

## The Effect of Involvement and Value Expectation on Online Consumers' Behavioral Reactions

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this research is to empirically test the effect involvement and value expectation have on online consumers' behaviors. Qualitative research was conducted using a survey. Research results suggest that the emotional and behavioral reaction can be strengthened based on interaction with involvement and value expectation. Specifically, when shopping online the preference and purchase intention can be strengthened with high involvement and hedonic value expectation. Meanwhile, the influence of value expectation confirmed in this research is meaningful in that it expanded from previous research that viewed value as the 'result' of consumer value exchange behaviors. It expanded the concept of value by including the 'expectation' of value, a strong motive that makes consumers participate in various web-based marketing communication activities. Moreover, product preference and purchase intention are higher when hedonic value expectation is higher. This suggests that consumers' emotional and experience aspect is as meaningful in the concept of value as the rational aspect represented by 'price' and 'quality'. Thus, in a web-based consumption environment, this research supports the change in paradigm that consumers' status as not only logical problem solvers but also experience and entertainment pursuers is rising.*

**Keywords:** Online Consumers, Hedonic Value Expectation, Utilitarian Value Expectation, Involvement

### 1. Introduction

Recently, rapid expansion and settlement of the online shopping environment has induced continuous change in consumers' purchase behavior. This is closely related to the ubiquity, timeliness, reciprocity, interactivity, usefulness, simplicity and etc. shown in the online-based marketing communication environment (Kim, 2007; Monsuwe, et al., 2004; Fortin & Dholakia, 2005). Moreover, when considering that the online marketing environment has continuous variability due to the development of advanced technology, the online-based consumption environment also naturally creates the necessity to reconfirm the effect of various factors that have influenced consumer behavior. From this perspective, as information from the website makes consumers react with various affective and conative behaviors with interaction, studying online consumers' behavioral reactions is becoming increasingly important.

Involvement has traditionally functioned as a key concept that helps understand consumers in the social science field. Previously, involvement has been researched in various fields of consumer behavior as a variable that influences consumer behavior (Antil, 1984), a factor that influences consumer experience (Koufaris, 2002), a factor that helps understand consumer decisions (Chakravarti & Janiszewski, 2003), a factor that influences purchase intention (Dijkstra et.al, 2005), a factor that influences positive attitude (Sanchez-Franco et al, 2009) and etc. In this sense, there is a wide range of research on involvement, but the rapid paradigm changes in environments such as the media environment, web-based marketing environment, advanced technology based communication environment and etc. require continuous confirmation of the influence of involvement to understand consumer behavior, which has become more elaborate. Value expectation interdisciplinary applies the concept of 'expectation' to 'value', and functions as a factor inducing voluntary participation in marketing communication activity (Kim, 2008).

This expands the importance of 'value' awareness with the concept of 'expectation' as a factor that influences satisfaction (McDougall & Levesque, 2000), a factor that influences repurchase (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001), and a factor that influences intention of actions. From this perspective, value expectation is gaining attention as a new topic for understanding consumer behavior. This paper focuses on applying interactive conditions of involvement and value expectation into the real field of online consumers 'behavior in order to test their effect on consumers' affective and conative reactions. Thus, the objective of this research is to examine how involvement and value expectation affect online consumers 'affective and conative reactions. To examine these questions, this research tries to test and compare the effect of involvement and value expectation on online consumers 'behavioral outcomes measured by preference at an affective level and their purchase intention at a conative level.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1. Websites as interactive media

