



Empirically testing the concept of value-in-behavior and its relevance for social marketing



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ABSTRACT

This paper empirically tests the concept of value-in-behavior (consumer perceived value towards the performance of behaviors), considers how it influences consumer behavioral outcomes, and identifies implications for social marketing. Value-in-behavior was tested in the context of energy efficiency, an important area for pro-social marketing. A survey of a random sample of 1444 consumers measured value perceptions towards the performance of energy efficient behaviors. Latent class analysis identified four segments based on consumers' perceived value of energy efficiency behaviors. The demographic and psychographic predictors of these latent classes are shown, and ANOVA and multinomial logistic regression are used to identify the relationships between the latent class value segments and behavioral outcomes. Implications for marketing theory and practice and suggestions for future research are discussed.

1. Introduction

Social marketing utilises marketing concepts and tools to promote pro-social behavior (French & Gordon, 2015). Scholars working in the environmental management area have considered using social marketing to promote socially responsible behaviors, such as energy efficiency (McKenzie-Mohr, 2011; Viardot, 2013; Yam, Russell-Bennett, Foth, & Mulcahy, 2017). Promoting responsible domestic energy consumption and energy efficiency are important topics given contemporary discourse regarding climate change, issues with energy security, increasing energy prices, and fuel poverty (Simshauser, Nelson, & Doan, 2011; Yergin, 2006). Energy researchers are, however, critical of social marketing and other social change approaches that assume influencing attitudes will drive behaviors (Shove, 2010). Their concerns are rooted in research evidence showing a consistent attitude-behavior gap, in which positive attitudes towards environmentally responsible behaviors such as energy efficiency, are a poor predictor of actual behavior (Barr & Gilg, 2006; Belz & Peattie, 2009; Shaw, McMaster, & Newholm, 2016). Responding to these critiques, social marketing scholars are focusing on other factors that promote energy efficient behaviors, such as consumer perceived value (Butler, Gordon, Roggeveen, Waitt, & Cooper, 2016), and the social and cultural conditions that shape energy consumption (Shove & Walker, 2014; Waitt, Roggeveen, Gordon, Butler, & Cooper, 2016). This paper considers how

a new perspective on consumer value, perceived value-in-behavior, can add to the knowledge base.

The value-in-behavior concept that has been proposed in the social marketing literature (French & Gordon, 2015; Zainuddin & Gordon, 2014). The central tenet is that consumers may not only perceive value in exchanging for (value-in-exchange), or using and experiencing (value-in-use) goods and services, but also towards performing behaviors. Although not a direct measure of behavior in its own right, value-in-behavior theorizes that consumers perceive value that is, or is not realized, through the performance of behavior. For example, the concept could reflect the value associated with eating healthily or keeping fit. This type of value is particularly relevant to promoting energy efficiency. Being energy efficient can involve exchanging and using goods (e.g. a heat pump) and services (e.g. a green energy provider), but it can also involve the performance of behaviors such as switching off appliances at the wall socket, or keeping cool by using a fan instead of an air conditioner. The idea of value-in-behavior is of importance to social marketers because of their interests in understanding and influencing the performance of pro-social behaviors (Dann, 2010; Gopaldas, 2015). Understanding and creating value for consumers in social marketing has been shown to facilitate pro-social behaviors and socially beneficial outcomes (Chell & Mortimer, 2014; Mulcahy, Russell-Bennett, & Rundle-Thiele, 2015; Zainuddin, Russell-Bennett, & Previte, 2013).

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Although researchers have started to consider how value-in-behavior might promote energy efficiency behaviors (Butler et al., 2016), empirical research is needed to explore the concept's scope and application (Butler et al., 2016; French & Gordon, 2015). This paper addresses this gap, examining whether consumers do perceive value-in-behavior and, how they differ in their perceptions. Predictors of consumer perceptions of value-in-behavior are identified and associations between these perceptions and behavioral outcomes are considered. This knowledge informs understanding of consumer value towards behaviors that could be harnessed by social marketers to promote socially beneficial behaviors.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The literature on value theory is considered and the conceptual framework of value-in-behavior is explicated. The study methods are then described, and the findings presented. The theoretical, managerial, and research implications for marketing and social marketing are followed by the conclusions.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework: value theory

2.1. Value theory in marketing

Value can be defined “as the regard that something is held to deserve, the importance, worth, or usefulness of something” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2013). Perceived consumer value and its influence on consumer behavior has attracted significant attention by scholars and marketing practitioners (Ravald & Grönroos, 1996; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Anderson, Narus, & Van Rossum, 2006; Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007; Gallarza, Gil-Saura, & Holbrook, 2011; Vargo & Lusch, 2013). This focus is unsurprising in light of evidence that creating and promoting consumer perceived value has a positive impact on consumer attitudes and behaviors (Choi, Woo-Hyun, Sunhee, Hanjoon, & Chakon, 2004; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Zainuddin et al., 2013).

