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Social marketing and value in behaviour? Perceived value of using energy efficiently among low income older citizens

Abstract

PURPOSE: Drawing on value theory, this study explores the perceived value of using energy efficiently amongst a low-income older population group. It aims to provide an empirical exploration of the concept of value-in-behaviour, and in doing so, identify that it is a logical addition to the extant concepts of value-in-exchange and value-in-use.

DESIGN: Exploratory focus group research was conducted to explore older, low-income people's perceived value towards using energy efficiently in the contexts of their everyday lives. The research was conducted in regional NSW, Australia with 11 focus groups of 59 people (40 females, 19 males) aged over 60 with a personal disposable income below \$26,104 per annum.

FINDINGS: Using this framework, functional, economic and ecological value appeared to be the most pertinent value dimensions for using energy efficiently, while social or emotional value was less relevant. Attention is drawn to how value in using energy efficiently emerges within the everyday contingencies and constraints configured by individual households' financial, social, material and cultural contexts. These findings suggest that programmes in this area and with similar target groups would benefit from trying to promote and co-create such value.

ORIGINALITY/VALUE: The present study provides empirical evidence that consumers in a social marketing context appear to perceive value-in-behaviour in relation to using energy efficiently. This approach inspires social marketers to foster individual behaviour change through a better understanding of how value is created in everyday practices. This builds upon existing work on value in social marketing and suggests that value is an important concept that warrants continued theoretical, empirical and practical exploration.

Keywords: value theory, value-in-use, value-in-behaviour, social practices, energy efficiency, social marketing, low-income older consumers, focus groups

Introduction

Contemporary marketing scholarship has increasingly focused on value as a core concept (Grönroos and Voima, 2013). This trend has more recently become evident in social marketing, with scholars identifying that value offers a more comprehensive and nuanced framework for understanding the motivations of people to engage in socially beneficial behaviours (see French and Gordon, 2015). This work on value in social marketing has only recently emerged, and has thus far largely been conceptual (see Domegan et al. 2013), or has focused on the value that citizens may perceive towards the use and experience of goods (value-in-exchange) or services (value-in-use) in social marketing contexts. For example, Zainuddin et al. (2011) examined women's perceived value towards the BreastScreen Queensland cancer screening service. Work in this area has identified how understanding the value perceived by consumers towards goods and services in a social marketing context is an important consideration. For example, the study by Zainuddin et al. (2011) identified that emotional value was an important concern in relation to breast cancer screening services, suggesting that ensuring a consistent, friendly service is vital to maintain engagement among service users. Thus value research offers potential to inform social marketing programme design and delivery.

Whilst such work is important, social marketers have recently begun to consider whether people may not only perceive value in consuming, using and experiencing goods, or services, but also in performing behaviours (see Zainuddin and Gordon, 2014; French and Gordon, 2015). The present study seeks to offer some insight on the proposal that consumers (at least in the social marketing context) may perceive value-in-behaviour. Specifically, the study aims to explore whether consumers do perceive value oriented towards the performance of energy efficient behaviour(s), and identify key implications for social marketing theory and practice.

This paper makes two main contributions to knowledge. Firstly, it provides an empirical exploration of the theoretical concept of value-in-behaviour. The study features a qualitative investigation of low-income older people's perceived value towards using energy efficiently. In doing so, the study contributes towards value theory, identifying that value-in-behaviour is a logical addition to the extant concepts of value-in-exchange and value-in-use. Secondly, the paper identifies some key implications for social marketing from considering value-in-behaviour, identifying that this framework can offer additional insight and understanding on social behaviours that can help inform social marketing programmes.

The paper is organised as follows. The literature on value theory and the theoretical framework for this study are considered, including the development of the value-in-exchange and value-in-use concepts, and the recent emergence of the value-in-behaviour concept that provides the focus for this research. Dimensions of value including functional, economic, emotional, social, and ecological value are then examined within the broader marketing context and specifically in relation to social marketing – with these value dimensions being applied to this study. The research context of energy efficiency is considered, and the research questions investigated in this study are presented. The methods section then describes the process for the qualitative interpretive focus group research. The study findings, examining participants' perceived value across the five value dimensions are then presented. The article concludes with a discussion on the theoretical and practical implications for social marketing that emerge from this study, and suggestions are made for future research in this area.

Value-in-exchange to value-in-use to value-in-behaviour

The Oxford English Dictionary defines value as the regard that something is held to deserve, the importance, worth, or usefulness of something (2013, p3500). The shift towards focusing on value creation and co-creation has been identified as offering a broader perspective for understanding marketing, including social marketing interactions, through its ability to incorporate multiple actors and multiple dimensions involved (Chandler and Vargo, 2011; French and Gordon, 2015). Furthermore, understanding the value that consumers perceive towards something – whether it is goods, services, or behaviours, offers an additional factor to consider as a predictor of consumption behaviour beyond attitudes (Sánchez-Fernández and Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). Indeed, research suggests that attitudes are not always a strong predictor of consumer behaviour and that other factors that may explain attitude-behaviour gaps (such as value) need to be considered (Boulstridge and Carrigan, 2000).

Value-in-exchange

Early work on conceptualising value in marketing was derived towards goods, and took a value-in-exchange perspective (Porter, 1985) that is outcomes oriented (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). This proposes an economic approach on value, involving a process through which consumers identify value from an evaluation of costs against benefits (Zeithaml, 1988). An example of this may be consideration of what is the value in purchasing a washing machine. While there may be both extrinsic and intrinsic benefits in value-in-exchange, this primarily tends towards extrinsic benefits. The concept of value-in-exchange can be identified as particularly relevant to traditional understandings of commercial marketing, in which the outcome orientation is profit for a firm gained through the delivery of value to the customer. According to this perspective value is derived during the exchange. In marketing, exchange is defined as a reciprocal exchange of goods, services, or resources between two or more parties with the expectation of some benefits that will satisfy the needs of each party (Bagozzi, 1975; Houston and Gassenheimer, 1987). Therefore, value-in-exchange refers to the value derived by parties (usually firms and customers) involved in such exchanges. Yet, whilst value-in-exchange might be useful for understanding consumer-perceived value towards the consumption of goods, and in situations in which there are only limited parties, it cannot encompass all elements of value. Applying the concept to social marketing, value-in-exchange can be useful to understand interactions involving transfer of tangible goods such as oral hydration tablets, condoms, or screening kits (Population Services International, 1977). However, social marketing often involves intangible entities such as feelings, experiences, social behaviours or intangible concepts such as the promise of a healthier lifestyle (for example, if you quit smoking).

