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Respected pillars of the community:

A values-based profile of the British market maven

Abstract

Market Mavens are consumers who are active purveyors of word of mouth (WOM) communication in society. In contrast to opinion leaders, mavens provide information that cuts across product categories, and advise on old and new products. Consequently, mavens can impact a wider number of social networks with WOM, and are therefore a valuable target for marketers. Despite much empirical work, a socio-demographic profile of the market maven remains elusive, and recently work has focused on those intrinsic characteristics that may distinguish mavens from others. However, no previous work has considered the possibility that personal values may be a distinguishing maven factor. Using the original market maven scale, the full Rokeach value survey and the List of Values (LOV), this research (n = 158) found mavens to place significantly more importance on several values than do non-mavens. Results suggest that mavenism has an external social dimension to sharing marketplace information that is not motivated out of self-interest, but by altruism and a genuine concern for others. Contrary to some previous research, this study shows that market mavens can be identified in a useful way to marketing practitioners. In addition to the obvious need for marketing communications to supply the maven with plenty of information about products and services, communications strategies need to focus on positioning brands around the values which reflect altruism, respect, helpfulness, and responsibility. In this way, the usefulness of market mavens and WOM communications can be harnessed successfully.

Key Words Market Maven, Values, Word of Mouth

Introduction

Word of mouth (WOM) communication is proven to be a key factor in consumer purchase decisions, with research suggesting it is more effective than any other type of marketing communications in influencing consumers (Mazzarol et al., 2007). Recently, the impact of positive WOM in increasing purchase probability has been found to be greater than the impact of negative word of mouth in reducing purchase likelihood (East et al., 2008). For this reason, marketers and organisations are keen to reach those consumers who actively undertake WOM marketing, targeting information and promotions towards them to persuade these groups of consumers to disseminate positive information to others about products and services (Gremler et al., 2001).

Feick and Price (1987) identified a segment of consumers, termed *market mavens*, who are active purveyors of WOM in society. They defined market mavens as, “individuals who have information about many kinds of products, places to shop, and other facets of markets, and initiate discussions with consumers and respond to requests from consumers for market information” (p. 85). Traditionally, the impact of WOM and its dissemination was examined within the context of opinion leadership and innovators or early adopters. The introduction of the maven therefore marked an important turning point, in that market mavens are individuals who provide information that cuts across product categories rather than within categories, while opinion leaders tend to be experts on particular products or services. Consequently, mavens have the potential to impact a wider number of social networks with WOM. Moreover, innovators and opinion leaders are primarily interested in new products, while mavens advise on old and new products with similar intensity (Goldsmith et al., 2003). More than just an “interested shopper”, the market maven has a constant search for, and dissemination of, marketing information. The market maven, then, is a valuable target for the

marketer particularly in the dissemination of more generalized information on a wide range of retail outlets, goods and services.

From a practical perspective, market mavens are elusive in that socio-demographics are not good markers of maven identification, leading researchers to examine a wide range of attitudes, behaviours and traits in order to recognise these important target consumers. However, to date no research has ever investigated the possibility that personal values may distinguish mavens from the rest of the population. Given that values have hierarchical primacy over attitudes, this is an important omission. A second knowledge gap is the relative lack of studies into market mavenism that have been conducted outside the US. Indeed, only one previous study has investigated the phenomenon in the UK, which concluded that UK market mavens could not be verified as a “unitary concept” (Goodey and East, 2008: 275).

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are twofold. The first objective is to determine the existence of the market maven concept in the United Kingdom and to identify any significant sociodemographic variables by which the maven might be identified. The second objective of the study is to determine whether or not market mavens possess a distinct personal value set when compared with their non-maven counterparts. Both of these objectives attempt to address significant gaps in knowledge in relation to the UK Market Maven. The findings of this study will be of value to marketing academics and practitioners alike through the extension of the literature base on UK market mavenism and the provision of further insight into the motivations for maven behaviour.

