vancouver business professional who has golfed since his childhood. His teen-aged daughter captains her high school golf team. Hideo golfs once a week with three good friends who compete for small sums of money and to determine who buys drinks at the clubhouse after the round. He also golfs several times monthly with clients from Australia, Japan, the U.S., and other parts of Canada. A student of the game with a respectable handicap, and expert of golf etiquette, Hideo feels some pressure to play respectably in the latter settings, "but doesn't want my game to be too superior or inferior to those of the clients at hand".

Steve is a 32 year-old auto worker in southeast Michigan. Childless and not currently partnered, Steve was an excellent high school athlete and was named

all-state in baseball. A natural at third base, he still plays high-level competitive softball. He has golfed sporadically for the past 10 years, playing for a "curious mix of entertainment and competitiveness", but he does not understand those who take the game too seriously. Steve has no regular golfing partners and only plays at the invitation of friends or friends of friends.

### A Conceptual Model of the Relationships among Involvement, Psychological Commitment, and Loyalty

We propose that individuals go through sequential processes including (a) the formation of high levels of involvement in an activity, (b) the development of psychological commitment(s) to various brands, and (c) the maintenance of strong attitudes toward resistance to change preferences for those brands (Figure 1). Furthermore, because not all individuals exhibit identical loyalty development processes, we propose that in the development of participants' loyalty, we propose that both personal characteristics and social-situational factors moderate the developmental processes. In Figure 1, dotted lines represent interaction effects (i.e., moderating effects) between different constructs (e.g., attraction X social support, sign value X side bets) for illustrative purposes.

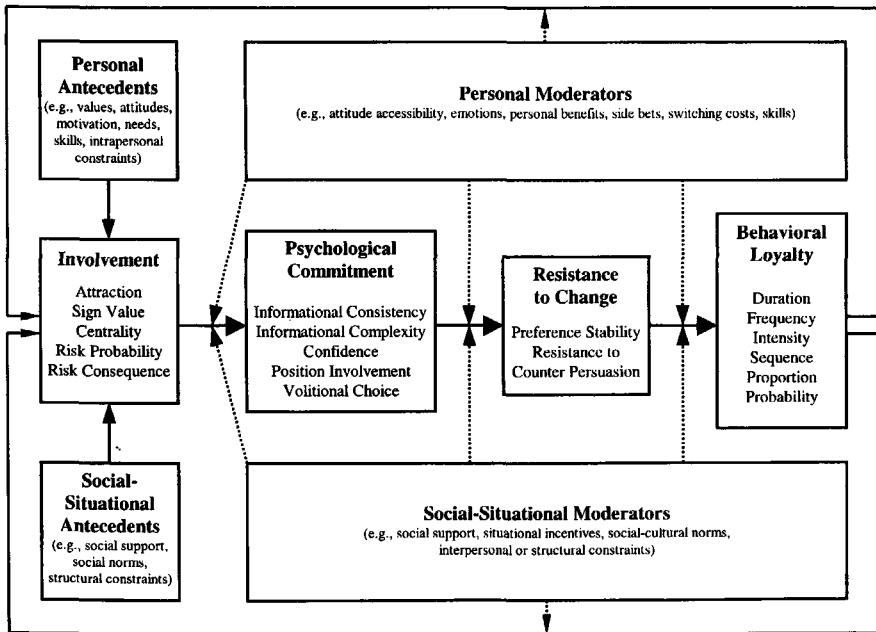


Figure 1. A Conceptual Model of the Relationships between Involvement, Psychological Commitment, and Behavioral Loyalty

*Antecedents of Involvement*

We define involvement as an unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest toward a recreational activity or associated product. It is evoked by a particular stimulus or situation and has drive properties (adapted from Rothschild, 1984). Involvement levels for the most part remain stable, fluctuating somewhat over time due to a variety of circumstances (Havitz & Howard, 1995). That is, Lisa's involvement with running will not likely be much different one or two years hence. Nor will Lisa's involvement be too similar to Carrie's involvement (which will also likely remain stable). This is not to say however, that Lisa and Carrie approach running with equal vigor day in and day out.

Antecedents of involvement consist of two general factors: individual characteristics and social-situational influences. Individual characteristics that have been suggested and/or found to be antecedents of involvement include: (a) values or beliefs (e.g., Beatty, Kahle, & Homer, 1988; Madrigal & Kahle, 1994); (b) attitudes (e.g., Kuentzel & McDonald, 1992; Manfreda, Yuan, & McGuire, 1992); (c) motivation (e.g., Kuentzel & McDonald, 1992; Williams, Schreyer, & Knopf, 1990); (d) needs or goals (e.g., Andrews, Durvasula, & Akhter, 1990; Zaichkowsky, 1986); (e) initial formation of preference (e.g., Crosby & Taylor, 1983); (f) initial behavioral experiences (e.g., Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Celsi & Olson, 1988; Donnelly, Vaske, & Graefe, 1986; Kuentzel & McDonald, 1992; Siegenthaler & Lam, 1992); and (g) competence/skills (e.g., Donnelly et al., 1986; Kuentzel & McDonald, 1992; Siegenthaler & Lam, 1992). Also, we propose that (a) intrapersonal constraints (e.g., Jackson, Crawford, & Godbey, 1993; Jackson & Henderson, 1995) and (b) anticipation of personal benefits and/or initial gain of personal benefits such as satisfaction and health (e.g., Driver, Brown, & Peterson, 1991) may be personal antecedents of involvement. High levels of intrapersonal constraints are likely to be associated with low involvement, whereas anticipated personal benefits and/or initial gain of personal benefits tend to result in high involvement.