Recognising these issues, social marketers have attempted to broaden the horizons of conceptualisations of exchanges in social marketing contexts (see Hastings, 2007). This has involved proposing a broader idea of exchange that offers participants something beneficial in exchange for taking part in social programmes and performing pro-social behaviours. In such examples, the benefits that may be offered in exchange may be tangible (rewards/incentives for participation or making behavioural changes) or intangible (e.g. personal satisfaction, improved health and wellbeing) (French and Blair-Stevens, 2006). Nevertheless, select social marketing scholars have identified that the exchange concept, and as a consequence value-in-exchange, does not always sit comfortably in social marketing due to the commercial origins of the concept and because of its focus on tangibles, discernible outcomes, and economic rational decision making (see Peattie and Peattie, 2003; Stead et al. 2007). The limitations of an exchange-only perspective of value have also been recognised in

the mainstream marketing literature, with scholars proposing an experiential value-in-use perspective (Sánchez-Fernández and Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007).

Value-in-use

During the past ten or so years, an experiential approach to value, value-in-use, has been introduced into the marketing literature. However, there is scholarly debate around what is value-in-use (see Macdonald et al. 2011). Macdonald et al. (2011, p671) define value-in-use as “a customer's outcome, purpose or objective that is achieved through service” with service in turn consisting of the skills, knowledge, and resources that actors use to deliver value. It should be noted here that there is an important distinction between service thinking (focused on the application of operand resources such as skills and knowledge) and services marketing thinking (focused on the delivery of services to clients) that should be acknowledged before continuing the discussion (see Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

Experiential marketing scholars such as Holbrook (2006) have conceptualised value-in-use as an interactive and relativistic preference experience that is related to the total experience of consuming goods and services. According to this view, value-in-use identifies that consumer value is realised during the consumption experience, rather than being embodied within goods or services (Sandström et al., 2008). What these perspectives share in common and help distinguish value-in-use from value-in-exchange is the clear acknowledgement of processes and experiences rather than transactions, multiple actors beyond producer and consumer, and that consumers are not passive but may actively create or co-create value.

As such, value-in-use differs from value-in-exchange, as it does not restrict value to being derived from a transactional exchange that is outcome-oriented, but conceptualises value as being derived through experiences and service processes. For example, value-in-use may be the value the consumer perceives towards the overall experience of going to a bank and using financial services in the store, such as: how long they waited in the queue; how friendly the staff were; what were the benefits from the financial services they were offered; and so on. In the value-in-use domain, there are both extrinsic and intrinsic benefits. However, the benefits tend to lean more heavily towards intrinsic benefits (Sandström et al., 2008; Holbrook, 2006).

Value-in-use is relevant to social marketing when the outcome orientation is behaviour change or maintenance for individuals who may consume, use and experience goods or services; or who may be involved in processes that involve resources, skills and knowledge being used to create value. Although this could be applied to a wide range of resource activities in social marketing contexts, the principal focus of existing social marketing research in this area has taken a services marketing perspective. Social marketing services researchers have used the value-in-use concept to investigate consumers' values towards blood donation and cancer screening services (Russell-Bennett et al. 2012; Zainuddin et al. 2011). This work has identified that participants do identify value-in-use towards social marketing services related to their experiences with resources operating in these contexts, and that these value perceptions have an impact on associated attitudes and behaviours – such as intention to reuse a social marketing service. This perspective has obvious relevance to social marketing, as it can help us understand consumers' perceived value of using services, such as a cancer screening service, including issues such as how long they waited in a queue, how friendly the staff were, and how welcoming the physical aspects of the service are (Zainuddin et al. 2013). Therefore, work in this area has begun to demonstrate the relevance and utility of value theory for social marketing, particularly in programmes that involve delivery and use of services (Russell-Bennett et al. 2013). What has emerged from existing research is that

focusing on high quality service experiences that create and deliver value to consumers is very important in social marketing programmes that feature services. However, work that considers more broadly value-in-use relating to service (skills, knowledge and resources brought to market to create value) as conceptualised by Vargo and Lusch (2004) remains lacking.

Value-in-behaviour

Whilst value-in-use offers a useful lens for social marketing research, there are some limitations to its use. Vargo and Lusch's (2004) original work on a service-dominant logic for marketing has been perceived as presenting everything as service (Rust, 2004). This leads us to question what happens in social marketing when there is no service experience or when we want to understand value perceptions with a different or more specific orientation. Indeed, scholars such as Wright and Russell (2012) have critiqued and identified limitations with seeing marketing solely through a service dominant logic as espoused by Vargo and Lusch, (2004). Wright and Russell (2012) state that perceiving everything in marketing as service is essentialising, and is a tautological argument that is not testable. Furthermore, in social marketing not all programmes, not all elements of programmes, and not all consumer agency, necessarily involves either using services; or engaging with service. In many social marketing contexts citizens perform behaviours with limited or no interaction with services; or with actors who deliver service resources (McCosker et al. 2014).

