

Antecedents of Attitudes Toward Social Issues and Intention to Comply

Deborah Griffin and Aron O'Cass, Griffith University

Abstract

Furthering our understanding of consumer behaviour related to social issues has both practical as well as theoretical importance. This study examines individual characteristics, including age, gender, involvement and susceptibility to interpersonal influence on attitudes toward social issues and intention to comply. Data were gathered from a convenience sample of young people across two social issues. The results indicate that generally demographic characteristics (age and gender) have a moderate effect on individuals' susceptibility to interpersonal influence for social issues, and their involvement in such issues.

Introduction

Finding solutions for the myriad of social problems facing Australian society is a constant challenge for governments, non-profit organisations and concerned citizens. Further, many of these social problems incur significant costs, for example, tobacco costs Australia at least \$12.7 billion a year and alcohol related problems approximately \$4.5 billion a year (Commonwealth of Australia, 2001). This study examines the impact that age, gender, susceptibility to interpersonal influence and involvement has on an individual's attitude towards a social issue and their intention to comply with a social marketing campaign.

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Celsi and Olsen, (1988) suggest many of the behaviors that social marketers are endeavouring to change are high involvement behaviours, and the decision regarding the behaviour will be a high involvement decision for the individual (Andreasen, 1994). Involvement has been shown to have a significant influence on a wide range of consumer behaviours (Bloch, 1982; Mittal, 1995; O'Cass, 2000; Zaichkowsky, 1985). Lee *et al.* (1999) suggest an issue is involving to the extent that the issue under deliberation is personally relevant, leading people to focus on how it will affect them. Hence, an individual involved in anti-smoking or anti-drinking issue may consider how it would affect them – leading them to not practice the behaviours. Conversely, individuals who are involved in the behaviour (eg. smoking or drinking to excess) may find the behaviours 'relevant' because they enjoy smoking or binge drinking. This situation is problematic for social marketers, because changing an attitude is difficult if an individual does not find an issue involving (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981). Further, Heslin and Johnson (1992) argue that a person with high involvement in a product class will have more interest in information regarding that product. Relating this to social issues, it may follow that a person with high involvement in the anti-smoking issue, would be more interested in information on the dangers of smoking, than an individual with little involvement. This may result in strengthening their attitude (in a positive manner) towards the anti-smoking issue, because highly involved individuals are likely to be interested in the subject and enjoy the cognitive processes concerning the subject and tend to form unbiased and balanced attitudes (Cacioppo and Petty, 1982). Hence, social marketers need to find ways to make issues more involving, so as to lead to greater processing of information which may influence the behavioural outcome. As such it is hypothesized that:

H1: Involvement in a social issue will influence intention to comply with the social issue.

One possible avenue that may prove valuable, is to link social issues to group behaviors such as consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence, which is a general trait that varies with situations and individuals. Defined as the need to identify with or conform to the expectations of others (Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel, 1989), it appears to have an influence on consumption behaviour “ especially for products like cigarettes and alcohol, which have the potential to affect both one's self-image and public image" (Kropp, Lavack and Holden, 1999, p.538). For drinking behaviour, Kropp *et al.* (1999) found one's peers and family are the main influence for adolescents and young adults. Conversely, it seems smokers may not place much importance on a sense of belonging or the respect of others, (Kropp *et al.*, 1999) and thus, may not be as influenced by their peers. As such it is hypothesized that:

H2: Individuals who are susceptible to interpersonal influence will have greater involvement in the anti-smoking and anti-drinking issues.

It seems certain individuals are more susceptible to interpersonal influence, with regard to smoking or drinking to excess. However, this influence could also be present within the context of stopping or being against these aberrant behaviours. For example, an individual who is susceptible to interpersonal influence may become more involved in the anti-smoking or anti-drinking issue, because their significant others are against the behaviours. This may result in them developing more positive attitudes towards the issue or a greater tendency to comply with a social marketing campaign for the issue and as such it is hypothesised that:

H3: Individuals who are susceptible to interpersonal influence will have a greater intention to comply with social marketing campaigns of anti-drinking and anti-smoking.

In addition, an individual's age and/or gender may influence their perception of a social issue or the behaviour associated with the issue. For example, involvement in a social issue may differ between males and females. Previous research has indicated gender has an influence on involvement levels within the context of fashion clothing (Browne and Kaldenberg, 1997; O'Cass, 2000). From the perspective of intangible 'issues' gender was found to have an effect on involvement in arts attendance (Gainer, 1993) and politics (O'Cass, 2002) and as such it is hypothesised that:

H4: An individual's gender will influence their involvement in the anti-smoking and anti-drinking issues, with females being more involved.

H5: An individual's gender will influence their susceptibility to interpersonal influence, with males being more susceptible.