The social-situational antecedents reflect both global or macro social-cultural influences and specific or micro situational circumstances such as (a) social support from significant others (e.g., Ditton, Loomis, & Choi, 1992; Unruh, 1980); (b) situational incentives (e.g., Andrews et al., 1990); (c) social and cultural norms (e.g., Beatty et al., 1988; Frederick, Havitz, & Shaw, 1994); (d) interpersonal and structural constraints (e.g., Jackson et al., 1993); and (e) anticipation of social benefits and/or initial gain of social benefits such as friendships and family solidarity (e.g., Driver et al., 1991). The above antecedent factors influence the formation of individuals' involvement with recreational activities or products. For example, if Lisa consistently improves her race times, she will tend to become more involved in running because of accolades she receives from peers and significant others. Likewise, if Steve receives little or no support from his social circle he is likely to become less involved with golf over time. One difficulty in assessing the an-

tecedent effects of this complex, but partial, list is that they rarely increase or decrease congruently with each other in terms of direction or intensity. For instance, Steve may read about the increased popularity of golf, learn of the opening of a new course in his neighborhood, and find that his income is rising thus improving his access to the game. At the same time, however, his friends may urge him away from that activity and toward other pursuits. If the effect of latter antecedent is very strong, it may override effects of the other three.

### *Leisure Involvement*

Consistent with previous research (e.g., Arora, 1993; Havitz & Dimanche, 1997; Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; McIntyre, 1989), our model operationalizes involvement as a multidimensional construct including five facets receiving broad support in the leisure literature: a) attraction, the perceived importance or interest in an activity or a product, and pleasure or hedonic value derived from participation or use; b) sign, the unspoken statements that purchase or participation conveys about the person, c) centrality to lifestyle, encompassing both social contexts such as friends and families centered around activities, and the central role of the activities in an individual's life; d) risk probability, perceived probability of making a poor choice; and e) risk consequence, perceived importance of negative consequences in the case of a poor choice. Though most often discussed in terms of physical risk (e.g., Robinson, 1992), numerous other sources of risk (e.g., social, psychological, financial) have been identified in leisure contexts (Brannan, Condello, Stuckum, Vissers, & Priest, 1992).

Our model favors a multidimensional approach over the unidimensional model proposed and tested by Kim et al. (1997). Recently, Havitz and Dimanche (1997) investigated over 50 leisure involvement studies conducted since 1988, and concluded that multifaceted interpretations have stronger content and face validity for studying leisure. Nevertheless, several studies (see Havitz & Dimanche, 1997; Zaichkowsky, 1990) indicated that the various components of involvement do not equally influence an individual's involvement profile; that is, different patterns of involvement profiles exist, according to activities, products, or individual characteristics. For example, the merger of the importance and pleasure facets, common in leisure contexts, consistently produces an attraction facet as initially reported by McIntyre (1989).

In general, market segmentation research that used multidimensional scales in recreational settings commonly revealed segments with high scores on at least one facet and neutral to low scores on other facets (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997). While the salience of attraction as the dominant dimension has been demonstrated with respect to leisure activities (e.g., Dimanche et al., 1991; McIntyre, 1989); the salience of risk has been revealed in many leisure product contexts (e.g., Havitz & Howard, 1995; Kapferer & Laurent, 1985); and other research has suggested that, at least for some people, sign

may be most important (Dimanche & Samdahl, 1994; Havitz, Dimanche, & Bogle, 1994). Hideo clearly associates social and functional risk (possibility of technical or mechanical failure) with business-related golf. Lisa views running as socially important and revealing of true self. Steve, conversely, also makes attributions about serious golfers, but generally he views their participation in different manner than do many of the serious golfers themselves.

Though involvement and behavior are undoubtedly linked, Laurent and Kapferer (1985) correctly suggested that "[i]nvolvement does not systematically lead to the expected differences in behavior" (p. 52). This is because, in part, each facet influences specific behaviors differently. Park's (1996) and Kim et al.'s (1997) research provided additional evidence that involvement is closely related to intentions and behaviors, corroborating evidence from numerous studies. However, Havitz and Dimanche's (1997) review of dozens of data sets concluded that leisure research has provided mixed evidence of relationships between involvement facets and behaviors. For example, Kerstetter and Kovich (1997) found that attraction scores were positively related to length and frequency of participation among basketball spectators, whereas sign was linked positively only with frequency of participation. Conversely, Gahwiler (1995) found that attraction, sign, and centrality scores were all positively related to a variety of behaviors. In summary, relationships between the various facets and behaviors are not consistent and clear. We believe our model, which accounts not only for mediating effects of psychological commitment and its various facets, but also for moderating effects of individual characteristics and social-situational factors, can clarify matters and explain some previously reported inconsistencies.

### *Psychological Commitment*

A number of scholars (e.g., Beatty et al., 1988; Block, Black, & Lichtenstein, 1989; Buchanan, 1985; Crosby & Taylor, 1983; Lastovicka & Gardner, 1979; Zaltman & Wallendorf, 1983) have suggested and/or found that involvement plays a formative or antecedent role in developing psychological commitment to a brand. Thus, we propose that an individual's involvement in a recreational activity or product is an antecedent of her/his psychological commitment to associated brands. Lisa and Hideo seem likely, in many circumstances, to develop brand level commitment given their high levels of activity involvement compared to those of Carrie and Steve. Lisa might prefer races on courses favorable to her strengths; perhaps hilly courses if she is a strong uphill runner. It also seems likely that Lisa will develop commitment to competitions high in prestige, and to specific brands of high performance shoes and equipment. Likewise, when golfing for business purposes, Hideo may carefully select golf courses to meet skill levels of particular clients.