A primary focus in social marketing is the promotion of pro-social behaviour(s) and facilitating behaviour change, adoptions or maintenance. Therefore, recent social marketing work has focused on whether and how citizens may perceive value in the actual behaviour(s) required to engender social good. Zainuddin and Gordon (2014) and French and Gordon (2015) have more recently proposed a behavioural orientation towards value in social marketing. This perspective proposes that consumers can perceive value that is, or is not, realised through the performance of behaviour. Here the orientation of consumer's value perceptions is not towards exchanging for goods or services, or using and experiencing them, but towards the performance of pro-social behaviours. This builds upon Chandler and Vargo's (2011) work on value-in-context in which they acknowledge the relevance of understanding behaviours, practices, multiple stakeholders, and systems that often operate in marketing interactions. Whilst this social systems perspective is important, Chandler and Vargo (2011) and others have not yet comprehensively explicated how value may be perceived or created within these different entities. Therefore, the concept of value-in-behaviour provides a framework for understanding value within one component of the systems approach advocated by Chandler and Vargo (2011) – with respect to consumer behaviours.

Consumers' perceived value in behaviour may be intrinsically or extrinsically benefit-motivated, as we know there are a multitude of reasons why people perform specific behaviours (French and Gordon, 2015). A value-in-behaviour perspective permits consideration of consumer-perceived value towards performing behaviours – e.g. what is the value in exercising daily, or what is the value in using energy efficiently? This proposal can help add further insight to understanding behaviour and behaviour change by adding additional perspective, and can contribute towards a holistic and multi-dimensional appraisal of value in social marketing. For example, energy efficiency can involve exchanging for (e.g. buying an energy efficient washing machine), using and experiencing goods and services (e.g. the use of electricity) but also the performance of behaviours (running the washing machine when it is full of clothing). The addition of value-in-behaviour enables social

marketers to understand consumer value perceptions towards the pro-social behaviours that are being promoted. However, whilst we propose value-in-behaviour as an additional domain for investigating consumer perceived value in social marketing contexts, the concept may also be relevant to other consumption contexts in which behaviours are performed.

The present study seeks to provide empirical evidence for the value-in-behaviour concept through consideration of the first of three research questions: **RQ1: Do consumers in a social marketing context perceive value in behaviour (in this case using energy efficiently)?**

Value-in-behaviour can incorporate all the dimensions of value an individual may perceive in the performance of behaviours, such as exercising more, or using energy efficiently. These value-in-behaviour perceptions, as with value-in-exchange and value-in-use, may exist across several dimensions including (but not limited to) functional value, economic value, emotional value, social value, and ecological value. These dimensions of value are examined next.

Dimensions of value

Several dimensions of value have been identified and conceptualised in the commercial marketing literature (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Koller et al. 2011). Whilst there are acknowledged debates around what are the various dimensions of value, and how they may relate and sometimes overlap, the present study examined functional, economic, emotional, social, and ecological value towards using energy efficiently as these were identified as the most relevant to the topic area.

Functional value

Functional value refers to the utility, convenience, and control provided by the consumption of something, is extrinsically motivated (perceived as a means to an end), and for the benefit of the self rather than others (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). An example in the social marketing context would be the consistency in the quality of a screening service, control over the process, being well delivered, and being of acceptable standard of quality (Zainuddin et al. 2011). Relating this to value-in-behaviour, examples specific to the present study include it being easy to use energy efficiently, and feeling that you have control over using energy efficiently.

Economic value

Economic value is intrinsically motivated, and focused on price and cost-benefit analysis from consuming goods and services, or from performing behaviours (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001) According to some scholars, and in some contexts, economic value has and can be integrated within the functional value dimension (Russell-Bennett et al. 2009). However, there may be cases in which economic value may not be relevant, for example when no economic exchange takes place, as is often the case in social marketing. Also, there may be instances when functional value and economic value may be distinct from one another. Therefore, other scholars present economic value as a separate dimension (e.g. Payne and Holt, 1999; Koller et al. 2011). Perceptions of economic value are essentially driven by cost-benefit analysis from consuming goods and services, or from performing behaviours. This can include considerations of whether something is reasonably priced, whether it provides value for money, and whether it is financially economical. In the social marketing context, examples include whether using energy efficiently offers value for money, or if the price of gym membership to help increase levels of physical activity and improve health is reasonably priced.

Emotional value

Emotional value is intrinsically motivated (an end in itself) and self-oriented. This relates to where consumption occurs for the emotional experience and for no other end-goal (Holbrook, 2006). Essentially, emotional value refers to different affective states that can be positive (e.g., confidence and pleasure), negative (e.g., anger and fear), or even neutral (e.g. ambivalence) (Sánchez-Fernández and Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). The utility in perceiving emotional value in a consumption context is derived from the feelings generated by the consumption of goods or services, or the performance of behaviours. Similarly, in the context of say using social marketing health services, participants could be expected to experience some form of emotion, particularly when it relates to personal health and wellbeing. An example in the social marketing context people may perceive reduced tension or anxiety from attending a heart health clinic, or in the context of the present study they may perceive increased happiness or feelings of pride from using energy efficiently.

Social value

Social value is also extrinsically motivated, but it is directed at others (Holbrook, 2006). Social value focuses on influencing other people as a means to achieving a desired goal, such as status or influence within groups (Russell-Bennett et al., 2009). The utility of social value for a consumer is acquired from the association of a product, service, or behaviour with social groups (Sheth et al., 1991) as well as their ability to enhance the consumer's self-concept (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Extant research has identified that social value is often sought when individuals seek to shape the response of others (Gallarza and Saura, 2006; Holbrook, 2006). It is also known that consumers often seek congruence with the norms of friends and associates when consuming (Sánchez-Fernández and Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007), or when performing behaviours (Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004). Social value appears relevant to social marketing as citizens may choose to perform desirable behaviours in order to fit in socially, or to influence others to perform similar behaviours. For example, a mother might make an attempt to quit smoking to set a good example to her children. In the context of this study, it could be theorised that a person may feel that being energy efficient positively impacts the way they are perceived by others in deriving social value.

