

# Member Values Over Time

A Study of the Relationship between Member Values, Age and Length of Membership

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## Abstract

Expectations from association members change over time in two respects: age and length of membership. In product and service marketing literature the fact of changing needs and expectations during a customers' life cycle is already well explored. So far, this is not the case in the research of member in nonprofit organizations. The paper closes this research gap from a member value perspective discussing the link between age respectively length of membership and value perception. Survey data from 1,613 members of a Swiss hiking trail association reveal that both temporal metrics show significant positive relationships with all member value dimensions: Enjoyment, affection, identity, power, participation, understanding and safety. In this respect, length of membership shows stronger effects than age, the only member value unaffected by time are the individual economic goals. The paper closes with practical implications for the management of membership associations.

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**JEL Classification:** L3, L31, Z13

## Introduction

Members have expectations towards their organizations and, implicitly or explicitly, expect certain values from their membership. The perception of these values is based on their needs that match the organization's provided benefits (Kandampully & Promsivapallop, 2006; Suter & Gmür, 2014; Toombs & Bailey, 1995). While the concepts of needs and values are often discussed as inherent parts of the human nature, there is no general understanding on the meaning of the concepts and their semantic links (Vabø, 2011). According to Buttle (1989, p. 197), "needs are sociocultural constructions and can be shown to vary across both time and space". From a marketing perspective, the satisfaction of the customers' or members' needs, builds the center of the discussion. Therefore, it is important for any organization to know its members' needs and to have an understanding in which directions these needs are potentially going to change. In the for-profit marketing literature, especially in the business-to-business research, the awareness of changing needs is already state-of-the-art whereby, in the nonprofit sector these ideas can hardly been found so far (Beverland, Farrelly, & Woodhatch, 2004; Flint, Blocker, & Boutin Jr., 2011). Ford Corporation (2011) write in its sustainability report 2010/11: "Consumers' wants and needs are constantly evolving, and we must keep pace with those wants and needs in order to remain competitive". The quote from Ford Corporation does prove the awareness of firms about the changing expectations of its customers and show the necessity to adapt and evolve their products and services accordingly. Therefore, it is not just the customers' or members' expectations which are changing but also the benefits and values provided by the organizations. What is first, the change of members' expectations or the change of provided benefits, remains a chicken-and-egg dilemma. Unfortunately, despite the importance of changing needs and values, there is hardly any literature about it, addressing the nonprofit sector. In nonprofits, this aspect is even more complex since the member-organization-relationship is generally more important and nonprofits do not only provide individual but also collective goods.

The present study closes this research gap by analyzing the evolving needs and values of the Berne Hiking Trail Association (Berner Wanderwege, in short BWW) in Switzerland. Although BWW offers guided hikes, hiking holidays, or training courses, the main service of the association is not to offer individual but collective goods in the way of coordinating the regional hiking trail network and the representation of interest towards the government as well as sport and tourism organizations. There is no obligation to become a member of a Swiss hiking trail association in order to use the actual hiking trails which leads to a free rider problem. Hence, the reasons for being a member lie mainly in latent factors like the identification with the organization and its goals and a gratitude for their work. In order to identify and analyze these latent factors, we adopt the member value concept of Suter and Gmür (2013b, 2014) to BWW.

For associations, it is important to know: Which aspects of their work are important to its members and which collective goods have to be particularly promoted? Or, in other words: What values are important for the members and how will they change in the future?

This paper adds two temporal dimensions to the existing body of research about needs and values: age and length of membership. We begin with a discussion of the theoretical framework and a presentation of the research model, relying on needs and value literature as well as a set of time-related studies and theories about the impact of time on needs and satisfaction. Subsequently, in the methodological part, we describe the research design and the used dependent and independent variables. We then present and discuss the results, accompanied with limitations and future research recommendations. Finally, we conclude with added insights to the theory as well as practical implications for nonprofit leaders.

## **Member value framework**

In management and nonprofit literature, the term “value” is used in different ways. From a normative perspective, values can be defined as the ideals and the beliefs that orients and guides person or a group through their actions and their attitudes (Rokeach, 1973; Vidal, Valls, & Grabulosa, 2008; Vinson, Scott, & Lamont, 1977). Values can hence be seen as guiding criteria of an actor regardless the situation and circumstances (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). Schwartz et al. (2006, p. 930) say: “When we think of our values we think of what is important to us in life”.

Under a marketing perspective, value is mostly used in the meaning of customer value or perceived value which is an imperative focus for marketing researchers and practitioners (Gallarza, Gil-Saura, & Holbrook, 2011). This definition is probably the most common in the for-profit sector and focuses mainly on the individual benefits of a single customer or client (Paananen & Seppänen, 2013). Until the last 20 years, only little research in the nonprofit sector has adopted the customer value perspective (Petkus, 2001). However, the adaption of this classic for-profit concept to the nonprofit sector is necessary in order to meet the characteristics of the sector and cover the organization-member relationship that often goes beyond a simple supplier-customer relationship (Bijman & Verhees, 2011; Liao, Foreman, & Sargeant, 2001; Warnaby & Finney, 2005). Additionally, nonprofits pursue a purpose driven mission that defines the value the organization intends to produce for its members and for its stakeholders at large (Moore, 2000). In this respect, Knowles and Gomes (1997) developed the customer value / mission-matrix (CV/M) that combines perceived customer value with the degree to which the NPO follows its mission. In the marketing research, several extensions of the customer value have been made so far, for example by adopting a relational dimension between supplier and customer described as “relational value” (Payne & Holt, 1999) or a wider value differentiation with functional, social and emotional values (Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). These extended value dimension goes beyond the price-versus-quality trade-off which is still prevalent in the classic consumer research (Dorsch, Swanson, & Kelley, 1998; Eggert, Ulaga, & Schultz, 2006). Further developed adaptations of customer value concepts to the nonprofit sector can be found in the research field of co-operatives (Mazzarol, Mamouni Limnios, & Soutar, 2011; Ringle, 2007; Suter & Gmür, 2013a; Theurl, 2013).