Psychological commitment has been defined in the context of cognitive consistency theories (e.g., Freedman, 1964), and has also been interpreted from a multidimensional perspective (e.g., Buchanan, 1985; Crosby & Taylor, 1983; Pritchard et al., 1992). Building primarily on Crosby and Taylor's work, Pritchard, Havitz, and Howard (1997) suggested that:

psychological commitment to a preference is best defined by a network where the construct's root tendency, resistance to change, is maximized by the extent to which individuals are: (1) motivated to seek informational complexity and consistency in the cognitive schema behind their preference, (2) able to freely initiate choices that are meaningful, (3) willing to identify with important values and self-images that are associated with that preference. (p. 25)

Psychological commitment as defined above has not been widely discussed in the leisure literature. It includes several facets. First, informational consistency refers to the degree of consistency in a consumer's cognitive structure characterized by congruence between beliefs and attitudes or congruence between values and attitudes (Rosenberg, 1960). For example, participants who are high in informational consistency may demonstrate positive beliefs toward a brand which are consistent with their positive attitudes toward the brand. Hideo may think "this golf course is forgiving so even though my client's driving is erratic, an occasional slice or hook will not overly inflate his score on this course".

In distinguishing between values and attitudes, Madrigal and Kahle (1994) suggested that values reflect abstract ideals, whereas attitudes are tied to specific objects or specific situations. Also, values are more stable over time than attitudes, since values are more central to a person's cognitive system than are attitudes (Rokeach, 1973). In addition, although beliefs and values are similar concepts, values are more enduring than beliefs and play a more guiding role for culturally appropriate behavior than beliefs (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1994). Broadly speaking, values and beliefs are mental images that serve as determinants of a wide range of specific attitudes, which in turn, influence a person's behavior in specific situations under specific circumstances (Homer & Kahle, 1988; Schiffman & Kanuk, 1994).

A second facet of commitment is the degree of informational complexity of a person's cognitive structure (McQuiston, 1989). Pritchard et al. (1997) argued that "the more complex the informational schema that gird a person's commitment, the more difficult it is to change your mind, as accommodating disparate cognitions (conflicting information) would require even greater change ... For the highly committed, such costs are greater than those incurred when change is contemplated in the simple structure of the less-committed" (pp. 7-8). For example, Hideo is likely to be psychologically committed to a specific course for specific circumstances, such as golfing with business clients, because he has developed a complex cognitive structure and in-depth insight into the nuances of that course. Steve is unlikely to perceive such a level of informational complexity with respect to golf courses; though he could likely discuss, at length, the nuances of good or poor baseball diamonds.

Third, confidence represents the degree of certainty associated with attitudes and/or behaviors (Berger & Mitchell, 1989). Sherrif, Sherrif, and Nebergall (1965), found that confidence level largely determines difficulty with which an attitude can be changed. Once again, Lisa and Hideo could be expected to demonstrate confidence in their abilities to make optimal choices regarding recreational sites or equipment because they are more



likely to have developed informed opinions in comparison to less involved counterparts.

Fourth, position involvement is maintained when self-image is linked to brand preference (Freedman, 1964). Pritchard et al. (1997) wrote that "values and self-images perceived in any public association with the brand (social self) would be personally evaluated to see if they are truly consistent with the consumer's internal views (personal self)" (p. 9). For example, should Lisa win a pair of running shoes based on her performance in a triathlon, she may never wear them even if they are of high quality because they are not her preferred brand. They might be a brand favored by some of her less competitive friends; therefore, she associates them with recreational running.

Fifth, volitional choice is the extent to which a decision to pursue a goal or perform an action is based on a person's free choice (Bagozzi, 1993). Repeat patronage is relatively meaningless if a participant has no real variety from which to choose (e.g., only one golf course within reasonable driving distance). However, a golfer such as Hideo who has high volition will try to maintain control in selection of courses and equipment if more than one option exists.

Finally, we propose that resistance of change plays a mediating role in the commitment-loyalty linkage. Based on Kelley and Davis' (1994) and Morgan and Hunt's (1994) conceptual and path analytic work, Pritchard et al. (1997) constructed a Key Mediating Variable (KMV) model where psychological commitment indirectly influences loyalty through the mediating effect of resistance to change. Pritchard et al. tested the KMV model against a Rival Direct Effects (RDE) model where psychological commitment directly influences loyalty from the perspective of structural equation modeling. Their chi-square difference tests in three cases (the total sample,  $n=681$ ; the airline sample,  $n=348$ . The hotel sample,  $n=333$ ) suggested that the KMV model provided a significant improvement in fit. Therefore, we believe that it is appropriate to distinguish between resistance to change and other components of psychological commitment, and conceptualize resistance to change as a mediator of the commitment-loyalty relationship.

### *Involvement and Psychological Commitment*

High involvement does not translate directly to high psychological commitment in part because individual characteristics and social-situational factors moderate the direct effects of involvement on psychological commitment. The personal moderators reflect an individual's cognitive, affective, and/or behavioral characteristics such as (a) attitude accessibility, that is, the extent to which an attitude is articulated from memory (e.g., Manfredo et al., 1992); (b) postpurchase evaluation (e.g., Oliver, 1980); (c) satisfaction/dissatisfaction and other emotional factors (e.g., Allen, Machleit, & Schultz Kleine, 1992; Dick & Basu, 1994); (d) personal benefits and potential personal benefits (e.g., Morgan & Hunt, 1994); (e) side bets or sunk costs, that is, financial and emotional investments including equipment and membership owned, money invested, and length of training (e.g., Buchanan, 1985;

Dick & Basu, 1994; Siegenthaler & Lam, 1992); (f) switching costs (e.g., Dick & Basu, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Porter, 1980); (g) competence/skills (e.g., Chipman & Helfrich, 1988; Williams & Huffman, 1986), and (h) intrapersonal constraints (e.g., Jackson et al., 1993; Jackson & Henderson, 1995).