Ecological value

Ecological value is a more recent dimension of value that has been proposed, in response to the increasing importance that consumers place on the impact that their consumption behaviours and experiences have on the natural environment (Koller et al., 2011). It is identified as being intrinsically motivated, though this has not been well established as empirical research on ecological value has only recently emerged (Koller et al., 2011). However, there may be synergies between the idea of ecological value and what Holbrook (2006) terms altruistic value – a concern for how one's consumption practices affect others, or what French and Gordon (2015) term as societal value – oriented towards the effect on society and the greater good relating to consumption practices. The utility of ecological value relates to perceived impacts on ecology and the natural environment, as well as its ability to enhance an individual's self-concept. For example, a consumer may perceive ecological value in purchasing and using a hybrid motor vehicle as it has lower carbon omissions and less impact on the environment. However, the same consumer may also perceive ecological value in how owning a hybrid car makes them feel about themselves – creating a sense that they are being 'green'. In the social marketing context, an example of perceived ecological value may be using energy efficiently to make a contribution towards reducing climate change, and also be perceived as 'green' by friends.

Whilst the relevance of value theory, and examining dimensions of value to social marketing appears clear, it is only recently that conceptual (Domegan et al. 2013), and empirical work has emerged (Zainuddin et al. 2013). Furthermore, existing work has focused on value-in-exchange and value-in-use in social marketing contexts. This paper seeks to advance understanding of the relevance of value theory in social marketing, through an exploratory study of participants' perceived value of the behaviour(s) of using energy efficiently in the home. This leads to the second research question: **RQ2: What is the relevance and implication of the concept of value-in-behaviour for social marketing?**

Research Context

The present study considers the concept of value-in-behaviour in relation to using energy efficiently. Definitions of energy efficiency can vary but generally refer to reducing the amount of energy required to provide everyday functions (see Australian Government Department of the Environment and Water Resources, Australian Greenhouse Office, 2006; NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, 2013). In the context of the present study we define energy efficiency as *using energy wisely and economically to sustain everyday life, live comfortably, and support well-being*.

Research on energy efficiency has attracted increasing attention across a variety of disciplines, including anthropology (Pink and Leder-Mackley, 2012), engineering (Diakaki et al., 2008; Ma et al., 2012), geography (Day and Hitchings 2009; Gram-Hanssen 2009; Hargreaves et al. 2010; Hitchings et al. 2015), sociology (Shove 2003, Halkier et al. 2011; Strengers and Maller 2011;), social marketing (McKenzie-Mohr, 2011), and psychology (Stern, 1992). Work in the social marketing/behaviour change domain has traditionally sought to understand and influence consumer attitudes and/or influence perceptions of social norms to facilitate energy efficiency behaviours (see Abrahamse et al. 2005; McKenzie-Mohr, 2011). The UK Department of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) (2008) published 'A Framework for Pro-Environmental Behaviours' that advocated the use of social marketing principles such as segmentation in energy efficiency programmes.

Belz and Peattie (2009) suggest that the most consistent finding across the energy efficiency behaviour change research field is the well-established attitude-behaviour gap; the common inconsistency between what people say, as expressed through attitudes and values, and how they actually behave. The attitude-behaviour gap has also been identified in other related areas such as ethical consumption (Boulstridge and Carrigan, 2000). Due to this attitude-behaviour gap relating to using energy efficiency, inquiry is needed into other individual, structural and socio-cultural factors that may influence being energy efficient. In the social marketing context, this reinforces the increasing recognition that it is not enough to simply understand and try to influence attitudes to influence pro-social behaviours (French and Gordon, 2015).

Therefore, using value theory, and exploring the value-in-behaviour of using energy efficiently across a number of dimensions provides an opportunity to identify, and add insight to and understanding of, individual factors driving energy use behaviours. Such insights and understanding can also help inform social marketing programmes on energy efficiency by identifying what value is relevant, and should be identified and promoted to consumers. Work in this area could also assist segmentation efforts, permitting social marketers to segment consumer groups according to the types of value they perceive in using energy efficiently.

Given the increasing interest in understanding energy efficiency, in what motivates people to use energy efficiently, and in delivering energy efficiency social marketing programmes, the present study is timely. By investigating whether and how people perceive value-in-behaviour towards using energy efficiently, the present study aims to generate conceptual and practical insights that can help inform future social programmes in this area, as well as inform social marketing programme design and delivery more generally. This leads to the third research question: **RQ3: How can understanding value-in-behaviour help inform social marketing programmes on energy efficiency, and in other contexts?**

Method

The study featured exploratory qualitative focus group research with low-income older residents in regional NSW, as part of a broader, multidisciplinary and multi-component social marketing programme to facilitate energy efficiency in an Australian community. Focus groups were chosen for this study, as the main focus here was to explore the concept of value-in-behaviour given the lack of existing empirical work in this area (French and Gordon, 2015). Furthermore focus groups methods have been previously used as an exploratory approach in social marketing research on value – for example Mulcahy’s (2015) study on experiential value of using mobile games in a social marketing context, and the work of McColl-Kennedy et al. (2012) examining value co-creation practices among cancer clinic patients. Small focus groups interviews with 3-8 participants were selected as an appropriate method for exploring perceptions of value towards energy efficiency as they can foster the sharing of narratives and reflections upon the everyday and mundane (Bryman, 2012).

The focus on low-income older residents was guided by the strategic objectives of the funding body for this project, and also given that research suggests that this population segment often face issues with managing energy costs, and living in thermal comfort (keeping warm and keeping cool) (Chester & Morris, 2011; ACOSS, 2014). An interpretive approach to gaining insight on participants’ perceived functional, economic, emotional, social and ecological value of using energy efficiently was taken. These insights were used to identify the conceptual and practical relevance of value perceptions in the context of social marketing and energy efficiency, and to inform the later development of a social marketing programme seeking to facilitate energy efficient behaviours. A purposive sampling approach (see Table 1 for sample composition) was utilised in which local networks were used to recruit people aged 60+ (n=59), with personal disposable income below \$26,104 per annum (the Australian Bureau of Statistics threshold for low-income [2011]). Eleven focus groups were held (40 females, 19 males), following which it was identified that data collection was completed as an appropriate volume of significant themes explored in this article had been identified.

