

## THE DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMOR AND UNIVERSALISM AS GROWTH ANXIETY-FREE TYPE OF VALUES

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**Abstract:** The theory of basic human values measures universal values that are recognized throughout all major cultures. Schwartz's theory refined the set of 19 basic individual values that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or group, further describing the dynamic relations amongst them. Current paper contributes with evidence to the theory of values reformulated by Schwartz in 2012, according to which values are arrayed on a circular motivational continuum in dynamic relationships, according to the compatibility or conflict between the motivations they express. A total of 220 youth respondents from the West side of Romania have answered using a Likert scale from 1 to 6 to a 46 items online questionnaire. The 46 items questionnaire shows solid internal consistency. This study brings evidence to interclasses dynamic relationships between humor as an openness to change value and universalism as a self-transcendence value, both included in the growth anxiety-free value specter. Conclusions and implications are discussed.

**Keywords:** values theory; humor; universalism; dynamic relationship;

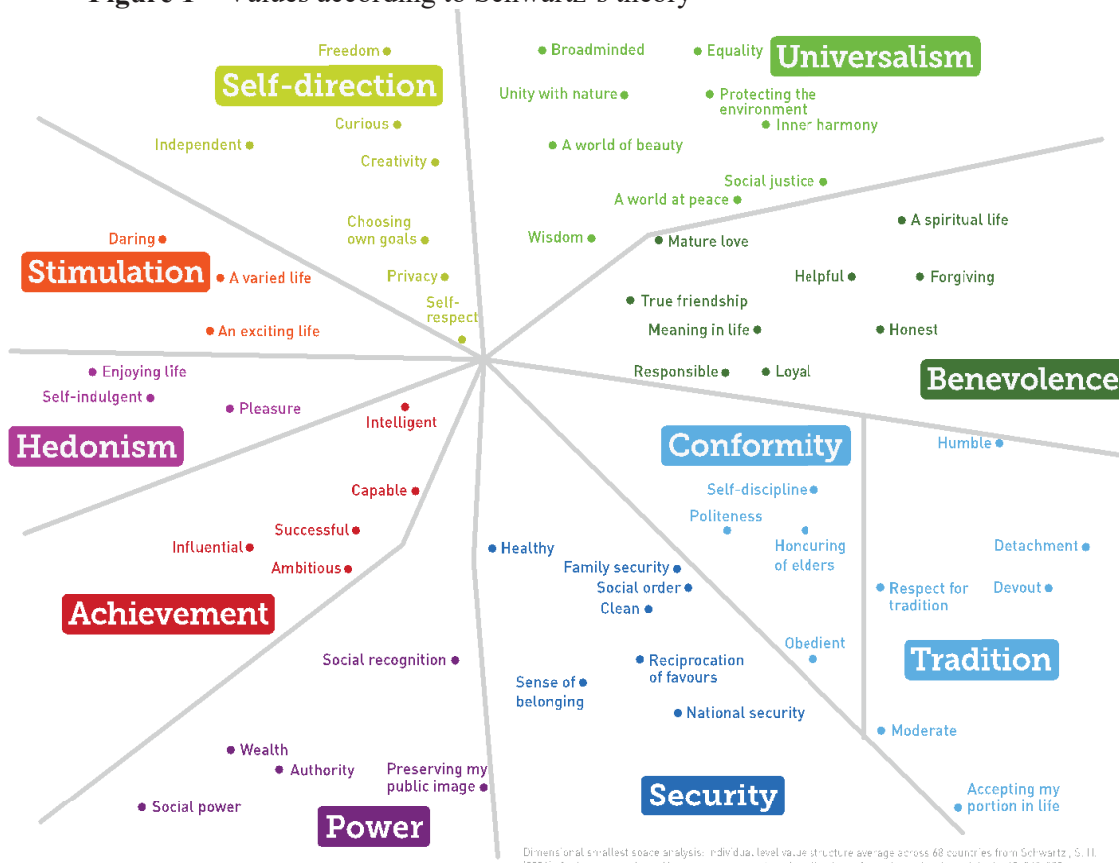
### 1. Introduction

Individual values have been the subject of different studies in the field of personality research. According to Rokeach, value is defined as an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence (Rokeach, 1973).