Some of the above personal moderators (i.e., competence/skills, intrapersonal constraints, personal benefits) are identical to the personal antecedents of involvement discussed earlier. These personal characteristics are likely to not only influence the formation of involvement, but also moderate the relationships proposed in this paper. In contrast, we assume that other personal moderators (e.g., side bets/sunk costs, switching costs) influence these relationships only after people develop their involvement in an activity, product, or program.

Components of the social-situational moderators (e.g., Buchanan, 1985; Johnson, 1973; Kuentzel & McDonald, 1992; Unruh, 1979) are identical to the social-situational antecedents of involvement discussed previously. These social-situational factors seem to affect the development of involvement, as well as moderate the proposed relationships. The moderating roles of the above personal and social-situational factors explain the conditional nature of the relationship. For example, an individual's involvement in running may better foster the development of psychological commitment to specific brands, whether they be competitions or shoes, for those such as Lisa who perceive more potential benefits (e.g., fitness, competitive success) than for those such as Carrie who perceive fewer potential benefits (primarily socialization). Similarly, the relationship between involvement and psychological commitment may be stronger for those golfers such as Hideo who accumulate more side bets (e.g., financial investment in club memberships, golf equipment, and lessons) than those such as Steve who invest fewer side bets.

*Relationship between involvement and psychological commitment at the facet levels.* Kapferer and Laurent (1993) argued that the different facets of involvement provide different influences on the consequences of involvement. Accordingly, "a composite index treatment may miss much of the explanatory detail available from ... multiple underlying constructs" (Kuentzel & McDonald, 1992, p. 283). Thus, it is important to pay attention not only to the relationship between involvement and psychological commitment at the global level, but also to relationships between each facet of the two constructs. Unfortunately, the leisure literature is rife with examples of involvement data collected at the facet level, but which has been analyzed at the global level (Ap, Dimanche, & Havitz, 1994; Bloch et al., 1989; McCarville, Crompton, & Sell, 1993; Park, 1996). Consideration of the relationship at the facet level can help researchers understand underlying links between involvement and psychological commitment. We believe that each facet of involvement will influence each facet of psychological commitment differently (Figure 2).

Our model suggests that informational consistency is influenced by attraction, sign value, and centrality to lifestyle. The more individuals regard activities as important and central in their lives, the more they attempt to

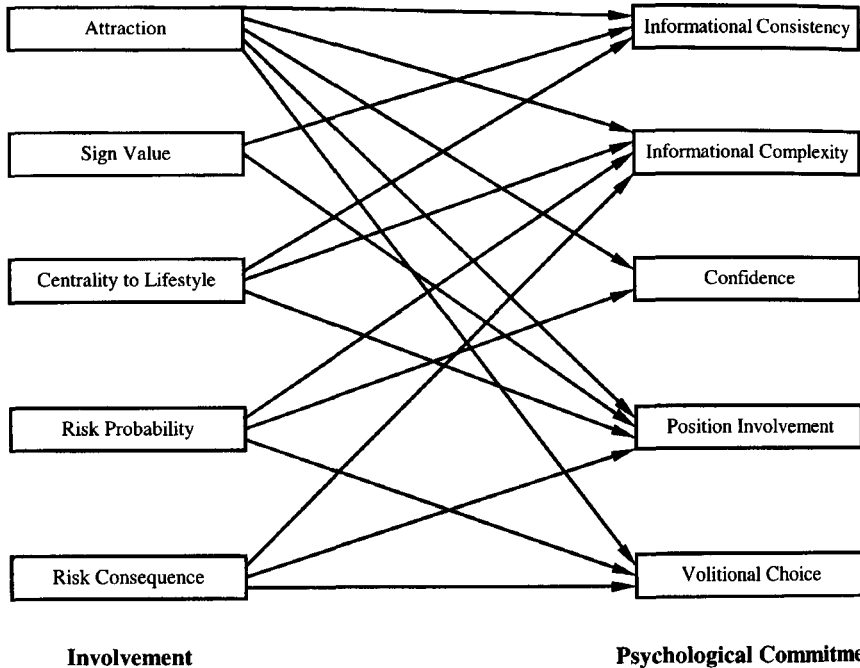


Figure 2. A Conceptual Model of the Relationship between Involvement and Psychological Commitment at the Facet Level

maintain balance or informational consistency between beliefs and attitudes (Crosby & Taylor, 1983). Similarly, pleasure or enjoyment experienced through activities has a connection to positive beliefs and attitudes, which result in cognitive consistency (Rosenberg, 1960). Individuals who emphasize the importance of sign value are expected to also demonstrate a consistency between their beliefs and attitudes (Dimanche & Samdahl, 1994). A runner such as Lisa, who considers running important and central to her life, and who experiences pleasure (even if related to competitive success) and sign value from running, will likely attempt to maintain consistency between her beliefs about a brand (e.g., a type of running shoes) and her attitudes toward them. Given her high attraction level, but low levels of sign and perceived risk, Carrie may also strive for informational consistency in running, but more likely with respect to the routes she and her friends choose to run, not with respect to the shoes she wears or the race that she enters.