Focus groups were conducted with residents in various locations in the region including two in a regional coastal city, four in the coastal city suburbs, three in a coastal town, and two in a highland town. This helped account for population spread, diversity in climatic conditions and likely effects on energy use in the home. Two groups were held with residents in Independent Living Units (ILU) in residential aged care villages, as the larger project includes a component to facilitate energy efficiency in select ILU villages.

INSERT Table 1: Focus Group Participant Demographics

Information sheets and consent forms were distributed, and written informed participant consent was obtained with the study receiving ethical approval from the appropriate University Human Research Ethics Committee. Participants were presented with a \$50 gift voucher as recompense for their time, and groups were held in participants' homes, or a local amenity – depending on the preference of participants. A semi structured discussion guide was developed, and was informed by an extensive review of the value theory literature (e.g. Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Koller et al. 2011). The focus here was on exploring respondents' perceived functional, economic, emotional, social, and ecological value perceptions towards using energy efficiently. Example questions included: do you think it is easy to use energy efficiently; do you think it is easy to control (both functional value); does using energy efficiently offer good value for money (economic value); how does it make you feel when you use energy efficiently (emotional value); how might you be perceived by others (social value); and do you think using energy efficiently can make a contribution to the environment (ecological value)¹. While the analysis presented here focuses on value perceptions, it should be acknowledged that other areas of focus for analysis and interpretation of the data may be possible.

Group discussions were digitally recorded, transcribed, and then entered into the QSR NVivo 10 qualitative data software tool ready for analysis. A corpus of 13 hours, 14 minutes and 49 seconds of audio, and 443 pages of transcripts was produced. Once the data was collected and loaded into QSR NVivo 10, the researchers initially reviewed the data, met and discussed emergent themes from the data, and discussed whether value theory and value-in-behaviour could offer a useful lens for interpreting participant's narratives. A draft coding structure based on the aforementioned value dimensions of functional, economic, emotional, social and ecological value was then developed, and data categorised and coded in NVivo into each node by two of the researchers, with inter-coder reliability checks conducted on all coding decisions, and with a third researcher resolving any coding disagreements. The researchers then further considered and discussed the coding process and the thematic analysis during an iterative process involving numerous meetings over a period of several months to reach a negotiated interpretation and representation of whether and how participants perceived value in using energy efficiently, and identifying the implications for social marketing. Themes and findings from the analysis were also shared with a selected number of study participants to provide a form of member checking, with any feedback considered and incorporated into the interpretations provided here.

Findings

Analysis of the focus group transcripts found that participants in all groups were fairly conscious of the topic of energy efficiency – describing practices like “*being aware of how you use it*”, “*be aware of how you use electricity and not waste it*”, “*being careful*”, “*only using when you need*”, and also utilising energy efficient appliances and other materials and products like solar panels. Participants also displayed distinguishable value perceptions towards behaviour(s) relating to using energy efficiently. This reinforces the relevance of the value-in-behaviour perspective proposed by Zainuddin and Gordon (2014).

Functional value

Functional value was identified as important in relation to using energy efficiently. Participants stated that using energy efficiently is not necessarily something that is easy to do, and requires effort and commitment.

¹ Note that a copy of the focus group discussion guide is available from the authors upon request.

“I don’t think it’s easy but I think once you’ve committed to it then it becomes easier” (Group 2).

“Not a lot, but it does take a bit of effort and a bit of commitment” (Group 3).

There was some level of heterogeneity in the views of the functional value of using energy efficiently, for instance participants in focus group 7 commented:

“I think it’s easy.”

“You have to put a lot of thought in it... keep on thinking all the time, am I doing the right thing or not.”

“I don’t know about anyone else, but I think I’m past that, too many other things to think about” (Group 7).

Some participants identified that using energy efficiently is something that can be controlled and done consistently through making it a habit and getting into a routine. The functional and indeed economic value of doing this was also expressed.

“It’s habit forming. It’s a way of life. You just don’t think about it, it becomes a habit” (Group 1).

“Certainly for me, once I’ve gotten into the habit of something I do it subconsciously. Before I go to bed at night, I turn all the plugs off. I don’t even think about it, and then I think ‘Did I do it (tonight)? And I have to get up and check if I have or haven’t. It’s like anything isn’t like, like cleaning your teeth” (Group 2).

“To a certain degree you can (control it). Seeing how we were able to reduce that massive bill by using solar energy and being mindful of our energy use” (Group 2).

Others identified that it can be challenging, and felt a lack of control over being able to use energy efficiently.

“Sometimes you can’t control it. As you get older you get more forgetful about things. We do anyway, and it’s a good idea to go around and check the place before you go to bed because many a time we – or me – have left a light on” (Group 4).

Many participants also mentioned the utility of using energy efficiently. For example, people discussed comfort in being able to use their heater when cold because they had been diligent in their energy use, or feeling safe by keeping their home well-lit using energy saving lighting.

“My personal comfort is more important sometimes than the cost - that’s not because I’m well off, I just like to be comfortable... And really you have to have some comfort in life... if you were trying to cut it down to the bare bones, but life was miserable, is it worth saving?” (Group 10)

Therefore, the functional value of using energy efficiently appeared to be a relevant concept in this study. This suggests that social marketing programmes to encourage energy efficient behaviours may benefit from communicating and facilitating their functional value, making it easier to do and identifying the utilitarian benefits. This finding supports earlier work

focusing on consumers use of a breast screening service that identified functional value enabled by things like consistency of the service was an important factor motivating participants (Zainuddin et al. 2011).

