

Issue: 18, 2010

Personal Values and Social Marketing: Some Research Suggestions

AUTHOR(S): Julie Anne Lee, Geoffrey N. Soutar, and Joanne Sneddon

ABSTRACT

Personal values, as motivational constructs, are likely to influence the types of social behaviours in which people engage. However, most of the research examining the relationship between personal values and social and ethical issues has focused on the relationship between one or two values and a very small range of attitudes or behaviours. The current paper focuses on Schwartz's value theory to suggest some methodological changes to advance our understanding of how individuals make such decisions.

ARTICLE

Introduction

Personal values indicate what is important to us in our lives, guide our behaviour, and reflect real differences between cultures, social classes, occupations, religions, and political orientations. Numerous studies across many disciplines (e.g., marketing, management, social psychology, sociology, political science, education, social work, law, economics) have confirmed the impact values can have on people's perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours, including consumer purchasing (e.g., buying environmentally friendly products and those made in their country). Values have also been related to a range of social issues, including people's disposition toward altruistic or philanthropic behaviour, organ donation registration, ethical decision making and attitudes, including bribery, coercion, deception, theft, and unfair discrimination, and environmental attitudes and behaviour.

The current paper focuses on one of the leading value theories, proposed by Schwartz (1992), which is discussed in the next section, as this theory has been well supported empirically, and has a relatively limited set of basic values and a theoretically derived structure between these values that add insight to our understanding of many types of behaviour. Specifically, we address the way in which personal values may potentially combine to influence the nature and types of behaviours people are likely to undertake.

Schwartz's Value Theory

Schwartz defined 10 basic values according to the goals that underlie them (see Table 1). Data from hundreds of samples in more than 80 countries support their existence and the relationships between them, as is illustrated in Figure 1. It is the theoretical relationships between the values, identified by a quasi-circumplex that differentiates Schwartz's (1992, 1994) theory from other values theories. This critical aspect has the potential to significantly add to our understanding of how values motivate different behaviours.

TABLE 1: Schwartz's 10 value types and the 45 associated individual level values items

Value-Type Definitions	Value Items For Each Value Type
Power: Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources.	Social power, authority, wealth
Achievement: Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards.	Successful, capable, ambitious, influential
Hedonism: Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself.	Pleasure, enjoying life, self-indulgent
Stimulation: Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life.	Daring, a varied life, an exciting life
Self-direction: Independent thought and action—choosing, creating, exploring.	Creativity, curious, freedom, independent, choosing own goals
Universalism: Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature.	Equality, a world at peace, social justice, broadminded, wisdom Protecting the environment, a world of beauty, unity with nature,
Benevolence: Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact.	Helpful, honest, forgiving, loyal, responsible
Tradition: Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide.	Humble, devout, accepting my portion in life, respect for tradition, moderate
Conformity: Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.	Politeness, obedient, honouring parents and elders, self-discipline
Security: Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self.	National security, social order, clean, family security, reciprocation of favours

Note. Adapted from Lee, Soutar, and Louviere (2008)

The Relationship between Values and Behaviour

The structure of interrelations between the basic values helps our understanding of how behaviours or attitudes are grounded in the values that oppose them and those that favour them. Indeed, the theory suggests an order of association of the 10 basic values with other variables, suggesting value-expressive attitudes and behaviours, such as those of interest to social marketers, are likely to be influenced by the relative importance attached to a range of values, rather than by the importance of any single value. Further, different combinations of values are likely to lead to different value-expressive attitudes and behaviour. As illustrated in Figure 1, adjacent values express compatible motivations, whereas conflicting values express opposing motivations.

For instance, the pursuit of self-direction is likely to conflict with the pursuit of security (which is on the opposite side of the quasi-circumplex structure), because attaining one is likely to block the attainment of the other. As an example, pursuing stimulation may encourage risk-taking behaviour, but this threatens and undermines security values that emphasize safety, harmony, and stability, such that those who place a high importance on stimulation and a very low importance on security are likely to take the most risks. Further, the relative importance attached to a range of values, rather than the importance of any single value, is likely to influence behaviour. For example, two people may attribute similar importance to

stimulation, but the relative importance of hedonism versus self-direction may influence their choices. Thus, a person who places great importance on hedonism and stimulation may be more likely to experiment with drugs, as these values both emphasize “affectively pleasant arousal”, whereas a person who places great importance on self direction and stimulation may look toward goal-directed challenges, as these values both emphasize “intrinsic motivation for mastery and openness to change” (Schwartz 1996, pp. 123-124) to satisfy their need for excitement. It is these relationships between values that have the potential to add insight for social marketers. For example, two people may attribute similar importance to universalism, but the relative importance of benevolence versus self-direction may influence their choices.



Figure 1: Schwartz’s Theoretical Structure of Values

Further, unlike generalised attitudes, the behaviours social marketers are interested in are likely to be resource constrained. That is, people are likely to trade-off among similarly motivated behaviours to express their value-system, rather than acting in a consistent manner across all similar situations. Taking philanthropy as an example, a person who places great importance on both universalism and self-direction is oriented toward “reliance upon one’s own judgment and comfort with the diversity of existence” (Schwartz 1996, p. 124). These people may be more variety seeking in their philanthropy, giving to a range of interesting charities that help others to become more empowered. In contrast, a person who places great importance on universalism and benevolence is oriented toward “concern for enhancement of other[s] and transcendence of selfish interests”, especially those with whom they are in frequent personal contact (Schwartz 1996, p. 124). These people are more likely to devote their time and money to supporting victims of natural disaster close to home. However, neither of these people could support every worthwhile cause that would satisfy their values system. Thus, people need to make choices or trade-offs about how they express their values in these contexts.

Despite this, a review of recent research found most studies relate a subset of Schwartz’s values with one or two outcome variables in a specific context, such as disposition toward altruistic behaviour or organ donation registration. Surprisingly few studies have included a

range of possible behaviours even in one specific context, such as ethical decision making, including bribery, coercion, deception, theft, and unfair discrimination, or environmental behaviours, including recycling, writing letters, voting for candidates, giving money, volunteering time, as well as attitudes toward the environment. No studies have examined the wide range of behaviours that might be expressive of different value combinations and that are likely to be of interest to most social marketers. Thus, it appears value-expressive behaviours have not yet been studied as trade-offs. Further, different combinations of value priorities have not been used to predict the context in which motivational values are satisfied.

Conclusions

The research directions outlined in the present paper have the potential to improve our understanding of the ways in which values combine to motivate a wide range of social marketing issues. Researchers should examine the way in which values combine to influence people's choice of behaviours and that there are a number of new techniques, such as Latent Class Modelling and archetype analysis, which may help uncover individual-level values structures that are related to different types of social and ethical behaviours.

References

- Lee, Julie A., Geoffrey N. Soutar and Jordan J. Louviere (2008), "An Alternative Approach to Measuring Schwartz's Values: The Best-Worst Scaling Approach," *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 90 (4), 335-347.
- Schwartz, Shalom H. (1992), "Universals in the Content and Structure of Values: Theoretical Advances and Empirical Tests in 20 Countries," In M. Zanna, ed. *Advances in experimental social psychology*, 25, 1-65. New York: Academic Press.
- Schwartz, Shalom H. (1994), "Are there Universal Aspects in the Structure and Content of Human Values?" *Journal of Social Issues*, 50, 19-45.
- Schwartz, Shalom H. (1996), "Value Priorities and Behavior: Applying The Theory Of Integrated Value Systems," in C. Seligman, J. M. Olson, and M. P. Zanna, eds. *The Psychology of Values: The Ontario Symposium*, 8, 1-24, Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.