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## **PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND SOCIAL ISSUE EXCHANGE: AN INTRAPERSONAL EXCHANGE PERSPECTIVE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Any individual behavior that results in social costs for other members of society is of concern to society. Nevertheless, in the case of ‘freely chosen individual behaviors’, positive social change will only occur if the individual takes action to change the condition, by giving up one behavior in exchange for another. Fundamentally, exchange may be attributed to intrapersonal characteristics. The research methodology for this study is based on the development of a survey resulting in 559 responses. The results indicate personality, along with involvement in the social issue influenced exchange.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Every day, people make lifestyle choices that have potential negative ramifications for themselves, other people and society as a whole. Whether it is smoking, taking drugs, speeding, drinking to excess, not conserving water or littering, societies around the world are faced with addressing a diverse array of social issues. The utility of social marketing as an approach to resolve social issues, and bring about positive social change is based on the assertion that exchange occurs, when the individual takes an action. However, exchange may also be positioned specifically within the context of the individual (Gould 1994), and their response to stimuli which, in this case, are social issues. According to Gould (1994), such exchange is intrapersonal self-exchange, where the individual engages in exchange with themselves, because they value one action over another. Moreover, the conditions that distinguish self-exchange over other types of exchange, is that the particular factors that influence the exchange process, are also to be found within the individual, for example, personality differences.

From a social marketing perspective, there is a need to understand why some individuals participate in positive social behaviors and others participate in negative social behaviors. However, regardless of the influence of social marketing, ultimately, it is up to the individual whether they undertake (or not) the behavioral action. Placing this premise in the context of intrapersonal or self-exchange, individuals arrive at this situation with an *a priori* set of characteristics. Accordingly, the factors that lead individuals to engage in or avoid positive social behaviors, that is, social issue exchange (SIE), may be in part explained by their dispositional characteristics. However, the position adopted here takes a more encompassing approach to the influence of personality traits on social issue behaviors, by utilizing four generalized traits that (singularly) have been found to have predictive utility across a range of social issue behaviors. Thus, a multi-dimensional construct labeled *propensity toward social issue exchange*, expressed as an aggregation of dimensions (i.e. four traits) define the conceptualization of the overall construct.

Many social issues have associated risk taking behaviors indicating that, for example, there are individuals who speed in motor vehicles. Why some people engage in these risky behaviors and others do not, may be explained by the view that risk taking can be considered a generalized personality trait (Dahlback 1990) in that individuals are inclined in varying degrees to take or avoid risks across situations and types of risks (Sitkin and Weingart 1995). If this is so, it may logically follow that a trait that characterizes an individual as being either risk taking or risk averse, would contribute to an individual’s propensity toward social issue exchanges, and thus, their engaging in a social issue exchange. Also, apart from risk aversion, the control individuals perceive they have over their behavioral outcomes, may also be a factor in how they respond to social issues. Perceived control may be viewed in the context of locus of control which focuses on individuals perceiving themselves as having some causal role in determining the outcome of specific events. Research on locus of control distinguishes between individuals with an internal locus of control who perceive behavioral outcomes to be within their control and individuals with an external locus of control who perceive outcomes beyond their control and are a function of fate, luck or powerful others (O’Cass 2004). An internal locus of control has been linked to range of positive behaviors within the environmental domain (Hines et al. 1986) and the health domain (Steptoe and Wardle, 2001) suggesting

that these individuals are more likely to make an effort or to try harder with regard to undertaking positive social issue behaviors, than those individuals with an external orientation.

One of the difficulties in addressing social issue behaviors is that often the consequences of engaging in these behaviors may not be realized for many years. This situation brings to the discussion the notion of time orientation which has been found to have an influence on social issue behaviors (Strathman et al. 1994). Time orientation may be viewed in terms of a trait termed consideration of future consequences (CFC), which is seen as a measure of the extent to which individuals consider the future in choosing their current behaviors (Strathman et al. 1994). Research indicates that high CFC individuals are more likely to engage in pro-social behaviors (Strathman et al. 1994) suggesting that that an individual's time orientation may be an integral factor in how they respond to social issues in general.

Given that the influence of individuals or groups has been widely recognized as a determinant of consumer behavior (Bearden et al. 1989), in context of personality, the degree to which individuals are susceptible to interpersonal influence may be a factor for them to engage in or avoid social issue exchange. Interpersonal influence may be manifested via normative or informational influence (Bearden et al. 1989). However, normative influence is of particular interest with regard to social issue behaviors, because it focuses on how concern for others' opinions, compliance to others' expectations can influence one's behavior (Bearden et al. 1989). Hence, the trait susceptibility to normative influence is included in the multi-dimensional construct, *propensity toward social issue exchange*.