Economic value

The economic value of using energy efficiently was identified as the most pertinent value dimension in nearly all of the focus groups. Indeed, when discussing other value dimensions, economic value would often be mentioned. Given the low-income status of participants, and increasing concerns over rising energy prices, this may be unsurprising.

“Well, being energy efficient is going to save you money isn’t it? It’s great...It makes a big difference” (Group 1).

“We turn off all the appliances after use at the power point. And we have two solar panels which are very efficient in the summer time but not in the winter months. It has to be boosted with electricity. So I try to conserve as much as possible... for environmental and cost reasons” (Group 6).

“I found in the last 12 months since she’s gone that I am very conscious of use of electricity. I only have one light on of a night time which is a small light, just for reading or whatever, TV of course, computer. But it has made me more conscious and acutely aware of what I can do to cut down on cost. Using the washing machine, clothing washing, I find I can get by with once a week” (Group 7).

“I think it’s in the back of your mind that you’ve got to think of the future and the environment. Also the bill, I’m not thinking so much of the bill but I’m very aware that the microwave is so efficient and so much less costly and therefore you’re using less electricity. I use the microwave for virtually everything. I hate putting the oven on to heat things” (Group 7).

Many participants discussed how their primary concern and motivation when using energy was to save or reduce economic costs. However, this was not universal, and a few people mentioned that they just used energy without thinking about the costs.

“I do think the bottom line is money” (Group 2).

“Cost. The price. I think in general people are using less because they’re more aware of it. And on a low income – when you get hit with a big bill like that” (Group 3).

“Well it helps – it helps pay the bill doesn’t it” (Group 8).

“I don’t think of it that way I’m afraid. If I need it I use it but I don’t think I particularly waste it” (Group 9).

“I feel too at our age, we’ve got to enjoy what time we’ve got left anyway so to be frugal doesn’t serve a point really (Group 11).

In relation to the economic value of using energy efficiently, the findings here suggest that it is a primary motivator for performing energy efficient behaviours. Yet, costs could also act as a barrier in relation to purchasing appliances and materials that could conceivably deliver

people increased economic value in being energy efficient. Some clear examples of this related to how participants considered the installation of solar panels or solar hot water systems, where the upfront cost was considered too high for the benefit of the return. It appeared that only when there was a potential impact on health was there a motivation to consider an expensive outlay on a solar hot water system.

“It’s the initial outlay. It can be quite expensive.”

Q: Is that the biggest barrier [to installing solar panels]?

“Yes, it is. It sounds great though doesn’t it?”

It sounds good; I think really good for younger people” (Group 2).

“[It’s] the cost factor... considering the way the house is and unless you’re going to stay here for the rest of your life and live another 20 years, which we may or not, you won’t really recoup it” (Group 10).

“I have considered solar power but we just never got round to it. In January this year my water heater went after 13 years and I did seriously consider it but the cost was quite a lot. We were having a lot of medical expenses at the time so I thought I’ll just replace it” (Group 10).

Therefore, social marketing programmes could benefit from accentuating the economic value of using energy efficiently, particularly in relation to smaller household modifications and behavioural choices. Benefit could also come from reducing barriers to more expensive energy efficient materials that do not appear to offer value for money for this particular target group through subsidies or even a longer term and strategic approach to investing in existing housing stock.

Emotional value

Emotional value did not appear to be as relevant in relation to using energy efficiently among study participants, compared to other value dimensions. A common refrain was that the emotional value of using energy efficiently was never or rarely considered.

“Making me feel safe? I never think about it that way... Protected, I would never think of that connotation” (Group 1).

“I don’t have any particular feeling about it you know” (Group 9).

“I’ve never really given it much thought... we just take it for granted really” (Group 11).

The most pertinent emotional value that participants identified with was that being energy efficient was associated with feeling safe, often through the reduction of various hazards.

“Well I do think it’s nice at night when we come in the village and we drive in and there’s light, I do like that, that makes you feel safe” (Group 1).

“We have lights – an awful lot of light here if you come back after dark but if we didn’t have them the safety would be a question mark. The stairs become a real problem. If there’s not a good light in the stairs you’ve got twice the problem” (Group 11).

There were a few participants who identified that it might make them feel pleased, or even righteous if they had been energy efficient, or that it may make them feel less stressed and worried. Participants did not appear to have demonstrated feelings of pride in using energy efficiently, instead referring to other concerns such as ecological value and protecting future generations.

“If you’re comfortable in your own environment with the amount of power you’re consuming and if you’re comfortable, you’re happy” (Group 1).

Q: What about the emotion of feeling calm?

“You’re not getting worked up about it or worried” (Group 1).

“Righteous, I feel righteous” (Group 4).

Q: Does it make you feel proud?

“I don’t think proud is the word... no... aware... you’re aware you’re trying to save for the future. I think we have more awareness than the younger generations” (Group 7).

Therefore the emotional value of using energy efficient did not appear to be a particularly strong motivator for many energy efficient behaviours in the home. This differs from earlier social marketing research on using breast cancer screening services that identified that emotional value was a strong factor (Zainuddin et al. 2011). This is perhaps unsurprising given that personal health is a very emotive issue, whereas using energy in the home is functional and mundane. In this study and with respect to using energy efficiently, participants appeared to be relatively ambivalent or neutral – an emotional state of perceived value identified and discussed by Sánchez-Fernández and Iniesta-Bonillo (2007).

Social value

Social value also appeared to be a less relevant value dimension. Participants discussed how they did not think that using energy efficiently would have much influence on how others viewed them, or could offer social status. This may also be related to how many participants identified that people do not often talk about energy use and being energy efficient – suggesting it is a relatively internal and private behaviour.

“To be honest I don’t think about it. I just do it. I don’t think it affects it [how others see me]” (Group 4).