The Market Maven

Research suggests a number of potential benefits of market mavens via positive WOM for the marketer and retailer, which include reduced campaign costs through both the creation of greater awareness of new products and the dissemination of information pertaining to established products; acting as promoters for general retailers with regard to a range of product and service information including the efficiency of store operations and general servicescape; and acting as advisors to consumers who are confused by the great diversity of choice across many product lines (Clark et al., 2008; Elliott and Warfield, 1993; Walsh et al., 2004; Wiedmann et al., 2001; Williams and Slama, 1995). The market maven therefore has a greater need for a variety of information about different products than the opinion leader, which renders the maven less of a loyal customer (Dawar et al., 1996; Stokburger-Sauer and Hoyer, 2009). Clearly, mavens and opinion leaders are “related but distinct constructs” (Feick and Price, 1987: 89), with consumer markets comprising greater numbers of mavens than either opinion leaders or early adopters (Wiedmann et al., 2001). Research has suggested mavens have higher media consumption than non-mavens, most notably in magazines and television, and that they take a greater interest in advertisements and direct mail (Walsh et al., 2004). Thus, advice to target mavens usually comprises exploiting the mavenistic need for lots of information in advertising campaigns (Ruvio and Shoham, 2007), especially when using execution strategies that urge sharing or consideration of others (Price et al., 1988; 1995; Walsh et al., 2004).

In terms of behaviours, a number of ‘value for money’ traits have been identified. In comparison to non-mavens, mavens actively seek out the lowest prices for goods and services, spend more time seeking bargains, are heavy users of coupons, and like to share coupons with others (Price et al., 1988; Wiedmann et al., 2001). However, despite empirical

investigations which attempt to identify their gender, race, education levels, and socio-economic status (Abratt et al., 1995; Feick and Price, 1987; Clark et al., 2008; Walsh et al., 2004; Price et al., 1995; Wiedmann et al., 2001; Williams and Slama, 1995; Barnes and Pressey, 2012), few consistent factors emerge. Thus, from a socio-demographic profiling perspective, the market maven remains elusive.

Due to the apparent lack of socio-demographic descriptors on which to identify mavens, research has begun to search for a range of intrinsic characteristics that may distinguish them from others. Mavens have been found to be more self-confident and to initiate more conversations than non-mavens (Clark et al., 2008; Geissler and Edison, 2005; Walsh et al., 2004; Chelminski and Coulter, 2007). However, despite their greater self-confidence and ability to offer information to others, they do not do not wish to stand apart from others in society. Thus, mavens will seek out products that are unique but which do not violate social norms (Clark and Goldsmith, 2005; Elliott and Warfield, 1993). Rather, this self confidence and increased conversation gives rise to market helping behaviour. Other studies, however, have failed to find any relationship between psychological traits and mavenism. Goodey and East (2008) examined the 'Big 5' personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience) and found none to be related to mavenism.

Goldsmith et al. (2006) examined innovativeness, need for uniqueness and status consumption in the context of the psychological characteristics acting as antecedents for market mavenism. They discovered that market mavens like to improve their social standing through the consumption of products that underline their status and use this behaviour to set themselves apart from other consumers. This finding contradicts earlier studies that suggest

mavens tend to focus on the functional aspects of goods and services rather than prestige factors (Williams and Slama, 1995), and the belief that mavens do not necessarily purchase the products and services about which they advise (Feick and Price, 1987; Laughlin and MacDonald, 2010).

A further contrast to opinion leadership, which tends to be motivated through product ownership and expertise, is the suggestion that more altruistic tendencies influence market mavens (Price et al., 1995). Mavens are motivated by a desire to help others (Goodey and East, 2008), feel obligated to do so through a sense of duty (Price et al., 1988; Walsh et al., 2004), and obtain pleasure from providing market information to others (Walsh et al., 2004). These findings led Ruvio and Shoham (2007) to suggest that mavenism should be examined within the context of Hofstede's work on cultural values as the individualistic or collective nature of societies may impact on the type of behaviour exhibited by individuals within them. The possibility that *personal* values may account for this altruistic behaviour, however, has never before been examined.

