

How to Measure Brand Values?

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In the branding literature it has been common for a long time to speak of brand values (Aaker 1996; de Chernatony, Drury, and Segal-Horn 2004; Keller 2008). In the research presented in this paper, brand values refer to human values consumers associate with brands. A number of studies underscore both the relevance and viability of such a concept for consumer behavior (Allen 2002; Allen, Gupta, and Monnier 2008; Alsem, Wieringa, and Hendriks 2007; Lages and Fernandes 2005; Limon, Kahle, and Orth 2009; Quester, Beverland, and Farrelly 2006; Strizhakova, Coulter, and Price 2008). However, this concept is not well developed. Consequently, a sound instrument to measure brand values does not exist.

Only recently, two studies use Schwartz's Value Survey (SVS) scale (Schwartz 1992) to measure brand values (Torelli et al. 2008; Zhang and Bloemer 2008). Even if we acknowledge the strengths of Schwartz's value theory and measurement instrument, we argue that the interpretation of brand perceptions based on the original SVS may be misleading. Not only some of the 10 Schwartz value types but also many indicator items might not be applicable to the brand context (Lages and Fernandes 2005). Moreover, genuine brand value types not covered by the SVS might exist.

In this paper we report the methodology and findings of a multi-method study aimed at developing a theory-driven conceptualization of brand values and a valid and reliable brand values scale. For that, we combined knowledge from psychological values research with results from research on consumer behavior and branding.

Our first empirical step was aimed at clarifying whether it is adequate to work with the original SVS scales. 64 respondents evaluated both the single items' applicability to brands in general and with regard to different categories of products or services. Since nearly 80% of the items were not considered being applicable to specific brands, we concluded that the original SVS scale's practicality to assess a brand's perceived values is not given.

In order to evaluate more deeply the suitability of the Schwartz value types in a branding context, in the next step a focus-group interview with a panel of nine marketing experts was carried out. The experts not only discussed the values' meaning with regard to brands in general but also named brands being strongly related to each value type. Although—with the exception of conformity—all Schwartz value types were accepted as being suitable for brand values, the semantic interpretation of some value types (i.e., achievement, power, security, tradition, and universalism) seems to differ significantly from Schwartz's (1992, 1994) original definitions. Consequently, we reformulated inadequate indicator items. A further review panel consisting of 12 marketing experts tested the reformulated list of items. This led to the elimination of items judged being generally inadequate for describing brands.

In the following step, the resulting preliminary brand values scale with 39 indicators was subjected to a survey. A sample of 99 students from three German universities evaluated to what extent each of the items was descriptive of four brands from different categories. The interpretation combined results from exploratory factor analysis and multidimensional scaling with knowledge about the original content of Schwartz's value types, the empirical find-

ings in the earlier studies and recent values research in psychology and consumer behavior. From the nine brand value types identified, five were consistent with Schwartz's human value types (benevolence, hedonism, self-direction, stimulation, tradition). However, there were also significant particularities. Achievement and power were found being merged into a single brand value type. The most important finding was that there might be three brand value types not present as separate human value types in Schwartz's model (aesthetics, ecology, and health).

Since the preliminary scale had shown some limitations (brand value types with intermixed items, three brand value types measured with only one indicator), in the final research step reported here an improved version of the brand values scale with 31 items was tested. A sample of 339 students from two German universities evaluated to what degree each of the items was descriptive of the same brands as in the previous survey. A series of confirmatory factor analyses supported the proposed conceptualization with nine brand value types (achievement/power, aesthetics, benevolence, ecology, health, hedonism, self-direction, stimulation, tradition). In order to gain insights into our brand values scale's nomological validity, we assessed its explanatory strength with regard to brand emotional appeal measured with items drawn from Fombrun, Gardberg, and Sever (2000) and Keller (2008). 157 respondents from a German university completed the questionnaire for two brands. Regressions run on the brand value types revealed significant effects for almost all brand value types, thus indicating nomological validity.

This research shows that conceptualizations of brand values based solely on Schwartz's work in the field of human values do not perfectly match the brand context. Our empirical findings provide converging evidence for the existence of nine different brand value types and indicate that brands can be meaningfully differentiated on this basis. While some brand value types are consistent with their human counterparts, others have to be adjusted. However, all adjustments can be explained by the characteristics of brands that obviously do not perfectly match human characteristics. In addition, our findings corroborate the existence of three genuine brand value types, aesthetics, ecology, and health, which are not present as separate value types in Schwartz's (1992) original model. Moreover, our newly developed brand values scale measures the nine brand value types in a valid and reliable way and thus is a promising instrument for consumer research.

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