“I don’t think you’d change your mind [to think] more or less of someone” (Group 7).

“I don’t discuss it with others.”

“I don’t think so.”

“I don’t think they’re aware” (Group 9).

The most common expression of social value in being energy efficient was related to hosting, or having guests visit the home. It was in this situation that some participants described actively changing their usual behaviours in the interest and comfort of the guest/s and influencing perceptions of how others perceived them.

“I always put the heater on Saturday afternoon when my daughter comes down, because she comes down in a summer dress with no sleeves on. And you have to put the heater on because she’s cold. But I wouldn’t put a heater on in the day time for anything” (Group 3).

“I think you know, people coming in, influences you maybe a bit more to put the heater on – not for our comfort, [for] their comfort” (Group 7).

Indeed a few participants even identified everyday behaviours being shaped by family members who live in the same residence. This suggests that any social value perceived in using energy efficiently is most likely to relate to close family members or fellow householders.

“Unfortunately where do you draw the line? When it came to energy, I drew a lot of information from the iPad and I went in that direction. But I found the direction I was going in I was enforcing those values on other people in the household. So I was forever walking in, flicking lights off and telling other people ‘turn that off because you’re not using it’. And in the end I was becoming one of those people...”

“Were you the energy Nazi were you?”

“I was going in that direction. In the end I was becoming unfavourable with the people I was living with so I had to pull back. No matter what now I look up and I see there’s an injustice in that room - there’s 4 devices on, we only need 2 but I just walk away. In my house now I have 6 people living there and I don’t restrict them from whatever they use because I find in the end the balance is harmony over efficiency, and people like me or don’t like me – I’d rather them like me” (Group 10).

In the present study there did not appear to be a strong sense of social value in being energy efficient. Given that social marketers and other scholars have discussed how social value is extrinsically motivated (Holbrook, 2006), driven by a desire to fit in with socially desirable behaviours (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004), the social value of being energy efficient is less pertinent because these behaviours are performed in the home, often out of view from peer and social circles. This demonstrates how important context is in determining which values a social marketing programme aims to co-create and promote in encouraging behavioural change. However, the findings here do not suggest social value is completely irrelevant in this context, in particular when this cohort of participants were hosting or catering to the needs of family, guests and other householders, it appeared that it may be of concern.

Ecological value

In addition to functional and economic value, ecological value appeared to be an important value dimension to some participants who identified that using energy efficiently could make a contribution to helping the environment.

“I think it’s also the whole greenhouse thing, you’re sort of aware of not overusing energy. We’re much more socially aware of what this can do to the environment and we’re in a position to do that which we are with just the 2 of us whereas before that with children you’re putting your children’s comfort first” (Group 2).

“For us it’s very much about the conservation as well and we’re a lot more aware of it down here I guess because of where we live. That is a lovely forest behind us and we don’t want to do anything to damage that” (Group 3).

“It’s very important.”

“I think so too.”

“I think it’s very important” (Group 4).

However, for some these thought processes were still intertwined with considerations of the economic dimensions – for some the environment was mentioned first and for others it was economic value followed by ecological.

“It contributes [to helping the environment] but it’s not a conscious thought ... It’s more money saving. Driven by money” (Group 1).

Q: Is saving money the most important driver?

“Closely followed and almost equal to, but not quite, the environmental issues because I think people, certainly our generation, is much more aware of it because we’ve been able to see the massive change in air quality and all kinds of things” (Group 2).

“I think it’s environmental as well as cost” (Group 5).

“I think it’s a bit of both – economic and environmental” (Group 8).

In identifying the ecological value of using energy efficiently, several participants stated that a strong motivation was to make a difference so that younger generations would not suffer from the adverse impact of environmental degradation.

“We grew up with that mindset of being very careful. From the money aspect as much as anything else. And I think our age group still have that and so now we have the time to be more aware of energy and we are aware of what’s happening in the environment and we don’t want to leave a world that is practically combusting for our younger generation” (Group 3).

“You’re helping to save the planet aren’t you, if you’re going to do the right thing ... We’re thinking of the kids coming up now – what’s the world going to be like for them. We’ve got to do something – or do our bit anyway” (Group 3).

These discussions relevant to ecological value of using energy efficiently appear to justify the introduction of this value dimension to the value theory literature by Koller et al. (2011). It is perhaps unsurprising that the results demonstrate utility in ecological value of being energy efficient, given the environmental impact that energy production and consumption has. The ecological value of engaging in energy efficient behaviours was a strong motivator in this group of older, low income participants. Moreover, the discussion on leaving a better world behind for future generations transcends a focus on protecting the ecological environment, but suggest that citizens may also perceive value in and be motivated towards performing behaviours for broader societal level benefits. This is a major gap in the existing value theory literature, which remains somewhat located within an individualistic perspective – what is in it for me? However, scholars have suggested that perhaps at least in the social marketing

domain, people may see value in behaviour that is related to societal benefits – proposing a concept of societal value (see French and Gordon, 2015).

Discussion

This exploratory study aimed to explore whether a sample of low income older consumers do perceive value oriented towards the performance of energy efficient behaviour(s), and identify key implications for social marketing theory and practice. With respect to RQ1: the study did identify that consumers in a social marketing context perceived value in behaviour (using energy efficiently). Specifically, our analysis of the data identified that economic value; functional value and ecological value appeared to be the most important and relevant motivators in influencing energy behaviours and practices in the home. The present study makes identified contributions to both theory and practice.