Websites' influence as reciprocal media has continued to expand and strengthen with its informational function, entertaining function, social function and etc. The influence of web-based platforms for consumers' online purchase behavior is growing especially more along with the development of advanced technology. Consumers' search for information in a web-based online shopping environment is reflected differently depending on the perspective: website-consumer relationship perspective, website characteristic perspective, consumer perception perspective, economic perspective, etc. In the website-consumer relationship perspective, the importance of interactivity is suggested. When considering that interactivity consists of subjective control, reciprocal communication, and timeliness of response (Kim, 2007), this perspective suggests that the higher the interactivity, the more consumers voluntarily participate in searching for information. Moreover, positive interactivity helps construct and maintain a positive relationship. From the website characteristic perspective, more convenient searching leads to more searching for information online (Ratchford, et al., 2001). From the consumer perception perspective, consumers who have a positive perception about online shopping are shown to be active in information searching (Klein, 1998). Generally, the higher involvement and immersion are, consumers are more active in searching for information online. Also, searching for online information increases when information searching ability is higher and motives are bigger. From the product characteristic perspective, the more consumers are price-sensitive and the more uncertain knowledge about the product is, searching for information online increases (Ratchford, et al., 2001). From an economic perspective, the lower prices are for information searching, consumers actively search for information (Peterson & Merino, 2003). <Table 1> shows the information pursuit tendencies of consumers in a web-based online shopping environment. It must be considered that influence caused by overlapping of the perspectives also exists. Thus, the perspectives are not mutually exclusive, but have complementary or mutually supporting relationship.

<Table 1> Information pursuit tendencies of consumers in a web-based online shopping environment

Perspectives	Detail
Website-Consumer Relationship Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Suggests the importance of interactivity through websites functioning as media</li> <li>- Includes both functional interactivity induced by websites' structural traits and emotional interactivity induced by consumers' cognitive traits</li> <li>- The higher interactivity is, there is an increase in online consumers' voluntary search for information</li> </ul>
Websites' Characteristic Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The more convenient searching is, the more information is searched</li> <li>- The stronger the flow, searching for information online is invigorated</li> </ul>
Consumers' Perception Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consumers who are affirmative towards online shopping are active about searching for information online</li> <li>- Consumers who are highly involved or highly immersed are active in searching for information online</li> <li>- Searching for online information increases when information searching capabilities are higher and motives are bigger.</li> </ul>
Product Characteristic Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Searching for information online increases the more consumers are price-sensitive</li> <li>- Searching for information online increases the more information about the produce is uncertain.</li> </ul>
Economical Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The lower prices are for information searching, the more consumers actively search for information</li> </ul>

Meanwhile, research on actual online shopping and online purchase behavior suggests that online shopping increases purchase convenience (Burke, 1996). Online shopping influences impulse buying (Donthu & Garcia, 1999), but simultaneously influences rational purchasing as well (Hajli, 2013).

From this perspective, research that actually applies variables that influence consumers' purchase behavior during continuous change of the web-based environment on a website functioning as media is meaningful at this time.

## **2.2. Involvement**

The concept of involvement has been applied to various fields of marketing, communication, consumer behavior, psychology, education, etc. This signifies the interdisciplinary applicability of involvement, but it also means that the definition and the measurement depend on researchers' subject of interest and major. On a level basis, involvement is divided into high and low levels (Assael et al. 1984; Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Previous research suggests that the level of involvement influences consumers' experiences (Koufaris, 2002) and the forming of consumers' positive attitudes (Sanchez-Franco et al, 2009). These results mean that the higher the level of involvement, the greater the amount of information searched, generally. For duration, involvement is divided into situational and enduring involvement (Bloch, 1982; Richins et al., 1992), enduring, situational, and response involvement (Houston & Rothschild, 1978). As types of involvement, Park and Young (1986) suggest involvement as cognitive and affective dimensions. Former research about variables affecting involvement insists that the interaction among consumers, products, and situations takes an important role in determining involvement (Bloch & Richins, 1983), personality, product, situation, and communication affect purchase involvement (Antil, 1984), self-expressive and hedonic importance, practical relevance, and purchase risk affect a level of purchase involvement (Jain & Srinivasan, 1990). Meanwhile, previous research about the effect involvement has on consumer attitude shows that involvement affects information searching (Celsi & Olson, 1988), affects a positive attitude (Andrews, Durvasula & Akhter, 1990), induces differences in consumer responses (Shamadasani, Stanaland, & Tan, 2001), and affects consumers' purchase intention (Dijkstra et al, 2005). Such previous research shows that involvement is still an important concept for understanding consumer behavior and stimulates the necessity for continuously confirming its influence in the recent changing web-based marketing communication environment.

