



Personal Values Approach For A Better Understanding Of Consumer Behaviour

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Abstract:

Studies on consumer behaviour aims to gain a deeper understanding of individual consumer and their behaviour patterns to develop an understanding of what motivates and influences their buying behaviour. There is a significant shift in the focus of studies on consumer behaviour – from demographics to psychographics. The common psychographic variables used in studies relate to personality, values, attitudes, interests, and lifestyles. Studies indicate that personal values may be more useful than the other psychographic variables in understanding human behaviour as they are more central to an individual's cognitive system. Past studies have attempted to establish an association of values with individual buying decision behaviour.

This paper substantiates that 'personal values of individuals have significant influence on their behaviour as a consumer' by drawing references to few studies that had used personal values as the independent variable in understanding consumer behaviour. A brief introduction to various values scales used in consumer behaviour studies is also presented here.

Key words: Consumer Behaviour, Psychographics, Personal Values

1.What Are ‘Values’?

Values have been defined in a variety of ways by different researchers. Milton Rokeach (1979), a prominent social psychologist, defines values as “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence”. Rokeach continues that values are “core conceptions of the desirable within every individual and society. Values are culturally determined and regarded as the most central, abstract beliefs that guide attitudes and behaviours. They serve as standards or criteria to guide not only action but also judgment, choice, attitude, evaluation, argument, exhortation, rationalization, and...attribution of causality.” Rokeach contended that values may be more useful than attitudes in understanding human behaviour as they are more central to an individual's cognitive system. In his 1979 publication, Rokeach also stated that the consequences of human values would be manifested in all phenomena that social scientists might consider worth investigating. In order for any type of research to be successful, regardless of the field of study, people’s underlying values needed to be understood.

A further review of the literature suggests that there is an established relationship between values and consumer behaviour, which holds across cultures, to the extent that it not only affects attitudes, behaviour and decision making, but also can be used as a basis for effective consumer segmentation. This is justified in the study conducted by Maria D. De Juan Vigaray, Monali Hota, (2008) that values play a central and stable role in consumers’ cognitive structures and also impact upon their attitudes which in turn impacts upon their behaviour as consumers.

Schwartz (1994) opines that human values are "desirable trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity" In the context of consumer behaviour, values are commonly regarded as the most deeply rooted, abstract formulations of how and why consumers behave as they do. Values exert a major influence on the consumer behaviour thus serving as determinant for his/her decision making in a discreet choice among brands, products or in any situation where conflict of choice exists. It is widely accepted choice criteria are based on individual's social values. Selection procedures are influenced by criteria people have set for themselves to select and justify own and others actions (Schwartz, 1992).

Watkins, Leah; Gnoth, Juergen (2005) suggest that ‘Values are not tied to any specific object or situation, but they form the basis for more situationally specific attitudes and are consequently a causal influence on behaviour.

Personal values are acknowledged as an underlying determinant of consumers' attitudes and behaviour (Homer and Kahle, 1988; Shim and Eastlick, 1998). A significant number of researchers suggest that values affect various aspects of consumption behaviours and attitudes (Becker and Connor, 1981; Donthu and Cherian, 1994; Prakash and Munson, 1985; Valencia, 1989; Vinson et al., 1977). Social adaptation theory describes values as a type of social cognition that facilitates an individual's adaptation to the environment (Kahle, 1983; Kahle et al., 1980; Piner and Kahle, 1984). Values, the most abstract of the social cognitions, reflect the most basic characteristics of adaptation. They serve as the basis from which attitudes and behaviours are created (Hilton, 2003; Homer and Kahle, 1988). Numerous scholars have suggested that behaviour is a result of values and attitudes. Both Connor and Becker (1979) and Homer and Kahle (1988) propose that values provide the basis for the development of individual attitudes that lead to specific decision making behaviour. Williams (1968), states that a person's values serve as ‘‘the criteria or standards of preference’’. He argues that values have cognitive, affective, and directional aspects, which when fully conceptualized become criteria for judgment, preference, and choice. While he does not address attitudes, he claims ‘‘actual selections of behaviour result from concrete motivations in specific situations which are partly determined by prior beliefs and values of the actor’’ (Williams, 1979).