Values are organized on several levels: general human values, values specific to a sociopolitical system, values that characterize a certain culture or ethnicity, values of large and average social groups, micro-group values (family) and individual values (Ilut, 2004). They influence both the individual in the choices they make from a relational and professional perspective (Dughi, Bran & Ignat, 2016), and also morally according to them adhering to a certain social, professional and cultural level at different stages of development (Ignat, S., 2017).

Values constitute a rational judgment, an agreement realized between a groups of individuals. And they also provide criteria for evaluating actions, individuals and events. Thus values are defined as an enduring prescriptive or proscriptive belief that a specific end state of existence or specific mode of conduct is preferred to an opposite end state or mode of conduct (Munson & McQuarrie, 1988).

**Figure 1 – Values according to Schwartz’s theory**



Schwartz’s approach is based on the typology of Rokeach, being structured around fifty-six values categorized in ten domains: self-orientation, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity, tradition, benevolence and universalism. These values are arranged in a circular structure and form a continuum.

Schwartz (1992, 1994, 2006) defines values as ideals, endowed with universal content and structure, corresponding to the requirements characteristic of the human species (biological needs, inter-individual coordination, societal continuity). Basically values are beliefs, they refer to the ideals that individuals strive to achieve, they transcend specific situations and actions, they are abstract objectives Schwartz (2011, 2012), making this concept distinguishable from other concepts such as norms, attitudes.

Values are ranked in order of relative importance. They form an ordered system reflecting the priorities of each person’s values.

The refined theory of Schwartz (2011, 2012) retains all the benefits of the original theory and adds to it the possibility of representing the motivational continuum of human values even more finely. The continuum of values can be viewed as organized along two bipolar dimensions:

- Self-enhancement values (power, achievement) that encourage and legitimize pursuit of one’s own interests oppose self-transcendence values (universalism, benevolence) that emphasize concern for the welfare of others.
- Openness values (self-direction, stimulation) that welcome change and encourage pursuit of new ideas and experience oppose conservation values (security, tradition, conformity) that emphasize maintaining the status quo and avoiding threat.

## 2. Research methodology

Our research team has developed the national project *Identitatea Nationala a Tinerilor Romani*, with the purpose of deeper understanding the dynamics of national identity aspects and personal values among youth from the West side of Romania. Among the first research questions was the identification of the existent relationship between universalism as a self-transcendence value and humor as an openness to change value, both included in the growth anxiety free type values, the first being oriented towards social focus and the second towards personal focus, according to Schwartz (2011). In this regard, we have designed an online questionnaire aiming to gather descriptive data, general perceptions about national identity and values.

Starting from Schwartz's three axes conservatism / autonomy, hierarchy / egalitarianism and mastery / harmony, we have designed a 46 items questionnaire including the following values: self-determination (items 1, 2, 3), stimulation (items 5, 6, 7), hedonism (8, 9, 10), achievement (12, 13, 14), power (16, 17, 18), security (20, 21, 22), conformity (23, 24, 25), tradition (27, 28, 29), benevolence (30, 31, 32), universalism (33, 34), humor (36, 37, 38), trust (40, 41, 42), health (44, 45, 46) and a dissimulation scale (items 4, 11, 15, 19, 26, 35, 39, 43). We have asked respondents to score on a Likert scale from 1 to 6 the importance of that value, where 1 means less important and 6 very important. A total of 220 responses were gathered between November and December 2018, by sharing them on social media groups of youth, for freely and voluntarily answering.