## **2.3. Consumer Value: Value Expectation**

Post-consumption activity has been regarded as an important factor to understand consumer behavior, and the concept of value has been studied as one of the major factors to understand post-consumption activities. According to Zeithaml (1988), the general use of value is related with the following perspectives; price, an exchanging process, an intervening variable, and a subjective factor. Also, price and quality have been outlined as the two basic components of value (Dodds et al., 1991; Monroe, 1990). This is because traditionally, value in the consumer behavior field has been related to rational problem solving and logical task accomplishment. In this context, Szymanski & Hise (2000) suggest the importance of practical values such as information and convenience in shopping satisfaction.

However, a new perspective viewing consumer value appeared in the 1990s. Accordingly, value in the fields of consumers' purchasing behavior was mainly divided into utilitarian and hedonic value (Babin et al., 1994). Utilitarian value is goal-orientated (Ryu et al., 2010), and hedonic value is pleasure and fun oriented. This means that utilitarian value is related to rational consumer behavior, and hedonic value is related to emotional, empirical consumer behavior. Babin et al. (1994) insist that utilitarian value is regarded as 'dark side' of consumer value, while hedonic value is regarded as 'fun side' of consumer value. They see the hedonic value as a fun-oriented, pleasure-based, and emotion-based perspective. This phenomenon derives from strengthening the perspective viewing consumers as emotional experiences and pleasure pursuers as an equal to the traditional perspective viewing consumers as rational problem solvers.

Thus a wide range of research on hedonic value has been conducted. This phenomenon reflects the importance of emotional factors whose meaning had been strengthened in the marketing, consumer behavior, communication fields and etc. after the 1980s. Bloch et al. (1986) suggested the key section of the ongoing search as hedonic value. He considered hedonic motives more important than construction of information in consumer behavior. Fisher and Arnold (1990) focused on consumers' gratification induced from hedonic pleasure. Turley & Milliman (2000) pointed out the importance of entertaining value in shopping, and Childers et al. (2001) confirmed the importance of pleasure in shopping experiences.

Such research results, based on the point that positive value perception positively influences satisfaction (Anderson & Mittal, 2000; Mathwick, Malhotra, & Rigdon, 2001), emphasize the importance of hedonic value based on emotional experience as much as utilitarian value, the center of rational problem solving. Accordingly, Babin et al. (1994) proposed that measurements of consumption value must check both utilitarian value and hedonic value.

Meanwhile, Kim (2008) pointed out that previous utilitarian, hedonic consumer value research was related to after conducting purchases, and applied 'expectation' before conducting purchases to the field of consumer value. Therefore, he suggested consumer value as utilitarian value expectation and hedonic value expectation (2008), social value expectation (2012), network value expectation (2013a), relational value expectation (2013b, 2015), etc. This change in perspective means that consumers' value expectation can be applied to all areas of society. Moreover, it reflects the change in consumer value paradigm in which value expectation can ultimately be a motive for consumers to participate in various communication activities.

<Figure 1> shows an edited version of the overall perspectives to figure out consumer value and the change of its paradigm cited from previous research (Kim, 2017).