While connotation differs, there appears to be a general agreement that values influence behaviour. The purchasing behaviour of the customer reflects the actions which are based on a consequential relationship between his/her values and consequential wants and actions. In a nutshell, ‘values are the core principles that an individual upholds in life which directs thought and drives action’.

2. Value Scales

Values scales are psychological inventories used to determine the values that people endorse in their lives. They facilitate the understanding of both work and general values that individuals uphold. Most scales have been normalized and can therefore be used cross-culturally for vocational, marketing, and counselling purposes, yielding unbiased results. Values scales are used by psychologists, political, economists, and others interested in defining values, determining what people value, and evaluating

the ultimate function or purpose of values¹. While there are a large number of different instruments developed and used over the time there are few most commonly used social value classification systems in marketing research. A brief description of the prominent and widely used values scales used in consumer behaviour studies are presented here.

3.RVS -Rokeach Value Survey (1973)

Milton Rokeach, a prominent social psychologist, created the Rokeach Value Survey (RVS), which has been in use for more than 30 years. The instrument contains two sets of values each representing 18 individual items - Terminal Values refer to desirable end-states of existence. These are the goals that a person would like to achieve during his or her lifetime. These values vary among different groups of people in different cultures. Instrumental Values refer to preferable modes of behaviour. These are the means of achieving the terminal values.

The value survey asks subjects to rank the values in order of importance to them. The actual directions are as follows: "Rank each value in its order of importance to you. Study the list and think of how much each value may act as a guiding principle in your life. The Rokeach Value Survey has been extensively used in empirical work by psychologists, sociologists and marketers.

4.LOV - List of Values – Kahle (1983)

The list of values (LOV) is a widely used scale for the measurement of values in a variety of consumer behaviour contexts. Kahle has suggested the instrument is a viable candidate as a widely accepted measure for cross-cultural comparison of values. Developed at the University of Michigan Survey Research Centre, the LOV is based on the theoretical contributions of Maslow (1954), Rokeach (1973) and Feather (1975). The LOV items were derived by culling the values from the above sources from a much larger pool of values to the nine LOV items. Initiated by the work of Veroff et al., it was further developed by Lynn Kahle to address the limitations of the Rokeach value survey (RVS) and provide a more parsimonious measurement of personal values. The LOV was first used in America with 2264 adult respondents. Subsequent research has confirmed the reliability and validity of the LOV and applied it to many specific consumer behaviours, including opinion leadership, gift giving, and conformity in dress, advertising preferences and sports participation. The LOV scale has exhibited validity

¹ Source Wikipedia

comparable to the RVS while offering greater parsimony. The LOV has also been found to provide a higher percentage of items that respondents said influenced their lives. It offers the advantage of greater ease of administration and completion. The LOV is also considered more easily translatable and relates more closely to daily life and consumer behaviour.

The List of Values (LOV) typology draws a distinction between external and internal values, and it notes the importance of interpersonal relations in value fulfillment, as well as personal factors (i.e., self-respect, self-fulfillment) and apersonal factors (i.e., fun, security, excitement) in value fulfillment. In essence, the LOV measures those values that are central to people in living their lives, particularly the values of life's major roles (i.e., marriage, parenting, work, leisure, and daily consumptions). The LOV is most closely tied to social adaptation theory (Kahle, Beatty, and Homer 1986), and many studies suggest that the LOV is related to and/or predictive of consumer behavior and related activities (e.g., Homer and Kahle 1988; Kahle 1983).