However, value is a subjective idea and there are several different perspectives on how consumers perceive value and how it is created (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). A key focus in the value literature is on value propositions (Kowalkowski, 2011) and whether consumer perceived value is created through value-in-exchange (Zeithaml, 1988), value-in-use (Holbrook, 2006), value in context (Chandler & Vargo, 2011), or value-in-behavior (French & Gordon, 2015). There is also considerable emphasis on the different dimensions of perceived value, which include: functional (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001); economic (Payne & Holt, 1999); emotional (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007); social (Holbrook, 2006); altruistic (Holbrook, 1994); and ecological value (Koller, Floh, & Zauner, 2011). To fully understand the value-in-behavior proposition, it is necessary to critically analyze these different perspectives on consumer perceived value.

2.2. Value-in-exchange

Value in marketing was originally conceptualized during the 1980s from a value-in-exchange perspective (Zeithaml, 1988). Based on economic theory (see Ricardo, 1817), this perspective suggests consumers identify value in consuming goods through a rational cost-benefit analysis (Zeithaml, 1988). In marketing, exchange involves trading or swapping goods, services, resources or values between two or more parties with the expectation that the benefits received will satisfy a particular need (Bagozzi, 1975; Houston & Gassenheimer, 1987). Often an exchange is utilitarian, involving the exchange of goods or services for money. However, it can also be symbolic, involving the transfer of psychological, social or other tangible or intangible benefits, such as a vote in return for tax breaks, or vaccinations in return for protection from disease. In such processes, the value-in-exchange perspective suggests that consumers will weigh what they must give up against

what they will gain from making the exchange. This process involves considering the financial costs they must bear to purchase goods or services, the time they will sacrifice when buying or consuming, as well as other associated costs.

Some important critiques of the value-in-exchange perspective should be acknowledged. Sheth and Uslay (2007) argue that a primary focus on exchange in marketing has been limiting, creating a transactional buyer and seller perspective that ignores other relevant actors from consumption contexts such as the producer, the consumer, the user, the financier and other relevant stakeholders. Zafirovski and Levine (1999, p. 311) argue that understanding human interaction through exchange alone requires “an untenable reductionism that grossly violates real-life complexity by proceeding on the delusion of simplicity in a complex socio-economic world”. In complex, high involvement, and longer-term consumption contexts, such as promoting pro-social behaviors, the notion of value-in-exchange may not always be suitable.

In such cases, interactions often go beyond a simple exchange. Longer-term commitments may also be involved, such as contributing to environmental sustainability through reduced energy consumption behavior, enjoying improved long-term health from living a healthy lifestyle, or benefiting from active participatory citizenship through voting in elections (Hastings & Domegan, 2013). Applying a value-in-exchange perspective to pro-social marketing can be problematic because exchanges are typically so intangible that they become abstract and evasive (Peattie & Peattie, 2003). Using a rational economic perspective to promote pro-social behaviors can therefore be problematic. Accordingly, scholars have recognized that exchange theory and value-in-exchange may have limited application in relation to the more abstract contexts found in social marketing (Domegan, Collins, Stead, McHugh, & Hughes, 2013; Hastings & Domegan, 2013; Holbrook, 1994; Peattie & Peattie, 2003). An approach to value has emerged that extends the notion of value beyond the moment in time at which an exchange occurs, and is focused on value-in-use (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

2.3. Value-in-use

Value-in-use is an experiential approach that conceptualizes consumer perceived value as relative rather than absolute, and that is related to the experience of consuming goods and services (Heinonen & Strandvik, 2009; Macdonald, Wilson, Martinez, & Toossi, 2011). This perspective sees consumer value as realized during the experience of consuming, rather than as embodied in goods or services (Sandström, Edvardsson, Kristensson, & Magnusson, 2008). Value-in-use has been found to influence behavior, for example research has shown that consumer perceived value of car usage influences intentions to purchase green automobiles (Koller et al., 2011).

Macdonald, Wilson, Martinez, and Toossi (2011, p. 671) define value-in-use as “a customer's outcome, purpose or objective that is achieved through service”, with service involving the skills, knowledge, and resources that actors use to deliver value. Here, consumers often become ‘resource integrators’, whereby they create value and achieve their own objectives (McCull-Kennedy, Vargo, Dagger, Sweeney, & van Kasteren, 2012).

Value-in-use from a service perspective is regarded as the achievement of a consumer outcome through service, in which service involves the resources that actors use to deliver value (Macdonald et al., 2011). For example, value-in-use could be the perceived value associated with the experience of using a health screening service. This value could include the time clients waited, the friendliness of staff, the benefits gained from being screened, and so on.

Although value-in-use may imply the performance of behaviors, this type of value is more specifically oriented towards the actual consumption experience. These subtle distinctions are important in exposing the particular contribution that value-in-behavior can make. Taking the health screening example, value-in-use is not specifically

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