As articulated above, some explanation for engaging in or avoiding positive social issue behaviors may be provided by the traits of risk aversion, locus of control, consideration of future consequences and susceptibility to normative influence. Following the argument of Buss (1989) that each time one adds a trait one moves closer to understanding persons as combinations of traits, this research proposes that grouping the aforementioned traits, may provide greater clarification of the influence of personality across social issue behaviors. Moreover, given the premise that engaging in a positive social issue behavior is characterized as engaging in social issue exchange, combining these four traits may provide a more comprehensive depiction of *propensity toward social issue exchange (PTSIE)* which is an orientation to respond positively to social issues. As such, those individuals characterized as being risk averse, internally oriented, future focused and do not conform to the expectations of others, will be more likely to respond to social issues in a positive manner, and thereby, act accordingly and engage in social issue exchange. Thus, *H1: Propensity toward social issue exchange has a significant positive effect on social issue exchange.*

People who behave in a positive manner that enhances the well-being of other people and the wider society may be seen to exhibit a notion of social responsibility (Berkowitz and Lutterman 1968). Importantly though, being predisposed towards social responsibility means one is conscious of 'behaving in a positive manner' equally as much as one is conscious of 'not behaving in a negative manner' (Hartup and van Lieshout 1995). The strength of this characteristic varies for individuals, however, it can be assumed that an orientation for social responsibility would be reflected in practising pro-social behaviors Tucker et al. 1981). Extending this theme, individuals whose propensity toward social issue exchange is characterized as pro-social, would seem more likely to reflect a socially responsible personality, than those individuals whose response is characterized as not pro-social. Therefore, *H2: Propensity toward social issue exchange has a significant positive effect on social responsibility.*

The discussion thus far, has been on individual characteristics and their influence on social issue behaviors, rather than the social issues that frame the behaviors. However, discussion is also warranted on role that 'social issues' may have in a person's life. That is, social issue involvement, in that if a social issue matters to, or is of importance in a person's life – they are involved (O'Cass 2000). Involvement has been shown to have a significant influence on a wide range of consumer behaviors (Mittal 1995; O'Cass 2000), however, there has been limited interest in the role of involvement in relation to social issues and associated behavior (Griffin and O'Cass 2004). Involvement here is viewed in the context of the pro or positive involvement in the social issue (Griffin and O'Cass 2004). Thus, those individuals who do *not* practice the positive social issue behavior would be deemed to have little or no social issue involvement in that they find the issue unimportant (Mittal 1995). Moreover, it would seem that for those individuals with a greater propensity to respond to social issues in a positive manner, would also be more likely to have greater social

issue involvement. Therefore, *H3: Propensity toward social issue exchange has a significant positive effect on social issue involvement.*

In characterizing the socially responsible individual, Berkowitz and Lutterman (1968) allude to the notion that those individuals high in this trait tend to have a greater degree of involvement with institutions within society (e.g. politics, community activities). Moreover, given that social issues are matters of concern within society, it may follow that individuals with a socially responsible orientation may be more likely to perceive social issues as more important in their lives and therefore be more issue issue involved than a personality that is not socially responsible. Thus, *H4: Social responsibility has a significant positive effect on social issue involvement.*

Research has shown that involvement has a diverse range of behaviors such as, voting behavior (O’Cass, 2004) and frequency of arts attendance Gainer (1993). In terms of social issue behaviors, Stanley et al. (1996) found that involvement with environmental issues was significantly related to overall environmental behaviors (e.g., recycling and green purchasing behaviors). This may be because individuals with higher issue involvement are more likely to appraise the merits of undertaking social issue related behaviors, than those less involved individuals. This circumstance implies that involvement has a direct influence on behavior, for those individuals involved with the object, that is, the social issue (Griffin and O’Cass 2004). Thus, *H5: Social issue involvement has a significant positive effect on social issue exchange.*

## **Research Design**

The research methodology for this study is based on the development of a web-based self-administered survey chosen for the advantages of rapid deployment, dramatically reduced costs, assured non-response, and design flexibility (Aaker et al. 2005). The sample consisted of students and staff of an Australian university database. Data collection involved the researcher sending an email (which included information on the purpose of study, as well as a link to a unique web site location to access the survey) via the email system to invite participation. The five items to measure *Social Responsibility (SR)* were adapted from Berkowitz and Lutterman's (1968) Social Responsibility Scale (SRS). The 11 items to measure *Locus of Control* were sourced from an adaptation of the shortened form of the James (1957) internal external control scale. The eight items to measure *Consideration of Future Consequences (CFC)* were adapted from The Strathman et al. (1994) 12-item CFC scale. The eight items to measure *Susceptibility to Normative Influence* were sourced from the Bearden (1989) 12-item measure consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII) scale. The items to measure *Risk Aversion* were sourced from Dahlback's (1991) 11-item measure of Declared Risk taking which focuses on a generalized form of non-impulsive risk taking. The five items to measure *Social Issue Involvement (SII)* were adapted from Mittal (1995). A seven-point Likert scale format was utilized for the study.