Personal Values

Values have long been recognized as integral influences upon behaviour across many disciplines (Clawson and Vinson, 1978). Rokeach (1973) defined a value as an enduring belief that a particular form of behaviour (an instrumental value) or a particular end state (a terminal value) was either personally or socially preferable to alternative behaviours and end states. Although values are similar to attitudes, insofar as they are both adaptation abstractions that help facilitate favourable interactions between an individual and his/her environment, values have hierarchical primacy over attitudes (Homer and Kahle, 1988; Kahle

et al., 1992), and they also transcend objects and situations, which attitudes do not (Crosby et al., 1984). Reinforcing the importance that cognitive style plays on the development of individual values, Claxton and Jones (1994) describe values as an immediate and stable influence on the individual. Indeed, Homer and Kahle (1988: 638) note, “because values are the most abstract of the social cognitions, they reflect the most basic characteristics of adaptations . . . (serving) . . . as prototypes from which attitudes and behaviours are manufactured”. They label this relationship the value-attitude-behaviour hierarchy. Given this hierarchical primacy, then, from a consumer behaviour perspective it is recognized that the use of values in research is more powerful than research that concentrates solely on demographic or attitudinal data (Kahle, 1985; Kamakura and Novak, 1992), as values can help to clarify underlying rationality and motivations (Kahle, 1996). Consequently, empirical research links personal values to various consumption attitudes and behaviour, including reactions to products and packaging, advertising, media preferences, personal selling, retailing, and as a basis for segmentation and positioning (Batra et al., 2001; Beatty et al., 1985, 1988; Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002; Homer and Kahle, 1988; Kahle et al., 1986; Schiffman et al., 2003; Gurel-Atay et al., 2010).

There are several obvious advantages of value research over attitudinal research. First, human beings possess fewer values than either attitudes or beliefs (McQuarrie and Langmeyer, 1985; Rokeach, 1968), thus the marketer has a more manageable number of variables with which to contend. Second, values have the ability to highlight changes in particular societies or markets, which may demand repositioning strategies (Kahle, 1988) or uncover emerging trends (Kahle and Kennedy, 1989), which is particularly useful in international markets (Munson and McIntyre, 1979). With these advantages in mind, and given the gap in

knowledge in that never before have a phenomenon as important as values been considered in relation to market mavenism, the current exploratory study was designed.

Method

The Market Maven scale (Feick and Price, 1987) comprising six items and a seven-point Likert-type scale was used in its original form. Market mavenism is not a discrete concept; the scale measures the extent to which an individual possesses and provides marketplace knowledge (Price et al., 1995). Higher scores indicate greater propensity toward market mavenism.

On the basis of the claim by Bearden and Netemeyer (1999) that “the importance of values, and specifically the Rokeach Value Survey, to marketing/consumer research cannot be overstated” (121), the full Rokeach Value survey, comprising 18 terminal and 18 instrumental values was utilized. Terminal values refer to ideal end states of existence, while instrumental values refer to modes of behaviour and beliefs. The distinction between the two groups is an important one, and theoretically, it could be expected that market mavenism would be more likely to be associated with instrumental as opposed to terminal values.

Additionally, because values have never before been considered in relation to market mavenism, it was important to include a number of scales for comparative purposes. Thus the List of Values (LOV) (Kahle, 1983) was also included. LOV is derived from both Rokeach and Maslow’s (1954) work, and its advantages over the Rokeach survey include its comparative simplicity and quickness to administer and analyse (Kahle and Kennedy, 1988). Moreover, LOV has been found to relate to a wide range of consumer behaviours (Sudbury-

Riley et al., 2011). All the value scales were also measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale in order to provide consistency for respondents.

Finally, a battery of the standard socio-demographic variables (age, gender, marital status, work status, socio-economic status, and educational attainment) was also included. Additionally, respondents were asked whether or not they were the main shopper for the household, household size, and the number of children living in the home, as these variables have been neglected in previous studies and intuitively may affect a person's market maven behaviour.

The final self-complete questionnaire was delivered to a snowball sample of 200 adults in a North West City in the UK, which provides a contrast to the only previous UK study which comprised respondents from a city in the South of England (Goodey and East, 2008). Due to the exploratory nature of the study, and the fact that the nature of the study is about people talking to each other, questionnaires were distributed to work colleagues, family and friends, each of whom passed some questionnaires to others in their social networks.

Results

The final sample comprised 158 adults aged 18-79 years. As table 1 shows, the sample is relatively affluent and of high socio-economic standing, with a good range of age groups represented.