Second, we assume that informational complexity is influenced by attraction, centrality to lifestyle, risk probability, and risk consequence. Individuals tend to develop complex cognitive structures for pursuing activities that are important, pleasurable, and central in their lives (Buchanan, 1985; Day, 1970). Also, those individuals, who care about the likelihood of making a bad decision, and about negative consequences of poor choice, seem to go through complex and extensive decision-making processes (Lastovicka &

Gardner, 1979). For instance, a runner who finds importance, pleasure, and centrality to lifestyle through running, and who is concerned with risk consequence, is likely to develop and maintain complex cognitive structures regarding brand options. Consider Lisa, who being well aware of safety issues and her busy schedule, coordinates her winter-time evening workouts with friends to assure maximum personal security even though she prefers to run alone. Informational complexity applies as well to product. Lisa is more likely attuned to published comparisons of various running shoes than would be a runner like Carrie.

Third, we believe that confidence is influenced by perceived risk probability and attraction. Perceived probability of making an inappropriate decision (i.e., risk probability) is negatively associated with confidence in an individual's brand choice (Dick & Basu, 1994; Havitz et al., 1994). Individuals for whom specific activities are important and enjoyable tend to have knowledge or experience necessary to make confident judgments (Burton & Netemeyer, 1992; Day, 1970). For example, Lisa may perceive little probability of making a poor choice on the selection of a triathlon despite the relative intangibility and heterogeneity of leisure programs (MacKay & Crompton, 1988). Hideo may have more difficulty in choosing a golf course in which to entertain new business clients than he would for clients with whom he has previously played.

Fourth, position involvement will be influenced not only by sign value, but also by attraction, centrality to lifestyle, and risk consequence. By definition, sign value of consumption behavior with an activity is an important part of position involvement with a brand (Assael, 1992; Crosby & Taylor, 1983; Pritchard et al., 1992). Warnick, Sutton, and McDonald's (1997) research, for example, suggests that Hideo, like many golfers, may ascribe status and skill levels to people partially on the basis of their selected clothing. Also, personal importance of, and pleasure derived from, participation in an activity can be a motivator for an individual to attain his/her desired value and self-image through position involvement (Dimanche & Samdahl, 1994; Freedman, 1964; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Mitchell, 1979; Pritchard et al., 1992). In addition, centrality to an individual's lifestyle embraces social contexts centered around activities (McIntyre & Pigram, 1992), which are associated with position involvement (Mitchell, 1979). Furthermore, people who care about negative consequences of a poor decision attempt to attain desirable self-image and social value; hence they maintain position involvement (Baumeister, 1982; Rothschild, 1979). For example, Hideo who (a) perceives golf as closely allied with his social and personal identity, (b) finds the nuances of the game interesting and pleasurable, (c) has close friends and business associates who play the game together, and (d) has had positive and negative golf experiences based upon service quality issues at various courses will likely develop high levels of position involvement both with specific makes of clubs and with favorite courses.

Finally, our model predicts that volitional choice will be influenced by attraction, risk probability, and risk consequence. People try to exert freedom of choice for pursuing goal-directed actions (i.e., volitional choice),

when activities are personally important and pleasurable (Brehm & Brehm, 1981; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Also, individuals who are concerned with risk consequences associated with poor decisions, and who perceive high probability of making an inadequate choice (i.e., risk probability) often desire to maintain volitional choice (Bagozzi, 1993; Robinson, 1992). For example, Lisa, who places importance on her performance, who experiences enjoyment from competing, and who has experienced negative consequences related to poorly organized races and poorly laid out courses, is likely to carefully scrutinize decision-making process involving a variety of races in which she has never run. Not so with Steve's decisions about where he might play golf. His volition is generally limited to options proposed by others. In between might be Carrie who is concerned about appropriate training routes, but may be less concerned with selecting an appropriate road race.

All of the examples in this section illustrate a problem with the model as presented: the conundrum of mixed involvement, and for that matter commitment, profiles. Few people score universally high, or low, for all facets (Havitz et al., 1994; Kapferer & Laurent, 1985). This profiling complicates facet-level interpretation of the model. Linear relationships are not likely to be the norm. Our discussion in the preceding section is relatively speculative because nowhere in the literature has anyone examined relationships between involvement and commitment at the facet level. For example, It seems very likely that Lisa will express fairly high psychological commitment on each of the five facets, but the model is not capable of predicting, a priori, which of the involvement facets most directly affect various commitment facets in her case.

### *Effects of Psychological Commitment on Resistance to Change*

As previously stated, many scholars (e.g., Buchanan, 1985; Crosby & Taylor, 1983; Heberlein & Vaske, 1977; Jacobs & Buchanan, 1981; Kiesler, 1977; Vaske, 1980) have indicated that a participant's psychological commitment to a brand results in her/his resistance to change. Resistance to change includes two facets: (1) preference stability, and (2) resistance to counter persuasion. The first facet refers to the degree of stable and/or "biased" intention to maintain people's preferences of a brand (Crosby & Taylor, 1983; Pritchard et al., 1996). Crosby and Taylor indicated that two mechanisms of preference stability are operative: (a) "selective perception" to protect preference and/or reduce dissonance; and (b) "biased post-decision evaluative process" to defend original decisions (i.e., biased reliance on prior preference as the basis for an overall evaluation). The second facet (i.e., resistance to counter persuasion) reflects the strength of resistance or block against persuasive communication which might provide attractive information about alternative choices (Dick & Basu, 1994; Kiesler, 1971).