### **3. Purpose of the Study**

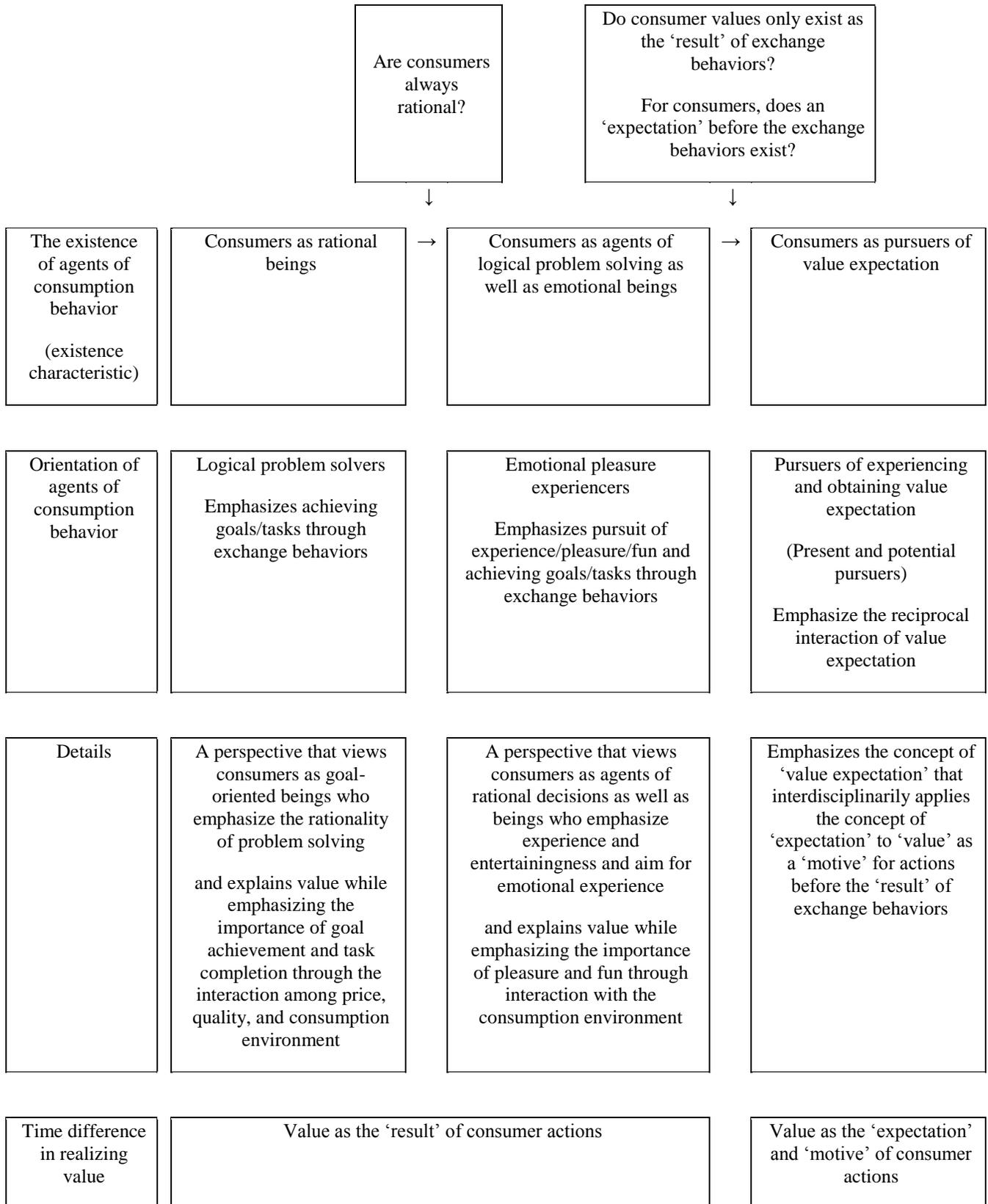
The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of involvement and value expectation on online consumers' behavioral reactions measured by preference as the affective level, and purchase intention as the conative level by using actual websites. Based on the theoretical discussion above, the following set of research questions was developed. 'How do involvement and value expectation affect online consumers' affective and conative reactions?'