## Member value approach

The interdisciplinary member value approach, on which the present study is based, understands members as a whole and not just as rational consumers of an organization's goods and services. The approach is based on the underlying assumption that actual value is only generated if members' needs meet the benefits provided by the nonprofit organization. In Figure 1 the member value is defined as the overlapping (congruent) area of members needs with the organizational benefits. Member value is thus not a static construct and cannot be "produced" solely by the NPO but rather depends on a match between the members' preferences and economic goals and the NPO's ability to provide the corresponding latent and manifest benefits.

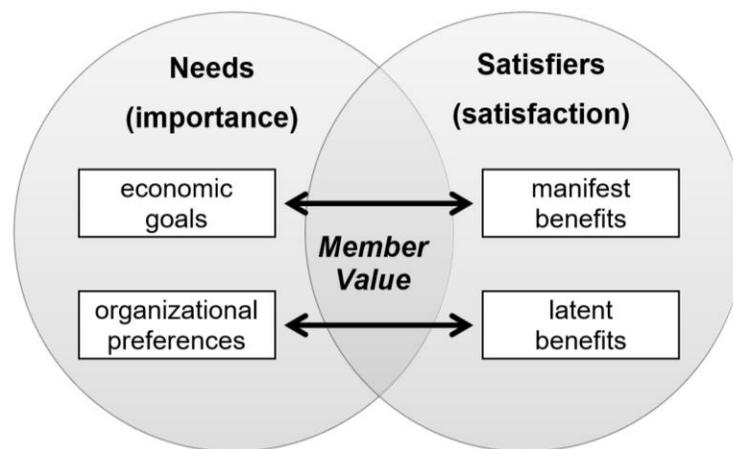


Figure 1: Basic member value model.

In contrast to institution-centered perspectives like "lifetime value", the member value focuses on the benefits of a membership received by the member, and not on the value a member (or donor) as an asset of the NPO (Bennett, 2006; Berger & Nasr, 1998; Venkatesan & Kumar, 2004). NPOs provide benefits not only in the form of products and services (manifest benefits) but also in form of their specific organizational characteristics like democratic structures or informal networks (latent benefits). Therefore, the comprehensive range of benefits offered by nonprofits is not restricted to the activities stated in the statutes or in the association's program but includes other characteristics such as the culture and community feeling. Briefly, the better the provided benefits of a nonprofit match the members' organizational preferences and economic goals, the bigger is the resulting member value. The theoretical foundation of the member value approach is based on a set of different theories addressing needs, motivation and values such as Maslow (1943, 1954), McClelland (McClelland, 2010), Max-Neef (1991), Sheth et al. (1991) and Schwartz (1992).

Table 1: Comparison of different need-and-value theories.

<b>Maslow (1943)</b>	<b>Mc Clelland (1961)</b>	<b>Max-Neef (1991)</b>	<b>Sheth et al. (1991)</b>	<b>Schwartz (1992)</b>
Love/Belonging	Affection	Affection	Social Value	Benevolence
Self-Actualization	-	Freedom	-	Self-Direction
-	-	Understanding	Epistemic Value	-
Esteem	Achievement	-	-	Achievement
Safety	-	Protection	-	Security
-	Power	Power	-	Power
-	-	Idleness	Emotional Value	Hedonism

Table 1 shows a short comparison of different need-and-value theories in a chronological order. Each theory is presented by a typical representative of the various fields that treat the topic. Whereas Schwartz focuses on universal normative values, Maslow takes a psychological perspective, Max-Neef is economist, Sheth, Newman and Gross represent the marketing research and Mc Clelland's main issue is business psychology. The table is not exhaustive and shows just a short extract of the different theories and focuses on its similarities that can be identified in "all" approaches. Each row represents the same need/value, however, not every need/value is specified in each theory and all theories use a different terminology. Furthermore, not all theories distinguish between the same values or needs nor do they start at the same point of origin, but they share a common conceptual core. The member value approach links and structures the different theories and differentiates 12 basic human needs: *subsistence*; *safety*; *enjoyment*; *freedom*; *aesthetics*; *understanding*; *creation*; *achievement*; *participation*; *affection*; *identity*, and *power*. These 12 identified needs are at the core of the member value approach, despite the different meanings of the term value, the normative as well as the psychological, economic and marketing-oriented approaches share a common ground. An individual gets a benefit or value by following its personal needs/values. The needs do not follow a strict order nor hierarchy unlike Maslow's (1943) need pyramid, but are interrelated. Furthermore, needs and satisfiers must be differentiated (see Figure 1). For example, food and shelter should not be seen as needs but as satisfiers of the *subsistence* need. On the one hand, a general assembly can satisfy at least two needs for *achievement* (opportunities to vote and raise one's voice) and *affection* (seeing other members and having a good time together) at the same time and, on the other hand, both needs are satisfied by several satisfiers. There is no one-to-one correspondence between certain needs and satisfiers but needs can be satisfied by many satisfiers and vice versa (Max-Neef, 1991). This argumentation fits with Maslow (1943) and other researchers who see acts as a result of a bundle of human needs (Mittelman & Rojas-Méndez, 2013; Suter & Gmür, 2016). Furthermore, this understanding is supported by Woodruff and Gardials (1996) value hierarchy that differentiate three levels following a means-end approach. Located at the lowest level, there are the so-called attributes which are the actual products or services. On the next level, the consequences are located, defined as the way the customer perceives these attributes and at the top of the hierarchy are the desired end-states, the satisfaction of the personal needs by through the consequences.