An individual's need to conform or fit may also be influenced by their age. Kahle (1995) suggests young people tend to be more susceptible to interpersonal influence than adults, and Beal, Ausiello and Perrin, (2001) argue peer influence has the greatest influence on young adults for health risk behaviours (eg. drugs, tobacco and alcohol). Further, research for a National Alcohol Campaign (Shanahan and Hewitt, 1999) suggests that 15 to 17 year olds were greatly influenced by peer group norms, with binge drinking common practice. Whereas, drinking behaviours of young adults (18 to 24) were more likely to be controlled and regulated, despite a tendency to binge drink on occasions, mainly by males. This suggests that growing older may influence drinking behaviour and it is hypothesised that:

H6: An individual's age will influence their involvement in the anti-smoking and anti-drinking issues, with older individuals being more involved.

H7: An individual's age will influence their susceptibility to interpersonal influence, with younger individuals being more susceptible.

A critical role of social marketing is to change behaviours (Andreasen, 1994), in this context, attitudes are important because of their role in predicting behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Sheppard, Hartwick and Warshaw, 1988). Attitudes may be seen as 'global and relatively enduring evaluations of objects, issues or persons' (Petty, Unnava and Strathman, 1991, p. 242). It has been argued that the way in which brand attitudes are formed or changed can be affected or moderated by the level of involvement (Laczniak and Muehling, 1993). Muehling and Laczniak (1988) reported that beliefs and attitude towards the ad had a significant impact on attitude towards the brand when people were highly involved. Hence, it may follow that an individual who is involved in a social issue (eg. anti-drinking) would tend to have a more positive attitude towards an anti-drinking advertisement, which may translate into stronger intention not to drink to excess.

Implicit in the notion of social marketing is that there are individuals who practice the behaviour and those who do not. As such, Perrachio and Luna (1998) reported there was a difference in beliefs and attitudes between young smokers and non-smokers. Both groups were aware of the short-term negative effects of smoking; however, only non-smokers made connections between the short and long-term negative effects. Petty and Cacioppo (1979) suggest increasing the personal relevance of an issue will motivate message recipients to process information regarding the issue more thoroughly. Thus, making the long-term effects of smoking relevant to smokers, non-smokers and potential smokers, may influence future behaviour (Perrachio and Luna, 1998) and as such it is hypothesised that:

H8: Susceptibility to interpersonal influence will influence positively, attitudes towards the anti-smoking and anti-drinking issues.

H9: Involvement in the anti-smoking and anti-drinking issues will influence attitude towards the issue.

H10: Attitude towards anti-smoking or anti-drinking issues will influence intention comply with the social marketing campaign for the issue.

Research Design

A self-completed questionnaire was administered to a convenience sample of undergraduate students, resulting in a total of 306 useable surveys being completed. These subjects were considered relevant to the study because of previous studies that focused on university students' use of alcohol and cigarettes (O'Callaghan *et al.*, 1997; Perkins *et al.*, 1999; Wolfe *et al.*, 1985). Items to measure involvement in a social issue were generated from Zaichkowsky's Personal Involvement Inventory scale (1985) and Personal Involvement Inventory for Advertising scale (1990). Susceptibility to interpersonal influence was measured via an adaptation of Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel's (1989) measure of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence. A pool of items to measure attitude towards the behaviour of smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol, were generated via a deductive process as well as a review of extant literature on attitudes (Kempf, 1999; Mano, 1997; Mittal, 1990; Simons and Carey, 1998). The study used a 7-point scale format, and where necessary, item wording and scale format of existing measures was modified to enhance overall instrument uniformity. All of the scales were found to have acceptable factor structures and reliability scores.

Respondents' ages ranged from 17 to 30 (mean age = 21) with the majority under 23 years of age (72%), and 59% of respondents were female. The results of the factor analysis indicated all items loaded onto their appropriate factor and all factor loadings ranged between .41 and .87 for the factors. All constructs showed acceptable reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha of .84 or greater indicating high reliability. The analysis of the scales showed that all the measures factor loadings were greater than .41 and all loadings were found to be statistically significant at $p < .05$. Partial Least Squares (PLS) was used to analyse the data after consideration of the proposed relationships and sample size (O'Cass, 2001). A systematic examination of a number of fit indices for predictive relevance of the model was necessary (Fornell and Cha, 1994) including, r^2 , average variance accounted (AVA), and regression weights.

The results of the inner model (Table 1) indicate the AVA for the endogenous variables was .17, and the R^2 's for attitude and intention were greater than the recommended level of .10 by Falk and Miller (1992). The regression weights were moderate to high. A reasonable criterion for evaluating the significance of the individual paths is the absolute value of the product of the path coefficient and the appropriate correlation coefficient (Falk and Miller 1992) and 1.5% (.015) of the variance is recommended as the cut-off point. Variance due to the path were above the recommended level of .015 (except for involvement-gender and attitude-interpersonal influence) and all the paths exceed this criterion, and the bootstrap critical ratios are of the appropriate size (greater than 1.96, $p < .05$ for two-tailed test or $p < 1.645$ for one-tailed test) that is all t-values were all significant and the regression weights were acceptable.