### **4. Methodology**

To test the topic, this study followed the quantitative research method based on a survey about the subject. The program SPSS 20.0 was used to analyze the data. A convenience-sample of this study consists of university students routinely using computers. A sample of 240 students participated in this research. From the pre-survey laptop computers were selected as gender-neutral products. For this research, general laptop computers' websites were used to test online consumers' behaviors. To test the influence of the levels of involvement, this study used Zaichkowsky's Personal Involvement Inventory (PII, 1985). By using the PII consisting of 20 items with seven semantic scales, the responses were split into two categories: 'high' (an average score of over 3.5 points) and 'low' (an average score of under 3.5 points). To categorize online consumers' value expectation, this study developed fourteen questions with seven semantic scales by adapting Babin et al.'s scale (1994, p.649) and Kim's scale (2008). By applying the results of the factor analysis on the pilot samples into this study, these questions were split into those for measuring utilitarian value expectation and hedonic value expectation.

Therefore, both utilitarian and hedonic values expectation consist of seven questions with seven semantic scales. Using these scales, the value expectation of a consumer was defined as UVE or HVE depending on which one the total value of a consumer's answers was closer to. To test its reliability, an internal consistency analysis was executed. The analysis indicated that the internal consistency of both utilitarian value expectation (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.94$ ) and hedonic value expectation (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.93$ ) were high. <Table 1> shows the result of factor analysis and reliability analysis on consumers' value expectation.

<Figure 1> The overall perspectives to figure out consumer value and the change of its paradigm\*



\* Kim, Chulho, (2017), Understanding Advertising Planning with Interdisciplinary, Integrated Symbiology Studies, p.128. Hankyungsa, Seoul Korea. (Modified)

**<Table 1> The Result of Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis on Value Expectation**

Value Expectation	Items	Factor Loading	
		Factor 1	Factor 2
UVE	06 I expected to find just the item(s) I was looking for while shopping at this website.	.855	
	07 I expected to accomplish just what I wanted to by visiting this website.	.848	
	02 I expected to complete this task very quickly.	.840	
	04 I expected to feel really smart about this shopping experience.	.839	
	03 I expected to feel that this shopping experience was successful.	.832	
	05 I expected that I would need to shop elsewhere to complete my shopping.	.814	
	01 By visiting this website, I expected that I could buy what I really needed to buy.	.802	
	Eigen Value	7.80	
	Cumulative Percentage	55.7	
Cronbach's $\alpha$	0.94		
HVE	04 While shopping, I expected to be immersed in exciting new products.		.832
	06 I expected the time I spent for shopping to be truly enjoyable.		.814
	07 I expected to have a good time while browsing this website, because I would be able to act on the spur of the moment.		.805
	05 I expected to be able to do fantasize a lot while shopping.		.800
	01 I expected this shopping experience to be truly joyful.		.792
	02 I expected to enjoy it for its own sake, not just for the items I may have purchased.		.792
	03 I expected to browse a while, not because I had to, but because I wanted to.		.788
	Eigen Value		2.38
	Cumulative Percentage		72.7
Cronbach's $\alpha$		0.93	

N=212

To test the consumers' preference as an affective reaction this study developed three questions based on former research (Yang & Chae, 2004; Hong & Park, 2005). To test consumers' purchase intention as a conative reaction, this study developed three questions based on former research (Bearden, et.al, 1984). The internal consistency of both preference and purchase intentions were high (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.90, 0.92$ , respectively). <Table 2> shows the questions for measuring consumers' preference and purchase intention and the result of reliability analysis on each variable.

**<Table 2> Questions for Measuring Preference and Purchase Intention with the Result of Reliability Analysis on Each Variable**

DV	Items	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Preference	I like this product.	0.90
	This product appeals to me.	
	I favor this product.	
Purchase Intention	I want to buy this product.	0.92
	This product increases my purchase possibility.	
	I will buy this product.	

N=212

Subjects were asked to spend up to \$2,000 on a laptop computer. Therefore, they were instructed to browse websites and shopped for a laptop computer for about 15 minutes. The subjects were instructed not to review the website information to answer the questionnaire after finishing the browsing.