The reliability of the market maven scale was found to be acceptable (Cronbach's alpha .91). Results show that respondents do cover the full spectrum of market maven tendencies, with

scores ranging from 6 (the lowest possible) to 41 (the highest possible score is 42). Higher scores demonstrate greater maven tendencies. The mean maven score was 23.98 (SD 7.84). One procedure which is consistent among previous maven research is the practice of splitting respondents into groups based on their market maven score, with the top third comprising market mavens (Abratt et al., 1995; Elliott and Warfield, 1993; Feick and Price, 1987; Geissler and Edison, 2005; Walsh et al., 2004; Williams and Slama, 1995), thus this procedure was duly followed. Those comprising the top third had a mean market maven score of 32.9.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

		Per Cent
AGE	18-25	9.0
	26-35	26.5
	36-45	31.0
	46-55	21.2
	56+	12.3
GENDER	Male	38.0
	Female	62.0
MARITAL STATUS	Married/living with partner	70.9
	Single	22.1
	Divorced/separated	5.1
	Widowed	1.9
HOUSEHOLD SIZE	1	10.8
	2	38.6
	3	20.9
	4	17.1
	5+	12.6
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS	AB	17.9
	C1	66.2
	C2	3.31
	DE	12.5
WEEKLY NET SALARY	Less than £199	10.5
	£200-£299	19.2
	£300-£399	31.1
	£400-£499	13.9
	£500+	25.2

Turning to socio-demographic variables, independent t-tests revealed that there are no significant differences between the maven scores of individuals by gender, whether or not they were the main shopper for the home, or whether or not they had dependents under age 18 living at home. Further independent t-tests found no differences between mavens and non mavens with respect to age and family size. Finally, one-way ANOVAs revealed there to be no differences with regard to marital status, employment status, socio-economic group, education attainments, or income. Clearly and categorically, then, these results show that market mavens cannot be identified by any socio-demographic characteristics.

In contrast, however, independent t-tests to compare the value base of mavens and non-mavens revealed some interesting findings. No significant differences emerged on any of the terminal values. However, Mavens report significantly higher scores on several values, some of which are drawn from the List of Values, and some from Rokeach instrumental values. Table 2 provides details of those values for which significant differences emerged, where it can be seen that mavens place more importance on the LOV values of and being well respected, security, and warm relationships with others; and also place significantly greater importance on the instrumental values of helpful (working for the welfare of others), intellectual (intelligent, reflective), loving (affectionate, tender), polite (courteous, well-mannered), responsible (dependable, reliable), and self-controlled (restrained, self-disciplined).

Table 2. Mavens and Non-Mavens Mean Value Scores

Value Set	Value	Mean Value Score		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
		Non-Mavens	Mavens		
LOV	Warm relationships with others	5.90	6.28	2.207	.05
	Security	5.95	6.34	2.265	.05
	Being well respected	5.55	6.11	-3.132	.01
Instrumenta	Helpful	5.63	6.11	-2.616	.01
I	Intellectual	5.32	5.70	-1.987	.05
	Loving	5.86	6.19	2.089	.05
	Polite	5.96	6.32	-2.270	.05
	Responsible	6.03	6.34	-2.150	.05
	Self-controlled	5.38	5.81	-2.649	.01

The custom and practice of top-slicing maven results by one third is of course problematic, and these issues are discussed below. In order to ensure that those classified as mavens in the current sample scored at least as high on the market maven scale as in previous studies, the data set was re-classified with the top 20% being classified as mavens and the remained being classified as non-mavens. A direct logistic regression was then performed to assess the impact of those values that emerged as significant in the t-tests detailed in Table 2. The full model containing all predictor values was statistically significant, $X^2(9, N=153) = 32.089, p < .001$. The model as a whole explained between 18.9% (Cox and Snell R square) and 29.8% (Nagelkerke R square) of the variance in market maven status, and correctly classified 80.4% of cases. The only value to emerge as making a unique contribution to the model was the value responsible (dependable, reliable), as table 3 shows.