## **Results**

The administration procedure yielded 559 completed surveys. The analysis of the data was undertaken via correlation analysis, exploratory factor analysis, reliability analysis and Partial Least Squares (PLS) SEM analysis was used to test the hypotheses. In the preliminary analysis indicated that respondent ages ranged from 18 to 86 and females formed the majority of respondents 66%. Also relating to the focal social issue behavior 40% stated they *do* travel over the speed limit and 60% stated they *do not* travel over the speed limit. The outer model (i.e. measurement model) was examined using PLS. All measures of constructs both reflective and formative) were submitted to preliminary analysis via PLS. The results indicated that all measures met acceptable benchmarks on factor loadings, weights AVEs, critical ratios and reliabilities. The hypotheses were tested using variance based SEM via PLS. Evaluation of the relationships was via statistical results that attempt to explain the data, congruence with the hypotheses and precision. An examination of hypotheses results was undertaken via  $r^2$ , average variance accounted for (AVA), average variance extracted (AVE), and regression weights and bootstrap critical ratios (t-values) and path variance. The individual personality traits are reflected by the indicators as in a Type II model. In Table 1, the AVA for the endogenous variables is .12. Also a reasonable criterion for evaluating their significance is the absolute value of the product of the path coefficient and the appropriate correlation coefficient (Falk and Miller 1992). This produces an index of the variance in an endogenous variable explained by that particular

path, where 1.5% (.015) of the variance is the cut off point for acceptable path variance magnitudes and the paths exceed this criterion. As the ratio between estimate and standard errors, critical ratios greater than 1.64 and 1.96 are significant at 90% and 95%. All critical ratios are above the acceptable benchmarks. Overall, the results used to evaluate the hypotheses indicate that all hypotheses are supported.

**Insert Table 1 in here**

## **Discussion**

The findings clearly indicate that an individual's personality configuration represented by propensity toward social issue exchange significantly influenced respondents social responsibility and involvement in the social issue. The findings imply that individuals characterized as risk averse, internally oriented, low in normative influence and future focused are more likely to be socially responsible. Additionally, the degree to which individuals exhibit pro-social characteristics is a factor in whether they engage in or avoid a social issue exchange. Moreover, such individuals are then likely to be more involved in the focal social issue (i.e., speeding or not speeding). The findings indicate that together the characteristics embedded in risk aversion, locus of control, consideration of future consequences and susceptibility to normative influence drives an individual's social responsibility and together these impact their social issue involvement. Importantly, taking the lead from these findings, eliciting positive social change, presupposes that individuals need to engage in an exchange process, for example, by undertaking positive social issue behaviors. This premise links to the notion of a social marketing exchange which occurs when an individual takes an action. However, regardless of the influence of social marketing, the occurrence an exchange ultimately rests with the individual, that is, intrapersonal self-exchange (Gould, 1994). Moreover, because the exchange is now within the realm of the individual, the determinants of exchange as indicated above, may include individual characteristics. This means that those individuals with greater pro-social characteristics have a greater likelihood of engaging in social issue exchange – and thus, practicing positive social behaviors. Conversely, a lower level of pro-social characteristics suggests that individuals do not engage in social issue exchange – practicing instead the behavior that is not promoted in the community. In addition, it seems that the combination of those facets of personality such as, being risk averse, future focused, internally oriented, not conforming, and socially responsible that explain an individual's pro-social orientation, also seems to generate a higher level of social issue involvement in the individual. In contrast, a response to social issues that is not positive, and is indicative of less pro-social orientation may translate into a situation where there is indifference, or unimportance regarding social issues. However, notwithstanding the influence of social marketing, ultimately, exchange resides within the individual, and it is on that premise that this study is based.

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**Table 1 Hypotheses Results**

Predicted Variables	Predictor Variables	Hyp	Path	Variance due to path <sup>a</sup>	R <sup>2</sup>	Critical Ratio <sup>a</sup>
SIE	PTSIE	H1	.151	.035	.16	3.43
	SII	H5	.336	.125		8.64
SR	PTSIE	H2	.145	.021	.021	3.64
SII	PTSIE	H3	.195	.047		4.73
SII	SR	H4	.336	.041	.17	8.97
<b>AVA</b>					<b>.12</b>	

<sup>a</sup>Only interpreted if R<sup>2</sup> is greater than 0.10; <sup>b</sup> Bootstrap estimate divided by bootstrap standard error; <sup>c</sup> Average Variance Accounted for.