**5. Results**

212 useful questionnaires were gathered and used for the study. An independent sample t-test indicates there is significant difference in the preference of products between high and low involvement ( $t_{(210)}=15.31, p<0.05$ ). The mean of preference with high involvement was significantly higher ( $m=32.70, sd=5.56$ ) than that with low involvement ( $m=20.24, sd=6.28$ ). The test shows there is significant difference in purchase intention between high and low involvement ( $t_{(210)}=13.37, p<0.05$ ). The mean of purchase intention with high involvement was significantly higher ( $m=27.16, sd=6.42$ ) than that with low involvement( $m=15.38, sd=6.41$ ). <Table 3> shows the result of independent sample T-test.

**<Table 3> The result of independent sample T-test.**

Group Statistics					
	Involvement	N	Mean	SD	SEM
Preference	1 High	106	32.70	5.557	.540
	2 Low	106	20.24	6.276	.610
Purchase Intention	1 High	106	27.16	6.419	.623
	2 Low	106	15.38	6.412	.623

**Independent Sample T-Test**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-Test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	MD
Preference	EV Assumed	.933	.335	15.307	210	.000	12.462
	EV Not Assumed			15.307	206.97	.000	12.462
Purchase Intention	EV Assumed	.130	.719	13.371	210	.000	11.783
	EV Not Assumed			13.371	210.00	.000	11.783

In addition, an independent sample t-test indicates there is significant difference in the preference of products between utilitarian value expectation(UVE) and hedonic value expectation(HVE)( $t_{(210)}=-7.96, p<0.05$ ). The mean of preference with HVE was significantly higher( $m=30.75, sd=7.17$ ) than that with UVE( $m=22.49, sd=7.90$ ). Also the test shows there is significant difference in purchase intention between utilitarian value expectation(UVE) and hedonic value expectation(HVE)( $t_{(210)}=-9.89, p<0.05$ ). The mean of purchase intention with HVE was significantly higher( $m=26.35, sd=7.27$ ) than that with UVE ( $m=16.55, sd=7.15$ ). <Table 4> shows the result of independent sample T-test.

**<Table 4> The result of independent sample T-test.**

Group Statistics					
	Value	N	Mean	SD	SEM
Preference	1 UVE	110	22.49	7.897	.753
	2 HVE	102	30.75	7.173	.710
Purchase Intention	1 UVE	110	16.55	7.153	.682
	2 HVE	102	26.35	7.274	.720

**Independent Sample T-Test**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-Test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	MD
Preference	EV Assumed	5.880	.016	-7.955	210	.000	-8.264
	EV Not Assumed			-7.984	209.92	.000	-8.264
Purchase Intention	EV Assumed	.805	.371	-9.885	210	.000	-9.798
	EV Not Assumed			-9.879	208.22	.000	-9.798

A GLM-ANOVA shows the main effect of involvement on product preference was significant ( $F_{(1,208)}=26.28$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The test shows the main effect of value expectation on product preference was significant ( $F_{(1,208)}=11.36$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

Also, the interaction between involvement and value expectation was significant ( $F_{(1,208)}=17.07$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). In comparing means, high involvement-HVE condition showed highest product preference ( $m=35.58$ ,  $sd=5.88$ ) than any other involvement-value expectation condition. <Table 5> shows the result of a GLM-ANOVA.

**<Table 5> The result of a GLM-ANOVA.**

DV: Preference

Involvement	Value	Mean	SD	N
1 High	1 UVE	29.93	3.458	54
	2 HVE	35.58	5.879	52
	Total	32.70	5.557	106
2 Low	1 UVE	15.32	2.336	56
	2 HVE	25.74	4.444	50
	Total	20.24	6.276	106
Total	1	22.49	7.897	110
	2	30.75	7.173	102
	Total	26.47	8.601	212

Test of Between-Subjects Effects

DV: Preference

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Intercept	Hypothesis	150198.140	1	150198.140	13.634	.008
	Error	18020.276	1.636	11016.051 <sup>a</sup>		
Inv.	Hypothesis	7901.220	1	7901.220	26.282	.012
	Error	300.633	1	300.633 <sup>b</sup>		
Value	Hypothesis	3415.464	1	3415.464	11.361	.018
	Error	300.633	1	300.633 <sup>b</sup>		
Inv. *Value	Hypothesis	300.633	1	300.633	17.065	.000
	Error	3664.230	208	17.616 <sup>c</sup>		