Each economic, social and political system adopts different satisfiers – from this point of view the choice of satisfiers is a culture-defining aspect. The same applies for values under a normative perspective, where for example Schwartz (1992) discusses values as universal or normatively approved ideals of a group or culture and Gebert and von Rosenstiel (2002) speak about preference orders of a society. Likewise, Eriksen (1996) considers needs as social constructions which rest upon an established social consciousness and shared meanings that are contingent on social changes. Based on these considerations, it is necessary to distinguish universal (basic) needs and (cultural) wants. Furthermore, each nonprofit organization offers a specific set of satisfiers and the members have specific expectations towards the NPO. In this vein, not all nonprofits satisfy all of the members' needs and wants to the same extent and in the same manner. However, it is also not in the members' expectation to have all their needs satisfied by one specific nonprofit organization. Therefore, the goal of any NPO should be to offer the best set of satisfiers according to their members' organizational preferences and to build a specific organizational culture. The distinction of the three levels of needs—basic needs, cultural wants and organizational preferences—takes into account the discussion about the universality of needs and their continuous change (Suter & Gmür, 2013a).

In addition to these rather unconscious and vague levels of needs, a fourth dimension has to be added in order to capture the more rational and economical aspects which often go along with a membership such as discounts for certain services (manifest benefits). Especially in nonprofits that are closer to the market (e.g. co-operatives), these economic goals play a major role (Theurl, 2013).

### **Change of membership-related expectations over time**

Nevertheless, it is not possible to define a set of satisfiers that will be eternally valid for the organization and all its members. The preferences of the members and the environment by which they are influenced are changing as well as the organization itself. Therefore, the unique characteristics of a NPO as well as the lifecycles of the organization and its members have to be taken into consideration (see Gmür & Lichtsteiner, 2009). For example, a new member probably has different preferences than a long-standing member.

For the present study and its focus on the change of member values over time, we included the organizational preferences as well as the economic goals. Whereas the literature on needs and values is very comprehensive, there are only few studies about the change of needs and values over time. "Time plays a critical, yet often underexamined, role in organizational behavior" (Dobrow Riza, Ganzach, & Liu, 2015). Therefore, it is necessary to adapt approaches and findings from different fields of research to this topic. As members are customers and a part of the organization itself, at the same time, both of their roles have to be considered. On the one hand, members benefit from a wide range of satisfiers provided by the NPO and, on the other hand, they can participate actively and enhance the organizations' legitimacy (cf. Bijman & Verhees, 2011).

Although basic needs do not change at all and the cultural wants change rather slowly over time, the time dimension is very important to the organizational preferences and the ability of nonprofit organizations to provide the demanded satisfiers (Goebel & Brown, 1981). Thus, the success of a NPO can be defined as its ability to adapt its provided benefits to the changing organizational preferences and economic goals. It is not possible to adapt to every individual change in the organizational preferences and economic goals because they sometimes change in a different direction at the same time (Suter & Gmür, 2014). But it is necessary to get a picture of the general understanding of the organization and the members' opinions. Although the organizational preferences of the different members can change in different directions, we may assume that, generally, the members' expectations rise together with the experience. More experienced members are more likely to have higher organizational preferences towards their NPO (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1991). A strong link between the age and the attitude toward a NPO can also be found in the volunteer research. On the one hand, cohort effects show an impact on the motivation for volunteer behavior. For members of Generation Y, for example, the top motivation for volunteering is altruistic, but second through fourth most important motives are related to one's self (Burns, Reid, Toncar, Anderson, & Wells, 2008). On the other hand, many studies indicate the highest volunteer engagement of the member in their middle age (Tschirhart, 1998; Wymer, 1998). With increasing age, social roles and the importance of different areas of life change and new opportunities arise as well as new restrictions require to rethink personal decisions (van Ingen & Wilson, 2017; Wilson, 2000). It is therefore important to a NPO to be aware of the changes in their member's (private) lives, not just to find the right time for recruiting them as volunteers, but also to keep them satisfied with their membership in general. In the business-to-business research, the understanding for changing and evolving preferences is already established. In 1997, Flint et al. (p. 164) state that "suppliers must be in tune with at least three key customer view factors: (1) the current needs of their customers, (what they value), (2) their customers' satisfaction with the supplier's ability to meet those needs (to create that value for them), and (3) the forces that drive customers' perceptions of value to change over time". In a more recent study from 2002, the same authors go one step further as they argue that it is not enough to react solely to customers' preferences but the organizations are forced to anticipate what customers will value next. At the same time, they criticize the narrow research focus in the emerging customer value literature that mainly concentrates on what customers currently want, but lack in offering theories about how and why customer value changes (Flint, Woodruff, & Gardial, 2002). Beverland et al. (2004) argue in the same direction with their conclusion that reacting to client-initiated changes is rather a relationship hygiene factor according Herzberg's two-factor theory and organizations must actively seek to improve the relationship through driving market actions in order to increase satisfaction and motivation (see Herzberg, 1966; Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). Under this perspective, being proactive and anticipating become crucial organizational functions (Flint et al., 2011). The intention to anticipate the future members' preferences sounds convincing, but it has to be kept in mind that all needs develop in their own way and at their own rate. Over time, certain needs stand out more conspicuously than others (Ojha & Pramanick, 2009).

In the field of psychology, a small body of research is dedicated to the relationship between age and needs. Goebel and Brown (1981) as well as Ojha and Pramanick (2009) analyze Maslow's need hierarchy in different age groups and conclude that the relationship between needs and age is curvilinear. The needs for *subsistence*, *safety*, and *belonging* show lower scores in the middle and higher scores at the two ends of age periods. Exactly the opposite was found regarding the needs for esteem and self-actualization (Ojha & Pramanick, 2009). Looking at older people aged 65 years and older, Steverink and Lindenberg (2006) find that none of the social needs becomes less important with advancing age. These results go along with the study from Harlow and Cantor (1996) about participation and satisfaction. Similarly, the socioemotional selectivity theory states that older people pay more attention the emotional quality of social exchanges and engage in attempts to optimize emotional aspects of social relationships (Carstensen, 2006; Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999).

