

CUSTOMERS' PRONENESS TO RELATIONSHIP SELLING AND UNIVERSAL VALUES

By Brent G. Goff, Charles R. Strain, and Lucille V. Pointer, Delia H. Rodriguez

The development of a new PRS scale examines the relationship between consumers' values and susceptibility to relationship marketing. Both Schwartz and Bilsky's (1987) universal motivation domains and specific values were found to be associated with PRS. As an individual trait, PRS becomes a marketing segmentation variable providing insights for competitive strategy. PRS' linkage to buying motives (values) provides salespeople information on which motives are best to appeal to during adaptive selling encounters. It is posited that individuals vary in their likelihood to engage in building relationships with salespeople due to an individual trait identified as *proneness to relationship selling* (PRS). **Key words:** proneness to relationship selling, relationship marketing, values, segmentation, susceptibility, adaptive selling, motivational domain

This research is the first formal test of the proposition of associations among PRS and values. The purposes of this study are to develop a measure of PRS and explore the possible associations among PRS and Swartz and Bilsky's (1987, 1990) 10 motivational domains and 56 universal values. Values represent individuals' beliefs about life and acceptable behavior. Rokeach (1973) defined values as enduring beliefs that specify modes of conduct or end states of existence which are personally or socially preferable to opposing modes of conduct.

These values are evident across almost all cultures and thought to be hereditary in the sense that they represent innate motives (e.g., security, stimulation). In this study values are viewed as having elements of both innate motives (human requirements), as well as learned, stable and enduring responses (guiding principles).

The determinants of success in personal selling are important issues for both

researchers and practitioners alike. A plethora of recent research has focused on the efforts of salespeople to practice adaptive selling or customer-oriented selling, since satisfaction with the salesperson is a major determinant in relationship development with customers (Williams & Longfellow, 2001). The values of sales personnel appear to be an integral factor in customer receptivity to relationship selling (Wright & Lundstrom, 2004). Consumer susceptibility to salesperson influence (CSSI) has been defined as "the proneness to be affected by the attitudes, opinions and behavior(s) of a salesperson..." (Goff & Walters, 1990). Goff, Bellenger and Stojack (1994) developed CSSI as a multidimensional phenomena that consisted of three dimensions: informational, recommendational and relational. Furthermore, studies support the argument that salespeople who are customer oriented realize better sales performance (Saxe & Weitz, 1982).

Table 1
Motivational Types of Values

Type	Values	Alpha
Achievement	Successful, Capable, Ambitious, Influential, Intelligent, Self-respect	.72
Benevolence	Helpful, Honest, Forgiving, Responsible, True Friendship, a Spiritual Life, Mature Love, Loyal, Meaning in Life	.76
Conformity	Politeness, Honoring Parents and Elders, Obedient, Self-discipline, Clean	.71
Hedonism/ Stimulation	Pleasure, Enjoying Life, a Varied Life, Daring, an Exciting Life	.71
Power	Social Power, Authority, Social Recognition, Wealth, Preserving My Image	.78
Security	National Security, Family Security, Reciprocation of Favors, Social Order, Healthy, Sense of Belonging	.70
Self-direction	Creativity, Curious, Freedom, Choosing Own Goals, Independent	.57
Tradition	Devout, Accepting Position in Life, Humble, Moderate, Detachment, Respect for Tradition	.85
Universalism	Protecting the Environment, a World of Beauty, Wisdom, Equality, Unity with Nature, Broad-minded, Social Justice, a World at Peace, Inner Harmony	.80

METHOD

Sample 1 consisted of college students, enrolled in business courses, in a medium-sized university in the Southwest. A final sample size of 237 students completed a three-page survey. The sample had the following characteristics: 64% male; 26% married; 79% 18 to 30 years old and 19% 31 to 50 years old; 42% with less than \$25,000 per year income, 42% with \$25,001 to \$45,000, 8% with \$45,001 to \$65,001, and 7% with more than \$65,001 per year income.