Table 3. Logistic Regression Predicting Market Mavenism

Value	<i>B</i>	SE	<i>p</i>	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
					Lower	Upper
Being well respected	.304	.	.285	1.36	.78	2.36
Security	-.090	.284	.769	.914	.50	1.67

		305				
Warm relations with others	.147	.	.645	1.16	.62	2.17
		319				
Helpful	.089	.	.733	1.09	.66	1.82
		261				
Intellectual	.522	.	.053	1.69	.99	2.86
		270				
Loving	.179	.	.577	1.20	.64	2.24
		321				
Polite	-.003	.	.993	1.00	.48	2.08
		376				
Responsible	1.042	.	.027	2.84	1.13	7.12
		470				
Self-controlled	.017	.	.957	1.02	.56	1.87
		309				

Discussion

Because many studies fail to report mean maven scores, direct comparisons with previous research is difficult. However, the overall mean score of 23.98 that emerged here is similar to Abratt et al. (1995) and Feick and Price (1987) who report mean scores of 24.2 and 25.6 respectively, although these are somewhat lower than Goldsmith et al.'s (2003, 2005) mean of 28.7. The common practice of top-slicing scores with the top third comprising mavens resulted in a mean maven score of 32.9, which again is comparable to Williams and Slama's (1995) study in which the high maven mean scores were 35.6 (female) and 35.4 (male), and a good deal higher than Geissler and Edison (2005) with 21.2 for their high maven group. Of course, it is lower than Goldsmith et al.'s (2003, 2005) studies which is why, for the logistic regression analysis, the top 20% of the current sample was used.

The large difference between the maven scores across studies therefore raises questions about custom and practice. Goodey and East (2008) noted an important issue when they observed that “mavenism will always exist as a statistical concept when people are distributed on a scale that measures it” (275). The common practice of top-slicing the scores is perhaps not such good practice, when different studies find such different scores for their mavens. Clearly, further work needs to decide upon an absolute ‘maven threshold’ score, above which a person is classified as a market maven. In this way, direct comparisons between studies and indeed cultures could be made. Given that the market maven has proved to be so elusive in previous studies, such a practice would certainly help move knowledge forward.

The lack of association between market mavenism and any socio-demographic variable whatsoever supports the vast majority of previous research (Abratt et al, 1995; Clark et al., 2008; Walsh et al., 2004; Wiedmann et al., 2001). Indeed, the current study extends knowledge in this area by including the additional socio-demographic variables of dependent children in the household, household size, and whether the respondent was the main shopper for the home, none of which has been utilized in previous studies. Clearly, socio-demographics are irrelevant to the behaviour of the market maven. Paradoxically, of course, it also supports previous claims that mavens are notoriously difficult to identify, given that, at least in terms of socio-demographics, market mavens are “much like other consumers” (Feick and Price, 1987: 93).

The major contribution to knowledge this study makes is in its findings that market mavens have a different value base to non mavens. The current study therefore answers the call from Walsh et al. (2004) that research should focus on the motivating factors for mavenism to enable these individuals to be identified. Interestingly, mavens were found to be no different

to their non-maven counterparts on any of the 18 terminal values. As terminal values are preferred end states of existence (Rokeach, 1974) rather than behaviours, they are somewhat less useful to marketers than the instrumental values, which relate to preferable modes of behaviour. Indeed, as Abratt et al. (1985: 46) note, “the value in exploiting market mavens may lie in what they do rather than who they are.” Clearly, then, differences in terminal values would not eradicate the old problem of how to target mavens. However, our findings that mavens differ on a number of instrumental values - i.e., preferred behaviours - and on several items from the LOV which are central to people in living their lives (Bearden and Netemeyer, 1999) and are predictive of consumer behaviour (Homer and Kahle, 1988) will aid in the identification and targeting of these key consumers.

Being well respected and *helpful* emerged as significantly more important to mavens than non-mavens, while *self-respect* did not, which lends support to the suggestion that mavenism has an external social dimension (Clark and Goldsmith, 2005; Goldsmith et al., 2006; Walsh et al., 2004; Brancaleone and Gountas, 2007). Moreover, the importance placed on *social recognition* was no different between mavens and non-mavens, suggesting that the social dimension to sharing marketplace information is not motivated out of self-interest. Perhaps the importance that mavens place on the value *intellectual* may reflect how they wish to be perceived by others. Indeed, if this was the case it may go some way to explaining why consumers are ready to believe market mavens and their recommendations about goods and services, despite the fact that they do not necessarily purchase the products and services about which they advise (Feick and Price, 1987; Laughlin and MacDonald, 2010).

