An Examination of the Relationship between Values and Holiday Benefits across Cultures using Ratings Scales and Best-Worst Scaling

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Abstract

The paper outlines an alternative method, based on Louviere's best-worst Scaling (BWS), which can be used to measure values, product benefits and other trade-off type decisions in holiday contexts. In a series of studies across four countries we correlated two of Schwartz's higher level values dimensions with a set of relevant travel benefits to assess the strength of expected relationships using both traditional rating scales and BWS. The BWS approach produced more significant correlations, especially in the Eastern countries (China and Korea), suggesting its use in cross cultural tourism research may be warranted.

Introduction

In a series of recent studies researchers have shown that Best Worst Scaling (BWS) produces better results than rating scales in some tasks, such as in the measurement of values (Lee, Soutar and Louviere, 2005) and product benefits (Cohen and Markowitz, 2002). The BWS technique was designed for conjoint analysis and an explanation of its use in this context has been provided by Finn and Louviere (1992) and Marley and Louviere (2005). While BWS has been most often used in conjoint contexts, Cohen and Markowitz (2002) used the technique to measure the importance of product benefits. They selected a list of benefits, placed them into smaller sets through an appropriate experimental design and asked respondents to choose the most important and the least important attribute in each set. In this case, the experimental design controlled for context effects (each item was seen with every other item an equal number of times) and order effects (each respondent saw each item in each position across subsets). The procedure produced a unidimensional interval-level importance scale based on the nominal level choice data provided by respondents.

As Cohen and Markowitz (2002) noted, there is only one way to choose the most important or least important item and, as such, respondents answering BWS tasks cannot consistently use the middle, the end points, or one end of the importance scale, forcing discrimination between the items, which can be a problem with ratings scales. Rating scales have some other disadvantages that the BWS approach may overcome, especially in cross-cultural research. People often use different parts of a scale, or have "response styles," which affect the mean and the variance obtained (Baumgartner and Steenkamp, 2001; Craig and Douglas, 2000). Some cultures are more acquiescent, producing higher means, while others use the extremes of a scale, producing more variance (see Chen, Lee and Stevenson, 1995; Chun, Campbell and Yoo, 1974; Lee and Green, 1991; van Herk, Poortinga and Verhallen, 2004; Usunier and Lee, 2005; Watkins and Cheung, 1995). Since response bias distorts ratings, many cross cultural researchers standardise raw scores to reduce or eliminate unwanted differences (Fischer, 2004). However, such processes may remove true differences in the data (Smith, 2004; Van Hemert, et al., 2002). In addition, there have been difficulties in achieving cross

cultural equivalence with rating scales, due to difficulties in finding lexical equivalent for verbal descriptions, metrically equivalent distances between numbers or separating numbers from their meanings (e.g., Roy, Walters, and Luk, 2001; Sood, 1990). Consequently, a measurement approach that overcame these issues would be a valuable addition to researchers and BWS may provide such an approach. In the present paper, the performance of a traditional rating scale is compared with a BWS approach, as outlined in the next section.

Context

Values segmentation is common in marketing as values seem to be strong predictors of and preferences in a wide variety of contexts (e.g., Corfman, Lehmann, and Narayanan, 1991; Madrigal 1995; Schwartz and Bardi, 2001). Kahle's (1983) List of Values (LOV) scale has been commonly used for this purpose. For instance, in a tourism study, Muller (1991) found the personal value of security was positively related to a desire for safety from crime and holidaying in a clean, well-kept city. While the LOV has advantages, such as its brevity, it can produce problematic outcomes in some cultures. For instance, Watkins and Gnoth (2005) found it inappropriate for segmenting Japanese tourists. Consequently, the use of a values scale specifically designed for cross-cultural use, such as the Schwartz's (1992) Value Survey, may be more beneficial in such contexts and, as such, it was used in the present study.

Some interesting tourism type associations have been found with Schwartz's values. Muller (1991) found a "security and reassurance" segment that seemed to be aligned with Schwartz's security, conformity and tradition value types and a "self-enrichment" segment that seemed to be aligned with Schwartz's self-direction value type. In addition, Schwartz's values have been found to influence preference for out-group contact. Sagiv and Schwartz (1995) found Schwartz's security, conformity and tradition values were negatively related to out-group contact, while self direction and universalism were positively related to out-group contact, which has important implications for tourism marketers.