As the member value approach does not just consider the members' preferences towards the organizations, but also their satisfaction, this aspect has to be taken into account, as well. The question of change in satisfaction over time is especially well researched in the area of job satisfaction. It is recognized and accepted that job satisfaction changes over time, but so far, the nature of the relationship between satisfaction and time yielded inconsistent findings. One main reason for these inconsistencies is the use of different time conceptualizations or metrics: age, which captures the passage of time within a person's life and tenure, which captures the passage of time within a person's specific employment context. The vast majority of research in this area indicates that job satisfaction increases with age (Dobrow Riza et al., 2015). Ng and Feldman (2010a, 2010b) conducted two comprehensive meta-analyses, one about relationship of age and job attitudes and one about organizational tenure and job performance. Their findings provide modest support for the hypothesis that older employees tend to have more favorable (and/or less unfavorable) job attitudes. This positive relationship remained statistically significant even with tenure as a control variable, however, at a lower level. Additionally, they found a general positive relationship between organizational tenure with citizenship performance. Dobrow Riza et al. in turn support Ng and Feldmans results with regard to the relationship between age and job satisfaction but at the same time they found evidence that job satisfaction decreases with tenure. "As people grew older, they became increasingly satisfied with their jobs, while during employment in a given organization, they became decreasingly satisfied as time advanced" (2015, p. 22). Some studies also found curvilinear relationships between tenure and job related aspects like involvement, core task performance and citizenship performance (Ng & Feldman, 2010a; Wagner, Ferris, Fandt, & Wayne, 1987). Despite the differences of being employed and being a member of a NPO, the general conclusions of this research lead to a better understanding of the relationship between organizational involvement, age, and tenure or length of membership, respectively.

The literature focusing on commitment is another big field of research considering the individual-organizational relationship. But, despite the wide range of studies about commitment, there is still considerable confusion and disagreement about what commitment is (Devece, Palacios-Marqués, & Pilar Algauacil, 2016; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Several conceptual frameworks can be found where commitment is conceptualized as either an unidimensional or

multidimensional construct (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). One of the most common commitment models that has undergone the most extensive research of any multidimensional approach (greatest empirical scrutiny) is the three-component model of Meyer and Allen (1997) that differentiates between affective, normative and continuance commitment (Pool & Pool, 2007; Preston & Brown, 2004). For our study, we focus on the affective organizational commitment. Much of the theoretical and empirical research has been based on the assumption that this form of commitment develops with tenure, displaying a rapid decrease after entry, followed later by a steady increase (Beck & Wilson, 2000).

Overall, the variety of studies in the different fields of research provides substantial evidence for a close relationship between values and age as well as between values and length of membership (see Figure 2). In general, we expect a positive relationship between age and satisfaction, especially with regard to the *safety* and *affection* values. The effect of the length of membership on the member values, however, is even more difficult to predict. The results in the field of job satisfaction indicate that the relationship between job satisfaction and tenure is significantly mediated by salary, an aspect that is largely missing in the nonprofit context (Dobrow Riza et al., 2015). However, the different kind of research fields, research questions and study designs do not allow for the direct deduction of specific hypotheses with regard to the member values in the nonprofit context. So far, there are no empirical studies about the change of different values over time that would allow describing the relationships between the member values and age or length of membership. Therefore, the study is pilot and of explorative character.

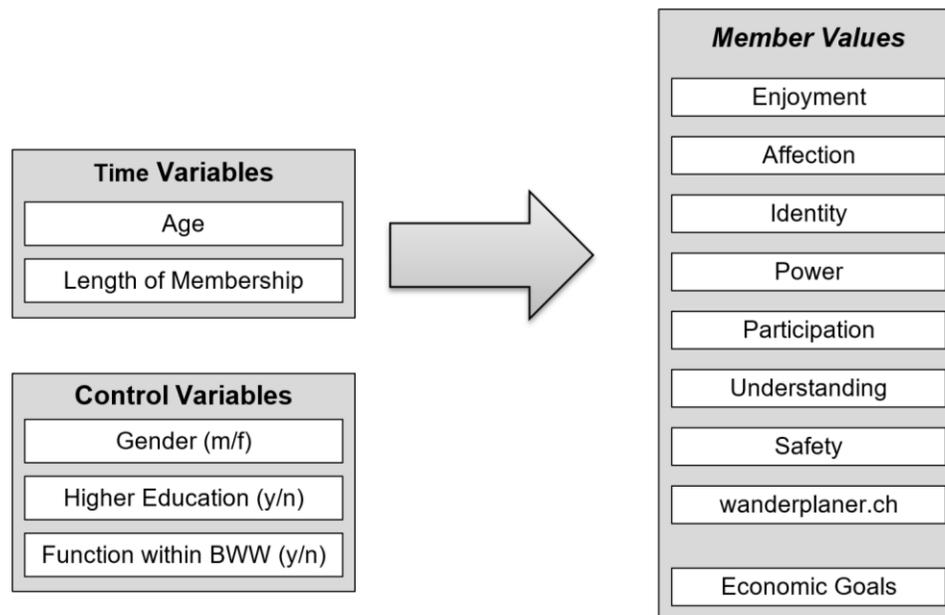


Figure 2: Research model.

## Methodology

We collected the data for the present study from the Berne Hiking Trail Association (BWW). According to a representative study, over 40 percent of the Swiss population hikes in their leisure time, making hiking the favorite Swiss sport (Lamprecht, Fischer, & Stamm, 2014). Switzerland boasts the longest, densest and best waymarked network of hiking trails worldwide (Switzerland Tourism, 2016). In 1934, the Swiss Working Group on Hiking Trails was founded with the goal to standardize the signalization and to connect the existing hiking trails all over the country. Nowadays, the Swiss Hiking Trails Association is divided in 26 cantonal organizations which supervise hiking trails with a total length of 65,000 kilometer (one and a half time around the globe) and coordinate the local municipalities which in turn are responsible for the maintenance of the trails (Schweizer Wanderwege, 2016). BWW is one of the biggest cantonal organizations with more than 13,000 members and almost 10,000 kilometers of hiking trails (Berner Wanderwege, 2016). The sample of the study is based on these 13,000 members, whereby the members with no digital contact data were excluded.