Similar to the relationship between involvement and psychological commitment, high psychological commitment does not linearly result in a high degree of resistance to change; in part because individual scores on the facets

of psychological commitment are unlikely to fluctuate in tandem. But, it is also important to recognize personal characteristics and social-situational factors as potential moderators of the relationship. The components of the moderators are identical to those described for the relationship between involvement and psychological commitment. Bryan (1977) suggested that skills and expected benefits interact with level of commitment in explaining recreation specialization continuum in which highly committed people resist change in their preferences of techniques and settings. Also, Vaske (1980) indicated that the relationship between commitment and substitution is influenced by the moderating effects of social groups/group memberships. For example, Steve may develop psychological commitment and stronger resistance to change to golf if desirable benefits accrue from golf participation (e.g., socialization and escape from work day life), especially if his softball team is playing poorly and there is dissension among teammates.

### *Effects of Resistance to Change on Behavioral Loyalty*

We conceptualize resistance to change as the most important antecedent of loyalty (e.g., Crosby & Taylor, 1983; Dick & Basu, 1994; Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978; Pritchard et al., 1997). Researchers generally agree that loyalty measures should combine both behavioral and attitudinal components (e.g., Asael, 1992; Backman & Crompton, 1991; Backman & Veldkamp, 1995; Howard et al., 1988). For example, Backman and Crompton conceptualized loyalty as having two-dimensions (psychological attachment and behavioral consistency). Psychological attachment describes the degree of a participant's general attitude toward an activity, whereas behavioral consistency assesses the intensity of participation. According to various combinations of high or low scores on the two-dimensions, Backman and Crompton classified individuals into one of the following four categories: a) high loyalty, b) latent loyalty, c) spurious loyalty, or d) low loyalty. Similarly, Dick and Basu (1994) conceptualized that customer loyalty can be operationalized by two dimensions: a) "relative attitude" derived from both "attitude strength" (i.e., the degree of an individual's attitudinal strength toward a brand), and "attitude differentiation" (i.e., the individual's perception of differences among brands), and b) "repeat patronage" (behavioral measure).

Although the models suggested by Backman and Crompton (1991) and Dick and Basu (1994) are useful, their operationalizations do not address dynamic processes underlying the development of loyalty. Also, the multidimensional nature of the behavioral and attitudinal factors is not explicitly reflected in their operationalizations, even though Dick and Basu's attitudinal measure consists of two elements: attitudinal strength and attitudinal differentiation. Thus, in the proposed model, we emphasize a dynamic process in the development of loyalty and the multidimensionality of both behavioral and attitudinal factors of loyalty.

First, we outline the dynamic relationship between involvement and loyalty in which individuals go through a psychological process in the devel-

opment of loyalty (i.e., involvement → psychological commitment → resistance to change → behavioral loyalty). Second, behavioral loyalty may be operationalized by at least six components including a) duration of brand use, b) frequency of brand use, c) intensity of brand use, d) sequence of brand use, e) proportion or percentage of brand use, and f) probability of brand use over time.

Duration refers to long-term length of participation, patronage, or use (Park, 1996). Duration of participation and length of behavioral loyalty are related, but not synonymous (Havitz & Howard, 1995). Lisa has, for example, registered for the same two high-prestige triathalons in each of her three competitive seasons. In addition, she has bought the same brand of running shoes every year. Carrie, though less involved with the activity of running, has participated in the same mid-pack (low-key) oriented 5 kilometer race in each of the past 10 years. When she needs running shoes she buys whatever is on sale.

Frequency refers to number of purchases, uses, or participation over a specified time-period; for example, a week, month, season, or year (e.g., Park, 1996). Lisa purchases new running shoes three times a year, runs six days a week year-round, and participates in an average of two races per month in-season. By contrast, Carrie purchases new shoes once every 18 months, runs three days a week in-season (less in the winter) and races once per year. It should be noted that frequency of use is both activity and situation specific. Most casual and professional observers would classify Carrie's behavior as being relatively infrequent in comparison with other runners. However, were Hideo to exhibit the same behavior with respect to golf (e.g., new equipment every 18 months, three rounds per week in-season, and one tournament per year) he would almost certainly be considered a very frequent participant.

Intensity is defined in terms of hours per week (or day, month, or year) devoted to purchase, use, or participation (e.g., Park, 1996). Hideo follows PGA scores in the newspaper and subscribes to a golf magazine, plays six hours of golf at his favorite course weekly in-season and two hours per week at an indoor range during the off-season. Steve rarely reads anything about golf, averages less than one-half hour of golf weekly in-season and does not play at all during the off-season.

Sequence of brand use has been defined in terms of undivided loyalty (e.g., AAAAAA), divided loyalty (ABABAB), unstable loyalty (AAAABB), and no loyalty (ABCDEF) (Brown, 1952; Pritchard et al., 1992). Hideo exhibits a divided loyalty pattern among several golf courses, perhaps based upon where he prefers to play with friends versus where he prefers to entertain business clients. However, he also has long-duration, undivided loyalty to brands of shoes, clothing, and golf clubs.

Similarly, proportion of purchase refers to the percentage of brand loyalty. Hideo plays perhaps 80% of his golf at the two aforementioned courses and purchases 100% of his equipment from a single pro-shop which carries merchandise from the previously mentioned manufacturers (Pritchard et al., 1992).

Probability of purchase differs from the previous five measures in that its intent is to predict future behavioral loyalty rather than quantify past behavior. Lipstein (1959) proposed "average staying time" which was calculated as the reciprocal of the probability of brand switching (Pritchard et al., 1992). Side bets, sunk costs, and social norms provide useful information in predicting probability of purchase.