The correlation, factor and reliability

routines of SPSS PC version 15 were used to analyze the results. PRS items were adapted from measures reported by Goff, Bellinger and Stojack (1994); Crosby, Evans and Crowles (1990) or developed by the authors (See Table 2). The items were measured on a 1 to 9 scale where 1 equaled “Disagree” and 9 equaled “Agree”. Scale purification was performed by using factor and reliability procedures.

Maximum Likelihood confirmatory factor analysis was utilized to purify the PRS scale. Original items included those listed in table

Table 2
Proneness to Relationship Marketing Scale

Proneness to Relationship Selling (Alphas .81 and .70)		
	Loading 1	Loading 2
I like to develop a personal relationship with the salesperson I'm dealing with.	.710	.798
I prefer dealing with salespeople who develop a personal relationship with me.	.660	.743
When dealing with a salesperson, I evaluate the relationship for potential recurring purchases.	.650	.453
Relationships are a priority for me.	.632	.493
I tend to have cooperative relationships with salespeople.	.572	.374
I shop at the same dealership because I am comfortable with the relationship.	.547	.354
I enjoy certain social aspects of the buying relationship.	.539	.374

two plus two additional items. ("I am comfortable in shopping relationships", and "I tend to have adversarial relationships with salespeople").

Measures

The nine items were analyzed and resulted in a two factor solution (promax rotation) with a Chi-square of 54.908 (df 19, $p < .000$). The "I am comfortable" item had a low initial communality (.184) and low loads on both factors. The "adversarial relationships" item had a very low initial communality (.103) and

exhibited factor loads of less than .3 on both factors. Consequently it was deleted from analysis. An eight item solution resulted in a two factor solution (promax rotation) with a Chi-Square of 35.598 (df 13, $p < .000$) that exhibited a heywood case. The "I am comfortable" item had the lowest communality and lowest loads on both factors and was dropped from analysis. A seven item solution resulted in a one factor solution with a Chi-square of 65.243 (df 14, $p < .000$). The Reliability routine in SPSS 15 was utilized to assess the Crohnbach alpha of the seven item

scale ($\alpha = .81$). Deletion of any item reduced the alpha. Schwartz and Bilsky's universal values (1987) were used to measure the values. Respondents were asked to rate each value on a 0 to 100 scale where 0 indicated "Not at All Important" and 100 indicated "As Important as Something Can Possibly Be". The scaling approach is similar to one used by McCarty and Shrum (2000). The individual values were grouped into motive domains reported by Schwartz and Bilsky (1987, 1990). The uni-dimensionality of each individual domain was assessed by confirmatory factor analysis. The hedonism and stimulation domains were combined (Swartz & Boehnke, 2004). The reliability of each domain was assessed by the reliability procedure of SPSS.

Correlations were utilized to determine association among PRS and the value domains. Since the individual values are important buying motives that can be used by sales personnel and as advertising themes, correlations between PRS and the individual values comprising each significant values domain were also assessed.

To confirm the PRS scale properties, a second sample was gathered in the spring of 2006. Sample 2 consisted of college students, enrolled in business courses, in the same medium-sized university in the Southwest. A final sample size of 244 students completed a one and a quarter page survey. The sample had the following characteristics: 41% male; 20% married; 86% 18 to 30 years old and 12% 31 to 50 years old; 53% with less than \$25,000 per year income, 29% with \$25,001

to \$45,000, 10% with \$45,001 to \$65,001, and 8% with more than \$65,001 per year income.

This time PRS scale items were measured on a 1 to 5 scale where 1 equaled "Disagree" and 5 equaled "Agree". Maximum Likelihood confirmatory factor analysis resulted in a one factor solution with a Chi-square of 53.656 ($df\ 14, p < .000$). The Cronbach alpha was .70. See table 2 for loadings. Constraining the results to a two factor solution resulted in a Chi-square of 20.128 ($df\ 8, p < .01$). All of the items had their highest loadings on factor one and all were larger than .3. For factor two, only two items had loadings larger than .3 (.410 and .397). The second factor appears to be a nuisance factor. The one factor solution seems stable and reliable.

RESULTS

PRS was significantly associated with the following value domains: power (.19), hedonism/stimulation (.19), security (.18), universalism (.18), benevolence (.17), and tradition (.17). In order to gain a better understanding of PRS and individual values, correlations with each value were computed. The individual values can be viewed as customer buying motives that can be utilized by salespeople in adaptive selling. The values can also be utilized as motives in advertising messages. Therefore, an understanding of the relationships among the values and PRS has relevance for practitioners.