A further group of values that emerged as more important to mavens centres on relationships. This comprises *helpful*, *security*, *loving*, and *warm relationships with others*. Kahle and

Kennedy (1989) refer to the value *warm relationships with others* as an “excess” value which is often associated with people who are friendly and have lots of friends, which of course further reinforces a social dimension. It appears that market mavens are not motivated by selfish or hedonistic values but out of genuine concern for the welfare of others, a finding that supports Price et al.’s (1995) conclusion that mavens are motivated by altruism. Indeed, the importance placed on these values evokes an image of a non-complex individual who places greater importance on Maslow’s (1954) basic needs of safety and belonging rather than the higher level needs of esteem and self-actualization.

Interestingly, the importance placed on *true friendship* did not emerge as significantly different to non-mavens, suggesting that mavens do indeed impact a wide number of social networks, including those that are often referred to as ‘weak ties’ in the WOM literature (Goldenberg et al., 2001). In contrast to strong ties, which refer to family and close friends, weak ties refer to relationships with more distant individuals such as work colleagues and acquaintances. Early research (Granovetter, 1973) suggests that weak ties are most important because they have the ability to pass information across clusters or networks, which is a key driver for the spread of WOM. This is of course even more important today due to the number of social networking sites and virtual networks (Macdonald and Uncles, 2007). Thus, market mavens are as likely to provide information to a work colleague or neighbour as a friend or relative in the real or virtual world.

The final group of values to set mavens apart suggests a behaviour dimension. These behaviours include *responsible (dependable and reliable)*, *polite (courteous and well-mannered)*, and *self-controlled (restrained and self-disciplined)*. Key to the maven’s motivation is being responsible, they are keen to be seen as someone to depend on, someone

who is reliable in their judgements and advice. Of course, as long as they successfully portray these qualities, they will be even more successful in spreading marketing information because they will be seen as credible and trustworthy. Indeed, marketers have long been aware that perceived credibility and trustworthiness are key factors in a persuasive message. At first sight, an individual who is active in openly providing advice and information to others might be expected to be more gregarious than the values of polite and self-controlled suggest. However, these results are in keeping with earlier findings (Clark et al., 2005; Goldsmith et al., 2006) that suggest that although market mavens are not afraid to try new products they do not like to violate social norms or stand out from the crowd. Thus, a market maven is unlikely to be a maverick.

Conclusions and Implications

This research, in common with maven research conducted in many other countries and cultures, suggests the UK maven cannot be identified or segmented using socio-demographic variables. We have, however, demonstrated that UK mavens do exist. More importantly, the major contribution to knowledge is the finding that market mavenism is related to several personal values, which can be categorized as social, relationship, and behavioural. Altruism appears to be a major motivation for the maven's WOM behaviour. Thus, the study supports previous suggestions that further research should focus on the identification and understanding of the psychological and intrinsic antecedents for market mavenism.

The identified relationship between a number of personal values and market mavenism has implications for several facets of marketing practice. First, the values that are of particular importance to mavens suggest that they will not favour products that are outlandish but would prefer those to have a sound functional purpose. Second, they are not likely to promote

products or services that could jeopardize either the respect shown to them by others or their perceived intellect in the area of consumerism. Finally, in addition to the obvious need for marketing communications to supply the maven with plenty of information about products and services, communications strategies need to focus on positioning brands around the values which reflect altruism, respect, helpfulness, and responsibility. In this way, the usefulness of market mavens and WOM communications can be harnessed successfully.

Prior to the current findings, many consumer behaviour academics recognised the potential value of market mavens to the marketing practitioner, but without ways in which to identify these important consumers their usefulness was difficult or even impossible to harness in practice. Indeed, due to some studies failing to find distinguishing characteristics, the very concept of market mavenism as a useful phenomenon with practical application has recently been questioned (Goodey and East, 2008). The current study has refuted this claim by looking more deeply and at the phenomenon in order to better understand these important consumers. In so doing this study has demonstrated that the market maven is alive and well and waiting to be targeted through brands and advertising that are centred on their own distinct value base.

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