Since each component of behavioral loyalty reflects a unique form of repeat patronage (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978; Park, 1996; Pritchard et al., 1992), we consider all of these components rather than operationalizing behavioral loyalty as a unidimensional concept. Also, researchers must pay attention to differences in recreational activity types and brand types to adequately assess behavioral loyalty. For example, a running workout is in a sense easier to plan than is a golf outing because playing golf requires relatively more preparation (e.g., preparing golf clubs, finding partners, accessing a golf course, and booking a tee-off time), money, and time commitment (to actually play a round). Indeed, runners must participate, on an annual basis, at rates five times those of golfers in order to be considered avid participants (Howard, 1992). Pritchard (1992) noted that proportion of purchase was the most compatible indicator of behavioral loyalty in the contexts of hotel and airline use, whereas frequency of use seems more appropriate for golf participation. As already noted, Park (1997) found that global involvement and commitment scores are not equally effective in predicting various aspects of behavioral loyalty.

Finally, we conceptualize psychological commitment and resistance to change as antecedents of behavioral loyalty. Dick and Basu (1994) argued that attitudinal loyalty consists of attitude strength and attitude differentiation. We believe that attitude strength is reflected in informational consistency, position involvement, and confidence as facets of psychological commitment, and in preference stability and resistance to counter persuasion as facets of resistance to change. In addition, we argue that attitude differentiation is reflected in informational complexity, confidence, and volitional choice as facets of psychological commitment, and in preference stability and resistance to counter persuasion as facets of resistance to change.

For example, golfers like Hideo who demonstrate (a) consistency between their beliefs and attitudes toward specific brands (e.g., golf courses and equipment), (b) self-image through their commitment to the brand, (c) confidence associated with their attitudes and behaviors toward the brand, (d) stable and biased intention to maintain their preferences for the brand, and (e) resistance to counter persuasion, express high attitudinal strength. Similarly, those golfers who have (a) a complex cognitive structure regarding a specific brand (e.g., golf courses and memberships), (b) free choice in a decision-making process of the brand use, (c) confidence associated with their attitudes and behaviors toward the brand, (d) stable and biased intention to maintain their preference of the brand, and (e) resistance to counter persuasion toward the brand, tend to maintain attitude differentiation. Thus, we suggest that the facets of psychological commitment and the facets of resistance to change reflect the attitudinal components of



loyalty; a conceptualization consistent with most loyalty literature (e.g., Beatty & Kahle, 1988; Day, 1969; Pritchard et al., 1992).

Again, personal characteristics and social-situational factors play moderating roles in the explanation of the effects of resistance to change on behavioral loyalty. The importance of the moderating factors in influencing loyalty has been suggested by a number of researchers (e.g., Allen & Meyer, 1990; Backman & Crompton, 1991; Dick & Basu, 1994; Howard et al., 1988, Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978). For example, Backman and Crompton (1991) found that competence and side bets played a role in discriminating between loyalty categories. Allen et al. (1992) have shown the moderating effects of emotions on loyalty. Furthermore, Howard et al. (1988) noted the importance of situational factors, including relationships with program leaders, socialization opportunities, and program formats in explaining loyalty. Also, Dick and Basu (1994) suggested that social/situational factors such as social norms, sunk costs, and incentives for brand switching can moderate the effects on loyalty.

#### *Feedback Effects of Loyalty*

Our model suggests that a participant's behavioral loyalty level will provide a feedback effect on her/his level of involvement. High association between loyalty and involvement has been documented (e.g., Assael, 1992; Backman & Crompton, 1991; Kim et al., 1997; Park, 1996; Shamir, 1988). For instance, loyal individuals tend to ascribe personal importance to both activities and products (Backman & Crompton, 1991), which is a central facet of involvement (Mittal, 1989). Also, loyal individuals are likely to emphasize the sign value of the activity as a way of demonstrating social identity and self identity (e.g., Dimanche & Samdahl, 1994). These feedback effects of loyalty on involvement are expected to be influenced by personal moderators and social-situational moderators.

#### *Summary of the Proposed Model*

Beginning with discussion of the antecedents of involvement, we have explained relationships between involvement, psychological commitment, and behavioral loyalty from a path analytic perspective. Our proposed model highlights the mediating roles of psychological commitment and resistance to change in the involvement-loyalty linkage. To become loyal participants, individuals go through sequential psychological processes including: (a) the formation of high level(s) of involvement in an activity, (b) the development of psychological commitment(s) to a brand, and (c) the maintenance of strong attitudes toward resistance to change preferences of the brand.

Researchers also need to take the moderating functions into account in order to further explain the above mediating relations. If only the mediating functions of the psychological processes explain the involvement-loyalty relationship, then all individuals must develop behavioral loyalty in identical

ways, regardless of individual differences and social-situational conditions. In reality, because of differences in the moderating factors, it is impossible to expect that the causal function of involvement  $\rightarrow$  psychological commitment  $\rightarrow$  resistance to change  $\rightarrow$  behavioral loyalty is the same for all individuals. Therefore, at each level of the causal relationships, researchers need to consider the moderating roles of personal and social-situational characteristics. Finally, researchers should not ignore feedback effects of behavioral loyalty. Highly loyal people tend to demonstrate high levels of involvement, and the personal moderators and the social-situational moderators are likely to influence these feedback effects. The proposed model outlines the dynamic and cyclical relationships between involvement, psychological commitment, and loyalty.