A GLM-ANOVA shows the main effect of involvement on purchase intention was significant ( $F_{(1,208)}=35.63$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The test shows the main effect of value expectation on purchase intention was significant ( $F_{(1,208)}=24.61$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Also, the interaction between involvement and value expectation was significant ( $F_{(1,208)}=11.44$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). In comparing means, high involvement-HVE condition showed highest product preference ( $m=31.06$ ,  $sd=6.86$ ) than any other involvement-value expectation condition. <Table 6> shows the result of a GLM-ANOVA.

**<Table 6> The result of a GLM-ANOVA.**

DV: Purchase Intention

Involvement	Value	Mean	SD	N
1 High	1 UVE	23.41	2.660	54
	2 HVE	31.06	6.861	52
	Total	27.16	6.419	106
2 Low	1 UVE	9.95	2.004	56
	2 HVE	21.46	3.483	50
	Total	15.38	6.412	106
Total	1	16.55	7.153	110
	2	26.35	7.274	102
	Total	21.27	8.708	212

Test of Between-Subjects Effects

DV: Purchase Intention

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Intercept	Hypothesis	97530.320	1	97530.320	8.341	.011
	Error	21871.045	1,871	11692.533 <sup>a</sup>		
Inv.	Hypothesis	7032.501	1	7032.501	35.625	.010
		197.404	1	197.404 <sup>b</sup>		
Value	Hypothesis	4857.436	1	4857.436	24.607	.013
		197.404	1	197.404 <sup>b</sup>		
Inv. * Value	Hypothesis	197.404	1	197.404	11.434	.001
		3591.123	208	17.265 <sup>c</sup>		

## 6. Implications

This study examines the effect of involvement and value expectation on online consumers' behavior. The results show the greater effect of high involvement and hedonic value expectation on online consumers' behavior. The influence of 'value expectation' the results show has significance in which understanding value has been expanded into the concept of 'expectation', a strong motivator, making consumers participate in various web-based marketing communication activities. The significance is more advanced than the argument of former research regarding value as the 'result' of exchanging behavior. The finding indicates that the greater hedonic value expectation is, product preference and purchase intention are higher. It implies that consumers' emotional and empirical aspects are as important as their rational aspect represented by 'price' and 'quality' for a long time. In other words, this result supports the changing paradigm on consumers 'status in which consumers exist not as only rational problem solvers but also as experience and pleasure seekers.

In addition, the finding reminds us of the following common statement: consumers do not always recall what they are supposed to recall, they do not always prefer what they are supposed to prefer, and they do not always intend to purchase what they are supposed to intend to purchase. The research results also arouse the necessity to apply the influence of key variables to understand consumer behavior and apply these variables into practical marketing communication activities in a changed, web-based environment.

In the actual fields of web-based marketing communication, therefore, marketers and communication planners may use various marketing communication strategies and tactics for online consumers. For example, developing websites for high and efficient interactivity and using central cues (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) for highly involved consumers may be useful. When applying the reinforcement effect on value expectation and attitude from visual cues (Kim, 2012), selective use of visual cues in marketing communication could be considerable. Also, getting consumers to maintain persistent motivation by providing continual benefits, satisfaction, etc. and producing continual entertainment and/or pleasure may be crucial to achieving the marketer's objectives.

This study has several limitations. First, the product for this research is limited to laptop computers, suggesting the necessity of applying this research into various product categories for future studies. Second, there was no clearly fixed time frame for the survey. This study used 15 minutes of website browsing and shopping. It may result in different outcomes if a different time frame is applied. Third, this research was conducted with conventional laptop computers as the target, thus not considering each company's website format and differences in text and visual structures. These are also factors that can influence online consumers' attitudes. Therefore, future studies must fully consider these limitations.

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