

A COURSE ON HUMAN VALUES FOR THE MARKETING CURRICULUM

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While interest in the subject of values has grown markedly over the last decade, reflected in a flow of conceptual and empirical papers in the marketing literature, this topic has not received serious attention in the marketing curriculum. The purpose of this paper is to describe the design of a course on values and consumer behavior, and to provide the reader a guide in developing his or her own course.

A reasonably clear consensus regarding a definition of "values" is emerging among social scientists. Kluckhohn, et al. suggested that: "A value is a conception, explicit or implicit. . .of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of action" (Kluckhohn 1951, p. 389). Building upon this foundation, Rokeach (1968, p. 124) defines values as "abstract ideals, positive or negative, not tied to any specific object or situation, representing a person's beliefs about modes of conduct and ideal terminal modes . . ." "Values, thus, are global beliefs that "transcendentally guide actions and judgments across specific objects and situations" (Rokeach 1968, p. 160).

Values should be distinguished from attitudes, which do focus on specific objects and specific situations. "An attitude is an orientation toward certain objects (including persons--others and oneself) or situations . . . An attitude results from the application of a general value to concrete objects or situations" (Theodorson and Theodorson 1969, p. 19). Behavior, finally, is a manifestation of one's fundamental values and consequent attitudes.

The syllabus distributed to students states: "The purpose of this course is to investigate the influence of personal values on human behavior." Based upon that purpose, a number of issues were considered in designing course content and structure.

First, it must not be assumed that students have any real knowledge of values as a scientific variable. Some of them may have been exposed to this concept in introductory courses in marketing, organizational behavior, or the behavioral sciences. On the other hand, they likely either have no knowledge of this subject or have actually been misinformed by casual references to values in the popular literature. "Values" has become a "trendy" topic, subject to the abuses and sloppiness of conceptualization that result from popularization.

Second, because of the limited student backgrounds, the course is structured in an hierarchical manner, ranging from a discussion of the most fundamental values concepts to an examination of empirical findings on the relationship between values and consumer behavior. The substance of the course begins at the definitional level; values are distinguished from attitudes, norms, personality, and so on. The first objective of this component of the course is to provide the student with rigorous definitions of concepts such as "value" and "value system." The second objective is to expose the student

to the idea of value dynamics - how values change, and the extent values in our culture have changed and/or are changing. The course then shifts to a discussion of sub-cultural values; the idea of a dominant cultural value system, and of deviant value systems among sub-groups, is introduced. Real data are presented to illustrate important differences as between, for example: males and females, blacks and whites, high and low income individuals. The relevance of such differences to consumer behavior and marketing management is then drawn. The next stage of discussion describes the effects of values in the organizational context in which marketing occurs. Students should be aware that values of organizational participants both affect and are affected by organizations of which they are members. To illustrate the effects of participants' values on organizational dynamics, a simple case exercise is utilized. Finally, we turn to values and consumer behavior. Only one model, that developed by Carman (1977), has attempted to integrate personal values into a theory of consumer behavior. Carman's model, therefore, is used as the framework both for discussing the relevant empirical research and for pointing out interesting research possibilities.

Third, there is no text dealing specifically with values and marketing. On the other hand, the literature on values-related phenomena is voluminous, perhaps overwhelming. In view these twin problems, the reading matter of the course is designed to do two things. The students should become familiar with the work of the principal scholars in the field, such as Clyde and Florence Kluckhohn, Milton Rokeach and Robin Williams. They should be also exposed to the very forefront of current research on values, with particular reference to research on values and consumer behavior.

Fourth, explaining methodologies for measuring values is an important part of the course. Emphasis was put on the development, administration, and evaluation of the Rokeach Value Survey (RVS) (Rokeach 1973). The RVS, for several reasons, has become the neo-orthodox instrument in values research. The RVS is easy to administer. Rokeach also has provided a set of values data, collected by means of a national, probability sample, against which other findings can be compared (1973). Rokeach offers substantial evidence on validity and reliability of his instrument (Rokeach 1973, pp. 13-42). Finally, numerous published studies have used this instrument, providing a degree of comparability not available with most other measures. The students are shown how RVS data are typically presented, and how statistical inferences can be drawn and tests of significance performed. Another useful measure of values is the Carlson-Levy instrument (Carlson and Levy 1970), that classifies people into two possible value categories: interpersonally-oriented or individualistically-oriented. This is a very short instrument that, unlike the RVS, can be scored to provide immediate results.

Fifth, an important test of understanding is the ability to apply a concept. To that end, a major term project is required in the course. The students first, individually, develop a list of behavioral phenomena that might be related to values. The list is gradually narrowed and students select themselves into groups based on specific research topics. They then design a questionnaire to collect data for their particular topic. A single, combined questionnaire is used to collect data for all groups, and responses are pooled. Values data are collected using the RVS.

Student response to the course was most favorable. A course outline and reference citations are available from the author .