Consistent with most leisure and consumer literature on involvement, psychological commitment, and loyalty (e.g., Backman & Crompton, 1991; Dick & Basu, 1994; Havitz & Dimanche, 1997; Pritchard et al., 1992), the proposed model assumes that an individual's involvement is interpreted at a recreational *activity or product level*, while her/his psychological commitment, resistance to change, and behavioral loyalty are interpreted at a recreational *brand level* (e.g., site, program, equipment type). The model illustrates that individuals initially form involvement(s) with an activity (e.g., running), then gradually develop psychological commitment to brands (e.g., running shoes, workout courses, specific road-races), and consequently, develop behavioral loyalty to brand(s). However, it may be worthwhile to explore other possibilities (e.g., all constructs at an activity or product level, all constructs at a brand level, or involvement at a brand level followed by the other constructs at an activity or product level) to better understand the relationships between involvement, psychological commitment, and loyalty. The present model does not outline these options.

### Conclusions

Behavioral loyalty may be a key goal of any recreational agency, in part because "[l]oyal customers provide a base of economic support for specific programs, as well as broad support for the agency's overall goals" (Howard et al., 1988, p. 50). Perhaps more importantly, behavioral loyalty may over time bring satisfaction, mental and physical health, and other personal and social benefits to participants themselves (e.g., Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Oliva, Oliver, & MacMillan, 1992). Although public agencies' missions generally mandate the attraction and inclusion of unresponsive people, loyal participants or clients seem to provide a variety of benefits both for agencies and for the participants or clients themselves. Thus, cultivation of loyal participants or clients should not be a threat to the mandates of public agencies. We have developed this paper for the purpose of assisting researchers and practitioners in thinking about the mechanisms and conditions of why and how consumers develop their loyalty to brand(s). In particular, this paper has discussed a conceptual framework which can provide a heuristic basis

for examining the relationships between involvement, psychological commitment, and loyalty.

When examining the proposed model, researchers should consider differences in activity types, product types, brands, and participants' experience levels (Beatty et al., 1988; Dimanche et al., 1991; Kuentzel & McDonald, 1992; Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Pritchard et al., 1992; Zaichkowsky, 1990). We expect that the nature of the relationships between involvement, psychological commitment, and loyalty varies according to the differences in the above factors. For instance, Gahwiler's (1995) work suggested that the involvement-loyalty relationship may differ between those individuals who have just started a specific recreational activity and those individuals who have had extensive experience in the activity.

The proposed model can be empirically examined by the use of a latent-variable structural equation modeling (SEM), such as the LISREL program (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1988), the EQS program (Bentler, 1985), or AMOS (Arbuckle, 1997). Empirical examinations of the model must acknowledge the diversity of a contemporary society. For example, differences in gender, ethnicity-race, social class, marital status, employment status, disability status, sexual orientation, and other individual backgrounds and specific life circumstances could be taken into account to examine the involvement-commitment-loyalty relationships. Initial exploration may be more successful if these variables can be controlled and/or if homogeneous samples are selected at the outset. Subsequent research should include sufficiently large samples if such differences are to be adequately explored.

Though not the purpose of this paper, application of the model should produce practical implications. If a series of empirical studies confirm the proposed relationships, practitioners could better understand the mechanisms and conditions of why and how existing and/or potential participants develop their loyalty to a program, a product, and/or an agency. The proposed model not only includes involvement and loyalty, but also third variables such as the antecedents of involvement, the mediator variables (i.e., psychological commitment and resistance to change), and the moderator variables (i.e., individual characteristics and social-situational factors). Thus, the proposed model can be a useful tool in monitoring people's psychological processes and conditions of developing their loyalty to a program or an agency (Backman & Crompton, 1989). It seems important to pay attention to both targeted marketing strategy and the variables in the proposed model to understand the characteristics of loyal participants, and realistically, to maximize the number of loyal participants.

However, it must be cautioned that the proposed model is a working model, not a complete model. There may be other alternatives with regard to the directionality of the relationships, mediating and moderating functions, etc. which might better explain these complex and dynamic relationships. Also, the consequences of loyalty are not explicit in the model. Further efforts are required to examine the consequences of loyalty, because an understanding of the consequences of loyalty has important theoretical and

practical implications (e.g., Backman & Veldkamp, 1995; Dick & Basu, 1994; Howard et al., 1988).

Research on leisure benefits is an important area of inquiry in the leisure field. However, marketing and consumer researchers have not extensively incorporated the notion of leisure benefits into their studies. Because of the similar experiential qualities among serious leisure (e.g., Stebbins, 1992), flow (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), involvement, commitment, and loyalty, and the potential links of these experiences to leisure benefits (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi & Kleiber, 1991; Mannell, 1993), it is important to examine why and how highly involved, committed, and loyal participants experience benefits and improve quality of their lives. Also, it is interesting to compare people at different stages of the developmental processes of loyalty, with regard to the type and level of benefits gained from their recreational participation.

In contrast, some intrapersonal, interpersonal, and/or structural constraints (e.g., Jackson et al., 1993) can negatively influence participants' loyalty. An examination of the continuation or discontinuation of participation is also an important area of research (Backman, 1991; Backman & Crompton, 1989; Gahwiler, 1995; Howard et al., 1988). For example, Backman (1991) found that the relationship between participants' loyalty and perceived constraints significantly explains the discontinuation of participation.

We recommend that researchers should examine not only the long-term consequences of loyalty, but also the developmental processes of loyalty, in order to more clearly understand the behavioral and psychological characteristics of loyal participants. Thus, an examination of the model and/or alternative models from longitudinal studies is particularly important. This paper provides one way of thinking about the relationships between involvement, psychological commitment, and loyalty.

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