## Research design

BWW mainly provides collective goods and the reasons for being a member are diverse. In order to analyze the member value, we divided the study in two parts. First, we sent an open online survey with only two questions to a stratified random sampling of 240 members to take the different types of members into account (member of the advisory board, volunteers in various functions and ordinary members). The first question helped to identify their kind of relationship with the association (membership type) and in the second question they were asked to name five reasons for their membership. The sample, with a high percentage of strongly committed member (members that assume a position within BWW), led to a high response rate of 45 percent. From 108 members' responses, 432 single reasons for being a member could be extracted and were matched to one of the theoretical member values. Too open or general formulated reasons like "I like being outside", "I like hiking" or "Hiking is ecological" were ignored, as they refer rather to hiking itself than BWW. Nobody is forced to be a member in a hiking association in order to go hiking. Based on the mentioned reasons, we generated 25 items in discussion with the management of BWW. Before the main survey started, we pretested the questionnaire with 200 randomly selected members. An exploratory factor analysis based on the pretest data led to a few changes of the item allocation to the member values and the deletion of one item. A table of the final items and their allocation to the member values can be found in **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.** After that, the management of BWW sent 7,754 e-mail invitations to members (advisory board members excluded) including a link to the web-based survey questionnaire. This was followed by an announcement in the member magazine and on the official website with a direct link to the survey. Reminder e-mails were sent two weeks after the initial invitation. For the French-speaking members (canton Bern is bilingual, German/French), the questionnaire was translated accordingly. As an incentive for the participation in the survey, BWW ran a raffle. The entire survey was carried out between June until end of July 2016, ending with 2,034 responses, an overall response rate of 26.2 percent.

Among the more than 2,000 responses, around 500 were found incomplete, leaving 1,562 usable questionnaires. Combined with the 51 responses from the pretest, a dataset of 1,613 responses was left for further analysis. The dataset is representative for the BWW members regarding the average age and sex ratio. On the other hand, active and honorary members are slightly overrepresented, what is not unexpected as a higher commitment to the association leads to a higher participation rate in the survey. Accordingly, the variable function within BWW was controlled in the regression models.

### **Dependent variables – member values**

In order to capture a comprehensive scope of member values, we created nine factors (member values) to measure all relevant dimensions of the member expectations towards BWW. The four member values *subsistence*, *aesthetic*, *creation* and *achievement* were not mentioned by the members as actual reasons, so we omitted them for further analyses. Every item we created is a consolidation of several reasons for being a member, customized for a specific member value. An explorative factor analysis with the principal component extraction and a varimax rotation, followed by reliability analyses based on the pretest data, then led to a few changes of the originally generated set of eight member values. The items for the member value freedom for example did not really fit and the data indicated that the focus should not lie on freedom itself but more precisely on the new internet platform wanderplaner.ch that allows autonomously digital planning hikes at home without needing special hiking maps or other information. Therefore, this internet platform represents a form of freedom for the members. In addition to the eight member values, we added the dimension of economic goals that were mentioned several times in the openly surveyed reasons for being a member. After the main survey we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis that confirmed the reliability and convergent-divergent validity of a member values. All member value scales include two to four items and show solid reliability values – Cronbach alpha between 0.63 and 0.94 and composite reliability (CR) between 0.64 and 0.94 (see **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**). The only member value with a convergence issue is power (AVE 0.47), but according to the theory both items are crucial for the measurement of the need for power (the representation of interests/lobbying and the social status of volunteers). Additionally, all factors meet the Fornell-Larcker criterion for discriminant validity.

As the member value is shaped by the importance of a certain organizational preference to a member and to what degree the member perceives this preference as satisfied, we measured each member value in two steps. First, the members rated all items of a member value separately on a seven-choice Likert scale, ranging from “unimportant” to “very important”. The index of the member value importance is thus the mean of its items. Secondly, they positioned a slider on a Likert scale ranging from “insufficient” to “entirely”, assessing BWWs’ ability to fulfill their organizational preferences with regard to a certain member value. Since a member value only occurs in the overlap between needs (importance) and satisfiers (satisfaction), the actual member value finally was calculated as the lower value of both measurements (see Figure 1).

## Time and control variables

In order to analyze if and how member values change over time, we measured two time variables: age of the member and length of membership in years. As control variables, we used sex, whether a member has a higher education (college or higher) and differentiated between members who hold a voluntary position within BWW. All three control variables were measured with dummy variables.

Table 2: Sample characteristics.

Age	Ø 61.7 years (SD 11.6 years)	
Length of Membership	Ø 12.3 years (SD 13.2 years)	
Gender	Male: 64.1%	Female: 35.9%
Higher Education	Yes: 44.3%	No: 55.7%
Function within BWW	Yes: 92.1%	No: 7.9%

The independent variables give an accurate picture about the member structure in BWW. The average member of BWW is almost 62 years old and joined the association more than twelve years ago. Women are underrepresented in the association, whereas the proportion of members with a higher education (44 percent) is quite high compared to the Swiss average of 24 percent (Wolter et al., 2014). BWW is a professionalized association and only a small percentage (8 percent) of the members actually engages within BWW.

## Results

After cleaning the data, we conducted nine sets of analyses, each addressing one specific member value, utilizing ordinary least square (OLS) regression. Before regression analyses, a series of diagnostics were concluded to ensure that the basic assumptions of OLS regression were met.

All models are significant, with high F values between 5.476 ( $p < .0001$ ) and 28.614 ( $p < .0001$ ). Nevertheless, the explanatory power of the models is rather low with 4% in average. However, it was not expected to explain a substantial portion of the variations of the dependent member values, since member values are highly individualistic and depend from a wide variety of different factors. Therefore, unobserved heterogeneity has not been fully taken into account when analyzing the determinants of the member values. However, the aim of the study is to analyze the changes of the member values over time rather than to determine the determinants of the member value of BWW themselves. The focus on the analysis of the two time variables was also the reason, why we turned down the idea of a structural equation model (SEM). Although the nine member values are discriminant factors, some of them correlate with one another what could lead to model effects and thus reduce the overall effect of age and length of membership on the member values.

