A framework for integrating values into persuasive communication: Value orientations, elaboration, and the theory of planned behaviour

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Communication, such as interpretation and education, is an important tool for managing visitor use in park and conservation areas around the world. Particularly in wildland settings, communication is often preferred as a tool for visitor use management by both managers and visitors because it is less intrusive, less expensive, and can be highly effective when designed correctly. To design effective communications, two theories have been widely used in visitor use management: the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Additionally, value orientations have been cited as an important component of communication, but empirical evidence is lacking (Miller et al., 2018a). This presentation presents empirical findings that merge value orientations, the elaboration likelihood model, and the theory of planned behavior into a single framework. Collectively this research enhances communication for visitor use management.

Background

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) is used to model human behavior in a variety of research, including visitor use management. In this theory, behavioral intentions are predicted by attitudes towards a behavior, subjective norms associated with the behavior, and perceived behavioral control in performing the behavior. Although this theory provides us with an understanding of the components that indicate *why* people intend to behave, it does not explain *how* to influence those components. To explore *how* to influence behavior, the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) is often used (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). ELM suggests that attitude change occurs by receiving and processing information through either a central or peripheral route, with the central route being indicative of long-lasting attitude change. Importantly, this change in attitudes may lead to an increase in appropriate behaviors (Ajzen, 1991). ELM has been used to construct and frame communications in a few protected areas, but empirical evidence regarding the process of elaboration is only beginning to emerge (Miller et al., 2018b). The emerging research shows that higher levels of elaboration (defined as interest, awareness, and cognitive engagement) are indicative of the central route of processing and have a strong relationship with intended behaviors (Miller et al., 2018b).

A key component of ELM is increasing message relevancy. Message relevancy is particularly important in non-captive audiences, such as visitors. Visitors are exposed to numerous messages, but if the message is not perceived as relevant, they may not process them (Ham, 2013; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Although there are numerous approaches to increasing relevancy (Ham, 2013), one proposed way is through value-framing (Miller et al., 2018a). Protected area visitors hold a diversity of beliefs and interests, and these characteristics influence the persuasion process (Ham, 2013). When addressing human–

wildlife interactions, wildlife value orientations (WVOs) are a useful for understand differences among visitors. Visitors with different WVOs are likely to find different types of messages about wildlife relevant (Bright, Manfredo, & Fulton, 2000). Few studies, however, have explicitly investigated this relationship.

Methods

We conducted intercept surveys of day hikers at Yellowstone National Park Facebook on several trails during from July 1st to August 10th, 2016. This method obtained over 600 completed surveys. The survey focused on measuring elaboration, components of TPB, an adapted WVOs scale, and the importance of a variety of wildlife-related messages. We used confirmatory factor analysis, ANOVAs, and structural equation modeling to explore components of the conceptual framework (Figure 1).

Results

We found that the importance of messages were significantly different among a typology of WVOs (Miller et al., 2018a). Messages that more closely matched visitors' WVOs were rated as significantly more relevant. Additionally, a CFA and SEM showed that elaboration significantly predicted visitors' behavioral intentions (Miller et al., 2018b). When the components of TPB were placed as mediators between elaboration and behavioral intentions in a SEM, the TPB components partially mediated the relationship. When viewed collectively, we believe the results from these studies provide insight into the role of values in persuasive communication. (Figure 1).
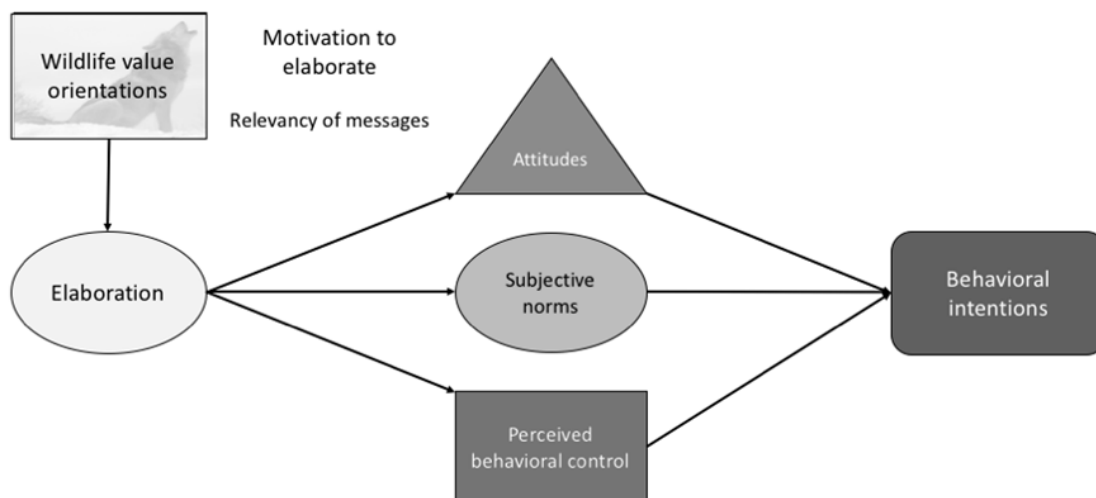

Figure 1. A conceptual model of the relationship between value orientations, elaboration, and the theory of planned behavior. If messages match values, elaboration increases. In turn, elaboration impacts the components of the theory of planned behavior. The end result is a shift in the behavioral intentions of visitors.

Discussion

Using empirical findings, we believe that the conceptual model (Figure 1) provides guidance for integrating values into the communication process. In one study, we found that messages that more closely aligned with a person's WVOs were significantly more relevant (Miller et al., 2018a). This relevancy interrupts the more common peripheral processing and increases elaboration likelihood (Ham, 2013). Another study showed that elaboration has a

significant, positive impact on behavioral intentions (Miller, 2018b). Furthermore, this elaboration-behavioral intentions relationship is partially mediated by components of TPB. Viewed collectively, values can be integrated into the communication process as a way to frame messaging and increase message relevancy, which in term should increase elaboration and impact behaviors. Future research should include examining the relevancy of value-framed messages through other methodological approaches and in other populations. Also, a pre-post testing of elaboration after a treatment of value-framed messaging could provide additional insights.

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