Table 1 Partial Least Squares Results for H1 to H10

Predicted variables	Predictor variables	Hyp	Path	Variance due to path	R^2	Critical ratio
Interpersonal influence	Age	H7	-.191	.03	.05	-3.53
	Gender	H5	-.167	.02		-3.00
Involvement	Age	H6	.169	.02	.05	2.74
	Gender	H4	.089	.00		1.64
	Interpersonal Influence	H2	.113	.03		1.89
Attitude	Interpersonal influence	H8	.084	.01	.22	1.70
	Involvement	H9	.455	.21		9.37
Intention to comply	Interpersonal influence	H3	.166	.04	.36	3.55
	Involvement	H1	.146	.05		2.30
	Attitude	H10	.471	.26		8.67
AVA					.17	

Discussion

The results indicate that involvement in a social issue, results in a more positive attitude towards the particular issue. Hence, focusing more on how smoking or drinking to excess will affect one personally, may lead one to develop an attitude that the behaviours are harmful. This is because health issues or issues relating to personal risk are believed to have a high degree of personal relevance, thereby, involving the individual (Raymond, Tanner and Eppright, 1998). Given that there is some uncertainty of the context of involvement being in the issue or the behaviour, the results suggest involvement must be seen as related to the theme of the issue, and is positive in that context. Further, increasing the involvement of a

social issue may depend on increasing the personal relevance, as La Tour and Rotfeld (1997) and Goldman and Glantz (1998) maintain, if individuals have clear idea of the personal consequences of their health risk behaviours they are more likely to be involved. Further, the findings suggest the most significant determinant of an individual's intention to comply with an anti-smoking or anti-drinking social marketing campaign is their positive attitude towards the issue. This is consistent with the theory that intention to behave is to some extent determined by the individual's attitude towards the behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; O'Callaghan *et al.*, 1994; Sheppard *et al.*, 1988).

In the study, susceptibility to interpersonal influence had no significant effect on involvement or attitude for the anti-smoking issue; however, there was some effect on involvement and attitude for the anti-drinking issue. Susceptibility to interpersonal influence was most significant within the context of an individual's intention to comply with a social marketing campaign for both social issues, but particularly anti-drinking. This suggests interpersonal influence may be mostly contained within the context of the situation; hence, if the situation changes, intention may also change.

Gender and age were found to be significant factors for both issues. Younger individuals appeared to be more prone to interpersonal influence for both issues; however, the effect of age and gender was only significant for the anti-smoking issue - with young females being more susceptible. Further, the impact of age and gender on an individual's involvement was only significant for anti-drinking, indicating growing older or being female resulted in higher involvement. The significance of the involvement - attitude and attitude - intention relationships, suggests that individuals may behave in a similar fashion when they are faced with decisions regarding 'tangible objects' or 'intangible issues'. Thus, giving support to the application of conventional marketing theories across marketing domains. Conversely, the interaction of individual and group characteristics with the 'issue and the issue related behaviour' suggest certain aspects of social marketing may be distinctive. For example, previous research has found interpersonal influence to be a determinant in practicing the negative behaviours that social marketers are addressing, yet as suggested here, it serves little function in an individual's attitude towards the issue itself. Further, from a practical perspective the role of age and gender cannot be overlooked, because social marketing campaigns are targeted at both genders and across all ages. While the results of this study were able to demonstrate that associations existed between the variables, arguments of causality should be undertaken with care. Student samples can limit the generalisations to other populations; however, young adults are seen to be a target market for social marketing campaigns, hence, for they were deemed to be an appropriate sample frame. These limitations do not in any way mar, or render less, the significant results and findings, but are acknowledged to emphasise the need for future research on social issues and their marketing.

As many social issue related behaviours are deemed high involvement behaviours (Celsi and Olsen, 1988), a further area of interest may be to explore the underlying dimensions of involvement in social issues in terms of beliefs, a broader array of traits and their values. In addition, susceptibility to interpersonal influence warrants further investigation, because it is seen to be a factor in social issue related behaviours. This study focused on exploring individuals' behaviours and perceptions of social issues, which operates within the wider context of a society that upholds the concept of free choice. Marketing operates with the knowledge of that free choice and it "offers a mechanism to find a cooperative balance between the rights of the individual and the rights of society" (Rothschild, 1999, p.17). Hence, 'social marketing' may assist the individual and society by offering incentives to

behave in ways that attempt to bring personal and societal benefits. Therefore, by understanding individuals' reactions to social issues as well as their compliance decisions regarding such issues, marketers can make a meaningful social contribution, as well as providing added value to marketings' contribution to the social good.

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