During the regression model specifications, different forms of relationships between the member values, age, and length of membership have been tested, for example by

logarithmizing and squaring age and length of membership. The results of the final regression models are summarized in Figure 3. Additional (confirmatory) analyses sometimes mentioned in the text are not presented in detail in order to increase readability.

Table 3: Determinants of member value perception (N=1,613).

	Enjoyment			Affection			Identity			Power			Participation		
	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta
Time variables															
Age	0.02***	(0.007)	0.1	0.019***	(0.007)	0.094	0.011**	(0.005)	0.068	0.015**	(0.006)	0.083	0.004	(0.007)	0.019
Length of membership	-0.005	(0.006)	-0.029	0.011*	(0.006)	0.060	0.011**	(0.005)	0.072	0.013***	(0.005)	0.084	0.018***	(0.006)	0.093
Control variables															
Gender	-0.557***	(0.149)	-0.114	0.008	(0.147)	0.002	0.183	(0.121)	0.045	0.175	(0.133)	0.040	0.317**	(0.153)	0.059
Higher education	-0.514***	(0.136)	-0.110	-0.569***	(0.135)	-0.121	-0.491***	(0.111)	-0.125	-0.268**	(0.122)	-0.064	-0.326**	(0.141)	-0.063
Position within BWW	1.077***	(0.245)	0.127	1.59***	(0.242)	0.189	0.636***	(0.203)	0.089	0.367	(0.228)	0.047	2.621***	(0.255)	0.281
Constant	5.261***	(0.452)		4.493***	(0.447)		6.634***	(0.371)		5.593***	(0.406)		4.090***	(0.468)	
<i>F-test</i>	11.334***			18.132***			11.292***			7.818***			28.614***		
<i>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.043			0.069			0.040			0.028			0.101		
	Understanding			Safety			Wanderplaner.ch			Economic goals					
	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta			
Time variables															
Age	-0.001	(0.004)	-0.009	-0.003	(0.003)	-0.031	-0.006	(0.006)	-0.036	0.007	(0.006)	0.042			
Length of membership	0.012***	(0.004)	0.101	0.005**	(0.003)	0.061	-0.019***	(0.005)	-0.120	-0.007	(0.005)	-0.047			
Control variables															
Gender	-0.355***	(0.092)	-0.112	-0.322***	(0.070)	-0.134	0.496***	(0.130)	0.114	-0.018	(0.123)	-0.004			
Higher education	-0.148*	(0.085)	-0.048	0.015	(0.064)	0.006	-0.097	(0.119)	-0.023	-0.583***	(0.114)	-0.145			
Position within BWW	-0.153	(0.157)	-0.027	-0.012	(0.119)	-0.003	-0.177	(0.220)	-0.023	0.103	(0.213)	0.014			
Constant	8.478***	(0.282)		9.409***	(0.215)		7.864***	(0.395)		6.998***	(0.380)				
<i>F-test</i>	6.264***			5.476***			6.551***			6.186***					
<i>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.020			0.017			0.022			0.020					

\*Significant at  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

The only member value not significantly affected by time (neither age nor length of membership), are the economic goals. It seems that the rational dimension of monetary benefits stay stable over time, however, at a relatively low level. Further questions about the economic goals revealed that a lot of members are not even aware of the offered vouchers from BWW. Due to the collective good character of BWW services, members do not expect personal financial profits and the membership fee is rather seen as a solidarity contribution.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

Overall, the length of membership has a stronger effect on the member values than age. Age positively influences *identity*, *affection* and *enjoyment*. The older a member gets, the more important are the solidarity and the shared goals with BWW, friendship, and social relations as well as the program of activities and happy moments. In line with Webster (2008), older members enjoy engaging at different levels of involvement and witnessing others' success. Older members also value, to a greater extent, a high standing of volunteers and the (political) representation of their interests as members like banning mountain bikes on narrow trails. These results can be linked with the socioemotional selectivity theory (SST). Older people care more for the social relationship within BWW and also engage themselves more actively. T-tests revealed significant age differences in the dataset. In average, members that hold a position within the association are six years older than "normal" members and members who attend the annual general assembly are even seven years older than non-attendants. The two strongest effects in the regression models are age on *affection* and age on *enjoyment* what fits with the finding that older people are mostly present-oriented and place priority on deepening existing relationships and developing expertise in already satisfying areas of life. According to SST, such differences occur not due to age but to differences in the perception of future time or the actual time left in life, respectively (Carstensen, 2006; Fingermaun & Perlmutter, 1995).

Interestingly, no significant relationship was found between age and the member value *participation* (Okun & Schultz, 2003). An additional regression without length of membership as an independent variable showed a significant positive relationship between age and *participation*. Therefore, the low effect of age on *participation* in the final model is mainly caused by a model effect. Based on the findings from Ojha and Pramanick (2009) a positive relationship was expected between age and *safety*, but we did not find this result in our analysis. The Swiss hiking trail system is graded in different difficulty levels, so that elderly people with health impediments can choose easier flat trails or even obstacle-free routes. So even if the need for *safety* increases with age, this does not lead automatically to a higher *safety* member value for BWW, since they offer trails in all difficulty levels.