Schwartz's 10 value types fall into two bipolar higher order value dimensions, which he termed openness to change (self-direction and stimulation) versus conservation (conformity, tradition and security) and self-transcendence (universalism and benevolence) versus self-enhancement (power and achievement). It seems that the former value dimension is likely to be related to potential travel benefits. Specifically, we would expect that openness to change would be positively and conservation would be negatively related to the benefits of stepping into the unknown and experiencing a different culture, while the reverse will be true for being safe and secure while on holiday and these relationships were tested in the present study.

The Present Study

As part of a large multi-cultural study into consumer travel plans, three questionnaire versions were designed to measure Schwartz's values and potential travel benefits. Survey one obtained Schwartz's Value Best-Worst Survey (SVBWS) and travel benefits by rating scales. Survey two obtained Schwartz's Value Survey (SVS) and travel benefits by using both rating scales and the BWS approach. Survey three obtained the values and travel benefits data using BWS in both cases. This allowed a comparison of correlations between the BWS and rating scale methods across the Western and Eastern countries included in the study.

The surveys were conducted on the Internet, using samples obtained from large online consumer panels in the USA, the UK, China and South Korea. The samples were limited to people aged from 18 to 75 years, who do not work in advertising, marketing research or the tourism industries. In addition, respondents were screened to be international travellers. That is, they reported travelling internationally in the last two years or intending to do so in the next 5 years. Respondents were randomly assigned to answer one of the three surveys. The resulting sample sizes are shown in Table 1.

Both the SVS and SVBWS were designed to measure Schwartz's values. While the procedures differ as outlined in the following paragraphs, they both resulted in scores for the same 10 value types (e.g., Stimulation, Power, Tradition and so on), which were used to calculate two bipolar higher order value dimensions composed of four higher order values. In this study, the SVS was used in the traditional manner. Respondents selected a response for each of the survey's 57 (USA and UK) or 58 (China and Korea) items on 9-point rating scales (-1 is opposed to my values, 0 not important, 3 important, 6 very important and 7 of supreme importance). Each item was presented in the recommended format, listing the value and providing a brief description of that value.

Following Lee, Soutar and Louviere (2005), the SVBWS task used a similar item-description format, but differed in the following ways. First, a balanced incomplete block (BIB) experimental design was used to create subsets of Schwartz value types. The design resulted in 11 subsets, with six value types in each. The characteristics of the design meant each respondent saw each value type six times and each pair of value types three times. This resulted in 66 measures of the 10 value types. Second, the three value items with the strongest reliability across 185 samples (see Spini, 2003) were used to represent the value types in the experimental design (e.g., creativity, curious and freedom were used to represent the Self-Direction value type). Third, the SVS brief description of each value item was imbedded into the webpage so respondents could read item definitions as they moved their mouse over any of the words. For example, when people held their mouse over the word CREATIVITY, the SVS description [uniqueness, imagination] appeared. Finally, within each set, the values were randomly ordered across individuals. Figure 1 shows how the SVBWS task appeared to respondents, who were given the following instruction:

Figure 1: The BWS Task

In this section, we will ask you to pick the most and least important values that guide your life. These values come from different cultures. While more than one may be important or unimportant, please choose the MOST and the LEAST important to YOU as a guiding principle in YOUR life. There are 11 sets of statements in this section. For more information hold your mouse over any word in each set.

Which is the MOST and Least important factor to you as a guiding principle in YOUR life?

Most Important		Least Important
O	Successful, capable, ambitious.	O
O	Protecting the environment, a world of beauty, unity with nature.	O
O	Helpful, honest, forgiving.	O
O	Devout, accepting portion in life, humble.	O
O	Clean, national security, social order.	O

Value Scores

For the SVS, values scores were calculated by averaging the relevant values (see Schwartz, 1994). For the SVBWS, the value types were calculated by counting the number of times each item was chosen as the most important or the least important and subtracting the number for least important from the number for most important. This number was then divided by the number of times the item appeared in the survey, creating a scale that ranged from minus one to plus one, with high scores implying a value was more important to the respondent (see Lee, Soutar and Louviere, 2005). For both the SVS and SVBWS, the higher order values were calculated by averaging the relevant value types.