The LOV is composed of nine values that can be scored in a number of ways. Each value can be evaluated on 9- or 10-point scales (very unimportant to very important), or the values can be rank ordered from most to least important. Also, some combination of the two methods can be used where each value is rated on 9- or 10-point scales and then subjects are asked to circle the one or two values that are most important to them in living their daily lives (e.g., Kahle 1983; Kahle et al. 1986; Kahle and Kennedy 1988). The nine values on the LOV are: self-respect, security, warm relationships with others, self fulfillment, a sense of accomplishment, being respected, a sense of belonging, fun and enjoyment, and excitement.

5. VALS -Values And Lifestyles

VALS ("Values, Attitudes and Lifestyles") is a proprietary research methodology used for psychographic market segmentation. VALS was developed in 1978 by social scientist and consumer futurist Arnold Mitchell and his colleagues at SRI International. It was immediately embraced by advertising agencies, and is currently offered as a product of SRI's consulting services division. VALS draws heavily on the work of Harvard sociologist David Riesman and psychologist Abraham Maslow. Both public television and radio of United States track customer loyalty using the VALS Psychographic segmentation system developed by SRI Consulting (Susan Myrland). The basic tenet of VALS is that people express their personalities through their behaviours. VALS

specifically defines consumer segments on the basis of those personality traits that affect behaviour in the marketplace. VALS uses psychology to analyze the dynamics underlying consumer preferences and choices.

However, it should be noted that VALS is a proprietary tool and use of VALS is restricted to permissions and applicable only within The US.

6.The VALS Segments Are As Follows

1. Innovators – Sophisticated, high self esteem, upscale and image is important
2. Thinkers – Conservative, practical, income allows many choices, look for value
3. Achievers – Goal oriented lifestyle, image is very important
4. Experiencers – Like “cool stuff,” like excitement and variety’ spend a high proportion of income on fashion
5. Believers – Conservative, like familiar and established brands
6. Strivers – Trendy and fun loving, money defines success, concerned about the opinion of others
7. Makers – Practical people, do it yourself, unimpressed by material possessions, prefer value to luxury
8. Survivors – Few resources, buy at a discount, very modest market, little motivation to buy

7.Schwartz's Value Inventory (SVI)

Shalom Schwartz (1992, 1994) used his 'Schwartz Value Inventory' (SVI) with a wide survey of over 60,000 people to identify common values that acted as 'guiding principles for one's life'. Schwartz identified and validated 10 value domains or distinct value groups with totally 56 or 57 values included. Values are rated by participants of the survey according to the importance of values for them. The domains represent either individualistic or collective values or combination of them and are viewed in a framework of four dimensions - openness to change, self-enhancement, conservation and self-transcendence. (Schwartz, 1992, 1994, 2006).

Schwartz Value Inventory assesses for the following values:

- achievement: personal success through the demonstration of competence in accordance with society's standards, e.g., ambition
- benevolence: preservation and enhancement of the welfare of others in one's immediate

social circle, e.g., forgiveness

- conformity: restraint of actions that violate social norms or expectations, e.g., politeness
- hedonism: personal gratification and pleasure, e.g., enjoyment of food, sex, and leisure
- power: social status, prestige, dominance, and control over others, e.g., wealth
- security: safety, harmony, and stability of society, e.g., law and order
- self-direction: independent thought and action, e.g., freedom
- stimulation: excitement, novelty, and challenge in life, e.g., variety
- tradition: respect for and acceptance of one's cultural or religious customs, e.g., religious devotion
- universalism: understanding, appreciating, and protecting all people and nature, e.g., social justice, equality, environmentalism

8. Conclusion

Values may prove to be one of the most powerful explanations of, and influences on, consumer behaviour. Clawson, and Vinson (1978) express the importance of values in predicting the consumer behaviour that values can surpass the contributions of other major constructs including attitudes, product attributes, degree of deliberating, product classification, and life style. Personal values have been shown to be efficient, measurable sets of variables that are less numerous, more centrally held and more closely related to motivations than demographic and other psychographic measures.

9.Reference

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