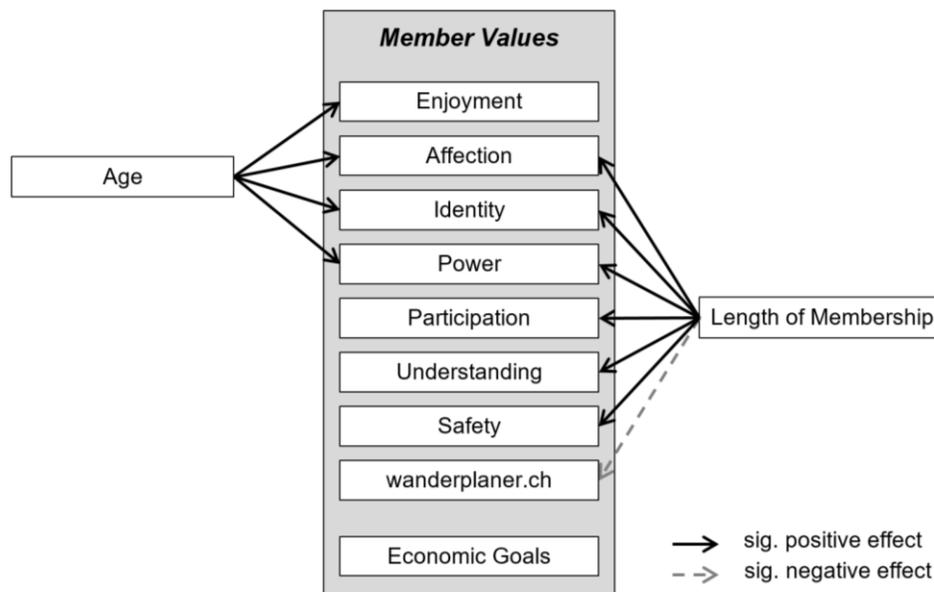


Figure 3: Regression models.

The length of membership influences almost every member value significantly. Like age, it positively influences the member values addressing *identity*, *power* and *affection*. During the membership, the bonds between the member and BWW are getting stronger and the services provided by the association are more appreciated. This goes hand in hand with higher member values for *affection* and *participation*.

The four member values *identity*, *power*, *participation* and *affection* have a lot in common with the concept of organizational commitment that is defined as “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization”(Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982, p. 27) or as Mathieu and Zajac (1990, p. 171) call it the “bond or linking of the individual to the organization”. The three dimensions of commitment—affective, normative and continuance commitment— are closely linked to the four member values *identity*, *power*, *participation* and *affection*: *Affection* goes along with the affective, *identity* with normative and *power* with continuance commitment, whereas *participation* includes both aspects of normative and continuance commitment. Under this perspective, the results of regression models support the statement by Mowday et al. (1979, p. 226): “Commitment attitudes appear to develop slowly but consistently over time as individuals think about the relationship between themselves and their [organization].” Further studies show a strong relationship between socialization and participation (Granik, 2005; Kelley, 1992; McShane, 1986).

The member value of *understanding* is positively influenced by the length of the membership as well. Long-standing members value information about hiking and suggestions for new hikes. In addition to that, an earlier member survey from 2009 already revealed the high importance of the member magazine “Wandern” (Schmidt, 2009). The magazine has a long tradition and is

very popular among the members, not just for the content of information and hiking ideas but also for the panorama images and illustrations. The survey, however, showed that the magazine lost its unique position as the number-one information tool of BWW compared to the new internet platform wanderplaner.ch. The latter was launched 2014 and attracted a lot of new members, who were highly interested in planning their hikes online. Wanderplaner.ch does not just allow a personal planning of hikes but also includes a wide range of pre-planned hiking suggestions. According to the regression model, wanderplaner.ch is more important to recently joined members than to older. The rise of the new platform is significant, after such a short time since its launch, wanderplaner.ch became already the second most important member value (see **Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**). Nevertheless, the more traditional information services of BWW remain very important and the members even ask for generally more comprehensive information and articles rather than for just short facts and figures. The negative relationship between length of membership and wanderplaner.ch can rather be interpreted as a cohort effect than an actual change in the member value: a large number of new members initially joined BWW in order to get access to this platform, whereas this innovation is not that important to long-time members.

The most important member value *safety* is also positively influenced by the length of membership. *Safety* is the only member value with a higher importance than satisfaction level. All other member values are “over satisfied”: The members are more satisfied with the performance of BWW than they give weight to it (importance). Therefore, *safety* is the only member value that is “defined” by the satisfaction of the members and not by the importance. In line with this, long term members are more satisfied with the safety-work BWW is doing. Moreover, a positive relationship between length of membership and the satisfaction exists also with the cumulated satisfaction values of all member value dimensions, but not with the cumulated importance values. From this point of view the whole literature about customer satisfaction, loyalty and retention should be viewed from the other side too. Customer satisfaction does not just encourage customer loyalty and retention but also the other way around (Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha, & Bryant, 1996; Gustafsson, Johnson, & Roos, 2005; Hennig-Thurau & Klee, 1997). In contrast to the length of membership, age has a significant positive effect on the cumulated importance values, but not on the cumulated satisfaction values. In conclusion, it seems that the older a member gets, the higher are the expectation towards BWW (higher importance of the member values) and the longer the length of membership, the higher the satisfaction with the work of BWW. These findings are somehow contrary to the studies from employment settings about the link between tenure and organizational satisfaction (Dobrow Riza et al., 2015; Ng & Feldman, 2010a), but go along the psychological research about needs and age (Goebel & Brown, 1981; Harlow & Cantor, 1996; Ojha & Pramanick, 2009; Steverink & Lindenberg, 2006).

## **Contributions and limitations**

The study may serve as pilot research in analyzing the effects of age and length of membership on a set of member values. This makes it difficult to compare the results with the

existing body of research that focus on other questions and took place in different contexts. Nevertheless, the results are in accordance with a wide set of points of reference from many other theories.

Age and membership length show significant relationships with all member value dimensions, with exception of the economic goals. This clear result proves the change of the members needs and values over time. The nonprofit research as well as nonprofit organizations in their daily work thus should consider this changeability and try to further examine in which directions the needs are changing under which conditions. Over all the study is able to shed some light on an entirely disregarded topic in the nonprofit research. The NPO research is advised to have a closer look on the work on changing customer wants and needs in the for-profit literature, especially in the B-2-B research.