The survey also included 11 potential travel benefits (Do my own thing, Avoiding touristy areas, Step into the unknown, Experience a different culture, Meet the locals, Quality of service, A taste of city life, Spoil myself, Feel safe & secure, Education/learning experiences and Relax and take it easy). Only the three most relevant to the value types were included in the results section due of space restrictions. The benefits were either measured on a five-point rating scale or through the same process as was used to measure the BWS value types.

Table 1: Value (Openness to Change and Conservation) and Benefit Correlations

	USA		UK		South Korea		China	
BWS values and BWS benefits	OC	Con	OC	Con	OC	Con	OC	Con
Step into unknown	0.35**	-0.17*	0.32**	-0.21*	0.18*	-0.22**	0.15*	-0.04
Experience different culture	0.23**	-0.17*	0.31**	-0.19*	0.24**	-0.26**	0.04	-0.20*
Be safe and secure	-0.33**	0.33**	-0.33**	0.35**	-0.19*	0.17*	-0.30**	0.17*
Sample size	207	207	208	208	242	242	209	209
BWS values and rating benefits								
Step into unknown	0.32**	-0.19*	0.17*	-0.11	0.08	0.12	0.03	-0.00
Exp. different culture	0.18*	-0.17*	0.15*	-0.15*	0.15*	0.06	0.03	0.03
Be safe and secure	-0.38**	0.26**	-0.35**	0.35**	-0.12	0.10	-0.22**	0.18*

Sample size	204	204	202	202	201	201	248	248
Rating values and BWS benefits								
Step into unknown	0.44**	-0.24**	0.25**	-0.19*	0.22*	-0.11	0.03	-0.05
Exp. different culture	0.21**	-0.19*	0.20*	-0.19*	0.03	0.01	0.10	-0.13
Be safe and secure	-0.30**	0.29**	-0.38**	0.31**	-0.38**	0.14	-0.20*	-0.02
Sample size	259	259	198	198	198	198	202	202
Rating values and rating benefits								
Step into unknown	--	--	0.31**	-0.17*	0.25**	-0.12	--	--
Exp. Different culture	--	--	0.23**	-0.21*	0.13	-0.09	--	--
Be safe and secure	--	--	-0.33**	0.24**	-0.23**	0.04	--	--
Sample size	--	--	198	198	198	198	--	--

$* p < .05;$ $** p < 0.001;$ non-significant relationships in bold

Results

Table 1 shows the correlations between the two higher order value types (Openness to Change and Conservation) and the relevant travel benefits in each country. Following Schwartz (1992), the SVS correlations were calculated as partial correlations, controlling for people's overall means on all of the value items. In effect this method removed an individual's patterning response bias from the SVS and the rating scale benefits data. As can be seen, all of the methods produce reasonable significant relationships in the expected direction for the two Western countries (the USA and the UK), while the BWS methods produce more significant relationships for the two Eastern countries (China and South Korea).

For the Eastern countries, the BWS values and benefits were significant and in the correct direction for 10 of the 12 computed correlations. This contrasts with only three of the 12 being significant when BWS values and rating benefits were used and three of the 12 partial correlations being significant when rating values and BWS benefits were used. In addition, while we only have data from the UK and South Korea for the rating values and rating benefits, a similar pattern was apparent for South Korea, with only two of the six partial correlations being significant.

Conclusions

The present study compared the results obtained when a BWS approach and a traditional rating scale method were used to measure values and benefits. While the traditional rating scale method produced the expected results in the Western countries (USA and UK), it failed to reproduce these results in the Eastern countries (South Korea and China), even when the rating scales were standardized by controlling for individuals' mean values. In contrast, the BWS approach produced similar results in both Western and Eastern countries. Thus, the BWS approach appears to have some advantages for tourism researchers using cross-cultural

samples. First, the BWS task is easy for respondents as all they need to do is choose the most and least important from different sets of items, which reflects real life situations. Second, the BWS method has only has two verbal scale terms (most important and least important), while rating scale methods usually include multiple verbal scale terms. This reduces the problems associated with lexical equivalence as it is easier to find equivalent terms for "most" and "least" in different languages, than the finer grained verbal terms employed by other methods. Third, the BWS method does not use numbers. This reduces problems that may be found when numbers have meanings in certain cultures, such as four being an unlucky number in China. It seems that the BWS approach is a real alternative for people interested in cross cultural research.

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