The following values (**domains in bold**) were significantly associated at the .05 level with PRS: **Achievement**-intelligent (.17), influential (.15); **Benevolence**-mature (.17),

meaning (.16), spiritual (.14); **Conformity**-obedient (.15); **Hedonism/Stimulation**-pleasure (.16), daring (.15), exciting (.15); **Power**-image (.19), recognition (.19); **Security**-belonging (.20), security (.18), healthy (.15); **Self-direction**-curious (.14); **Tradition**-humble (.18), tradition (.18), position (.15), moderate (.14), detachment (.14); and **Universalism**-beauty (.17), equality (.16).

DISCUSSION

This research extends the understanding of relationship selling by developing PRS as a new construct and relating it to universal values that can be construed as buying motives. The PRS construct is an important contribution to the selling literature (O'Malley et al., 1997) by providing a tentative explanation as to why some customers may be, and others may not be, amenable to relationship selling. Therefore, the study proposes that some individuals are prone to relationship selling due to an individual trait. Hence, PRS can be used as a segmentation variable that may help to identify customers prone to relationship marketing.

There is support for the proposition of an association between PRS and both value domains and individual values. Individual values from most of the Swartz and Bilsky motive domains were linked to PRS. The results confirm that a wide range of values influence purchase behavior (Long and Schiffman, 2000) and also support the notion that multiple values may influence choice (Howard, 1977; Sheth, Newman and Gross, 1991).

IMPLICATIONS

The linkage of PRS to values provides salespeople with insights to which motives may be effectively appealing during adaptive selling encounters. Salespersons can probe and gain information from the potential customer about his or her dominant values to decide which type of influence approach is most appropriate to pursue in the sales interaction. This becomes another tool sales managers can use to train their salespeople to enhance their performance similar to their ability to deter the need for autonomy among their salespersons – since managing salesperson perceived autonomy has been demonstrated to be positively related to salesperson performance (Strain & Taylor, 1997). The connection of PRS to buying motives give insights to managers and selling professionals concerning the development of marketing relationships with heavy users since value appeals are more salient for them (Perkins & Reynolds, 1988). However, the results also raise issues concerning potential negative aspects of the implementation of relationship marketing and relationship selling. The establishment of PRS has public policy and corporate policy implications given the finding that it costs five times as much to obtain a new customer as to retain an existing one (Obringer, 2003). Thus, understanding just how much attention your customer needs is important! Too much or too little could jeopardize the continuance of the relationship and the profitability of the company. Corporate policy implications may be considered when using PRS in advertising or with manufacturer's sales agents as a primary means of promotion objectives. Certain

values lend themselves to a situation where a salesperson could potentially act unethically by taking advantage of a client's security or by exerting too much power. Clearly, an implication for clearly laid out sales training that keeps the client's needs at the center is manifested by these findings. The public policy concerns that the findings suggest are that sales agents could use the PRS and knowledge of the client's values and take advantage of the client. Although ethically trained sales agents would behave more ethically than that, standards need to be enforced to keep that tendency to take the advantage too far in check. Finally, advertising can benefit from these results, as IMC uses emotional appeals to engage consumers and try to gain more loyalty for the product. Thus, across a broad promotional spectrum, PRS demonstrates a value-added approach to enhance the abilities of sales managers and salespersons alike.

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Brent G. Goff (Ph. D., University of Arkansas), Charles R. Strain (D.B.A., Mississippi State University) and Lucille V. Pointer (Ph. D., Texas A&M University) are Associate Professors of Marketing in the MMBA Department of the University of Houston-Downtown.

Delia H. Rodriguez (B. B. A., University of Houston-Downtown) is a Librarian with the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas-Houston Branch.

Deborah D. Whitten (M.B.A., Texas Tech University) is a one-year appointment teaching Marketing at University of Houston – Downtown. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Brent G. Goff, MMBA Department, One Main Street, Suite 1066-N, Houston, TX 77002-1001