A couple of particularities of the survey, however, lead to a restricted generalization of the findings. First of all, BWW provides mainly collective goods by coordinating the municipalities and interest groups in order to maintain and develop the hiking trail network, whereas the actual individual services like guided hikes are of less concern. From this perspective, the BWW members are more similar to donors of a foundation than being a “classical” member for example in a sports club or a union. This is probably the main reason why the importance of the majority of needs was lower than their corresponding satisfaction. Being a member in BWW means not necessarily to be able to hike on the Berne hiking trail network. In other member value studies, it was generally the other way around and the members always wanted to get a little more (importance) than the nonprofit organization provided (satisfaction). Accordingly, further research should test the actual findings in different nonprofit organizations that focus more on individual benefits and have a stronger interaction between the members and the organizations themselves. Secondly, the vast majority of the members from BWW are between 50 and 75 years old. Considering this, further research should extend to younger age groups. And last but not least, in order to minimize cohort effects and other confounding variables, the effects of time on member values should be analyzed in longitudinal panel studies.

Regarding the methodology, the study narrows intentionally the focus on a small set of independent variables (two time variables and three control variables) according to the basic research question. For future research, it could be interesting to analyze the time variables and the different member value dimensions in a structural equation model (SEM). This would also allow to examine the risk of reverse causality in the present study. The time variables probably do not just have an effect on the member values, but also the other way around. Additionally, the potential problem of the common method bias has to be considered.

## **Managerial and practical implications**

Member values change over time, whereas two time metrics have to be differentiated: age and length of membership. Both temporal metrics show significant (mostly) positive relationships with all member value dimensions. The only value that is unaffected by time are the economic goals. Therefore, the rational thinking remains stable, although—in the context of BWW—at a

low level. The negative relationship between wanderplaner.ch and length of membership can rather be explained by a cohort effect than an actual change in the member value, as the wanderplander.ch platform was just introduced a few years ago. Another explanation for the negative relationship is that wanderplaner.ch is the only individual benefit provided by BWW. For a majority of the more recent members, this new internet platform was the initial reason to join BWW. In this vein, new attractive individual benefits seem to be a promising instrument for nonprofits to recruit new members (cf. Clark & Wilson, 1961; Marshall & Sundstrom, 2010; Olson, 1971). In contrast to this, all other member values rise along the length of membership. The longer a member stays in its association the more satisfied he is with it. This can be a result by the tendency of dissatisfied members to leave their organizations while satisfied members stay (see Sarker, Crossman, & Chinmeteepituck, 2003). Another explanation is the stronger affective and normative commitment with increased knowledge about the organization. As a result, nonprofit organizations are suggested to invest in closer relationship with its members and thus focusing on collective values in order to keep their members. In conclusion, nonprofit organizations should be innovative regarding new individual benefits for attracting new members. But for member retention activities, it is important to strengthen the social and participative member values. The positive relationships between age and member values tend to head in the same direction. In accordance with the social selectivity theory, older members value common events and social cohesion more than younger ones. Overall, the study provides solid empirical findings that member values change over time. In general, a positive relation between age and member values as well as the length of membership and member values was found. Similar results can also be expected in other nonprofit contexts regarding collective goods. Looking at rather individual services and benefits, however, could change the way of the relationships considerably, as indicated by the results concerting wanderplaner.ch.

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# Appendix 1

## Descriptives of scales and items

Scales and Items	Importance	Satisfaction	Member Value	Cronbach $\alpha$ / CR	AVE
Enjoyment	3.30	5.50	3.36	0.87/0.88	0.70
1. The nice experiences on common events and activities.	2.94				
2. The wide range of guided hikes, hiking holidays etc.	3.42				
3. The extensive range of courses (e.g. learning how to read maps).	3.37				
Affection	3.54	5.14	3.55	0.83/0.83	0.62
4. Considering yourself among friends and having a good time at meetings of BWW.	2.94				
5. The courteous manner of the BWW-team towards its members.	4.47				
6. The feeling of being a part of the association.	3.20				
Identity	5.17	5.62	4.95	0.76/0.76	0.61
7. The conviction that BWW shares the same ideas and represents my personal concerns.	4.74				
8. The solidarity with BWW and support for the sake of the good cause.	5.57				
Power	4.94	5.25	4.58	0.63/0.64	0.47
9. People who voluntarily work for BWW are regarded.	5.03				
10. Knowing, that BWW represents my personal opinion and ideas (e.g. political lobbying for the interest of hiking).	4.82				
Participation	3.39	5.00	3.38	0.85/0.87	0.77
11. The opportunity to engage myself in meaningful (voluntary) activities.	3.03				
12. Being able to make a personal contribution.	3.65				
Understanding	5.75	5.87	5.40	0.80/0.81	0.51
13. The comprehensive information all about hiking.	5.71				
14. The great suggestions and ideas for new hikes.	6.00				
15. The high information content and interesting read with the magazine "Wandern".	5.66				
16. The hiking books, brochures, and maps edited by BWW.	5.61				
Safety	6.52	6.30	6.13	0.74/0.76	0.52
17. Reliable time information and signposts allow deviating spontaneously from the planed hiking route.	6.21				
18. To feel safe on hikes due to the good signalization, even in personally unknown areas.	6.65				
19. The safe and well maintained hiking trails in the whole canton Bern.	6.71				
wanderplaner.ch	5.90	5.93	5.51	0.94/0.94	0.89
20. The internet platform wanderplander.ch with a lot of hiking suggestions and the possibility to plan individual hikes on your own	5.98				
21. The newly found freedom of planning hikes by wanderplaner.ch.	5.81				
Economic Goals	4.63	5.72	4.50	0.81/0.81	0.59
22. To benefit from reductions and special offers (e.g. mountain railways or sport shops).	4.15				
23. The favorable prices for maps, books and other hiking equipment in the online shop or the office of BWW.	4.92				
24. The favorable member fee.	4.82				