With respect to RQ2, there are some important theoretical implications relating to the concept of value-in-behaviour for social marketing knowledge. The current study is one of the first to empirically explore the concept of value-in-behaviour recently introduced to the social marketing domain (Zainuddin and Gordon, 2014; French and Gordon, 2015). The findings here identified that study participants do appear to hold value perceptions towards behaviour(s) (i.e. using energy efficiently) in a social marketing context. This suggests the utility of broadening the scope of value theory beyond value-in-exchange, and value-in-use to a value-in-behaviour perspective. This can enable social marketers to understand the value that consumers perceive towards exchanging for, using and experiencing goods and services, but also towards the performance of pro-social behaviours. This adds an additional perspective to understanding behaviour and behaviour change, and can contribute towards a holistic and multi-dimensional systems type appraisal of value in social marketing (French and Gordon, 2015). Furthermore, the value-in-behaviour concept helps contribute some understanding regarding one of the components of Chandler and Jones's (2011) value-in-context framework that identifies the importance of considering behaviours, practice, multiple actors, and systems within marketing contexts to understand value holistically – by helping us understand consumers' value perceptions towards performing behaviours.

The identification of how consumers' perceive value towards using energy efficiently may also hold some relevance to understanding the attitude-behaviour gap often identified in relation to pro-environmental behaviours (Belz and Peattie, 2009). For example, the study here found that low-income older participants were highly motivated by economic and functional value in using energy efficiently. This can offer additional insight on the motivations for pro-environmental behaviours that may be offered by traditionally attitude-behaviour models that might only examine whether consumers hold pro-environmental attitudes – but not examine economics, or functionality as relevant dimensions. Indeed, although ecological value was identified as relevant by some of our participants, it was not the only or principal motivation. This helps identify that future work on understanding pro-environmental behaviour and addressing the attitude-behaviour gap could incorporate consumer perceived functional, economic, emotional, social and ecological value as potential influencers.

With respect to RQ3, the study findings also have implications for informing social marketing programmes and practice, and policy. Having established that in a social marketing context people appear to perceive value-in-behaviour, this suggests that social marketers should pay attention to scoping, understanding and co-creating value with those they wish to influence. One idea is that understanding different value perceptions among consumers could

be a way to segment people into different groups, and provide a value theory framework for the segmentation approach advocated by governments in relation to energy efficiency programmes (DEFRA, 2008). This could help advance segmentation in social marketing beyond more limited demographic, attitude, or behavioural only type approaches. In relation to the implementation of social marketing programmes this study has identified that interventions could particularly benefit from promoting and creating economic value, functional value, and ecological value as these appeared the most relevant value dimensions. Energy efficiency programmes could therefore focus on accentuating the cost savings and financial rewards in performing energy efficient behaviours. Economic value appeared to be an important motivation for consumers in relation to energy efficiency, and this means that energy policy could benefit from being oriented towards helping consumers be economically efficient, for example through subsidies for efficient appliances or retrofits to people's homes. Furthermore, the creation and promotion of functional value could be achieved through policy and social marketing interventions that help facilitate making it easy to use energy efficiently. For example, training in, or installation of, accessible energy saving appliances and equipment could be effective in increasing the functional value of being energy efficient in the home. In addition, this study identified ecological value as being important. Accordingly, social marketing programmes could identify how using energy efficiently in your own home can make some incremental positive difference to the environment. Adding to this, doing something to help future generations was pertinent to many participants, so messages that communicate how saving energy can help future generations might be effective.

Limitations/Future Research

Whilst this study helps provide some empirical research support for the concept of value-in-behaviour there are some limitations to the present study. The use of focus groups, within a specific geographic location of regional NSW, and a relatively small qualitative sample means that the findings presented here are not necessarily generalisable to a larger population. Furthermore, given that energy use in the home may be a fairly personal/household related practice, participants in focus group research may not necessarily disclose some aspects of their discourses relating to energy efficiency. In addition, the analysis presented here was oriented towards exploring the relevance of a proposed theoretical concept – value-in-behaviour. As is common in qualitative research (Patton, 2015) there remain other areas for focus, analysis and interpretation. The dimensions of value discussed in this paper, of functional, economic, emotional, social and ecological, is not a definitive list of values that could be relevant to the conduct of energy efficient behaviours in the home. Future work on value in social marketing would be encouraged to explore other dimensions of value, such as altruistic value, or societal value (Zainuddin et al., 2011; French and Gordon, 2015). The present study was also not primarily focused on examining the concept of societal value; however the findings relating to ecological value do suggest that empirical exploration on societal value would be worthwhile to add understanding of what motivates people to perform energy efficient behaviours in the home.

The present study also concluded that emotional value may not be pertinent to encouraging energy efficient behaviours in the home, and thus social marketing programmes in this area may not benefit from a strong focus on co-creating and promoting emotional value. However, this proposition requires further empirical testing. Indeed, further empirical research in different social marketing contexts and oriented to different behaviours can help develop the knowledge base in this area. Specifically, research that explores the value perceptions people hold relating to a range of health behaviours such as smoking, drinking alcohol, eating energy

dense high fat foods versus healthy nutritious food, or doing physical activity, could all help advance knowledge about the value people place in performing these behaviours, and inform social marketing efforts in aiming to influence behaviour change. Exploratory research can help generate such insights, and quantitative research can help test conceptual ideas and evaluate programme effects. If the promotion and creation of value across different dimensions in future social marketing programmes is properly evaluated then it will offer good insights on what value can be effective in changing behaviours. Such learning would be valuable for informing programme design and development.

Conclusion

The present study has provided empirical evidence that consumers in the social marketing context appear to perceive value-in-behaviour in relation to using energy efficiently. Therefore, social marketers are encouraged to further explore and test this conceptual proposition. Functional, economic and ecological value appeared to be the most pertinent value dimensions for low-income older citizens in relation to using energy efficiently, suggesting that programmes in this area and with similar target groups would benefit from trying to promote and co-create such value. By exploring and offering some empirical research findings and implications this paper builds upon existing work on value in social marketing (Russell-Bennett et al. 2009; Zainuddin et al. 2011; Domegan et al. 2013), and suggests that value is an important concept that warrants continued theoretical, empirical and practical exploration.

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