Our hypothesis states that humor and universalism are in a curvilinear relationship. In order to test our curvilinear hypothesis, we have used SPSS' multiple linear regression analysis, based on multiple regression analysis for curvilinear effects, where humor was the dependent variable and universalism the independent variable.

The study was conducted on a random sample of 220 students from the West side of Romania, of both sexes, 17.3% males and 82.74% females, from both rural 42.7% and urban 57.3% environments, with 50% of participants having high school level of education, 35.5% bachelor and 14.5% master degree.

## 3. Results

As data shows, the dominant value of the research sample is intellectual autonomy. Identifying aspects such as intelligence and creativity as highly important, with an averages mean of  $m=5.57$  and  $m=5.26$ , results outline this type of autonomy. On the opposite, lower scores of values like pleasure  $m= 4.97$  or excitement and exciting life  $m=5.04$  indicate a lower concern for affective autonomy. Contrasting to autonomy there is conservatism, with respondents choosing the lowest interest in this value - social order and respect for traditions having the lowest scores,  $m=4.81$  and  $m=4.43$  respectively. It is noted here that one of the specific values of conservatism, namely security, has a very high score  $m=5.52$ .

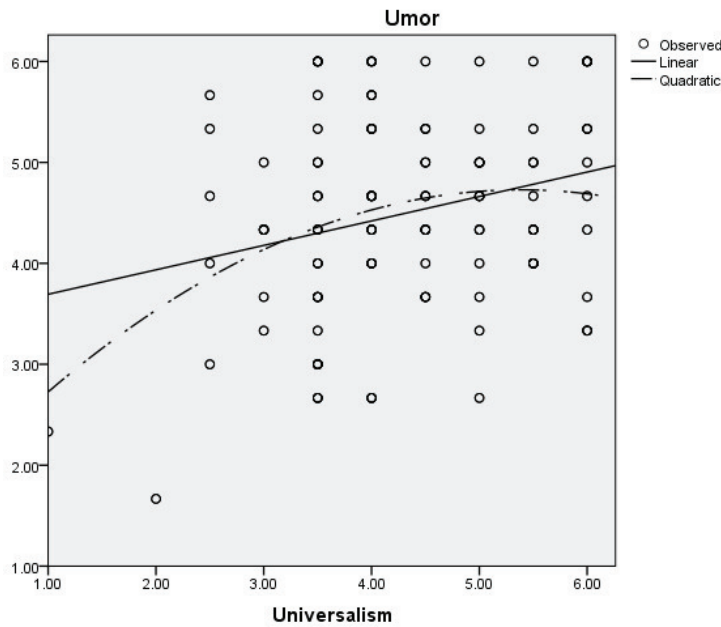
Regarding the internal consistency of the 46 items scale of values, we have obtained an alpha coefficient of .839, suggesting that the items have relatively high internal consistency, a reliability coefficient of .70 or higher is considered acceptable in most social science research situations. We have also computed the Total Variance Explained output, where the Eigen value for the first factor is twice larger than the Eigen value for the next factor (10.278 versus 5.312). Additionally, the first factor accounts for 71% of the total variance, suggesting that the scale items are unidimensional.

In order to test our hypothesis that states that between universalism and humor conceptualized as self-enhancement value, respectively openness to chance value there is a curvilinear relationship, we have used a confirmatory factor analysis, based on multiple regression analysis for curvilinear effects. We describe a curvilinear relationship as a relationship between two or more variables which can be graphically depicted by anything

other than a straight line. A particular case of curvilinear relationships is the situation where two variables grow together until they reach a certain point (positive relationship) and then one of them increases while the other decreases (negative relationship) or vice-versa, the graphical representation of the function being an U or an inverted U shape.

This relationship can be easily identified graphically by a Scatterplot, choosing additional two representations of the regression line: Linear and Quadratic model, for depicting curvilinear effects. The Scatterplot diagram presented in Figure 2 indicates the curvilinear relationship between universalism on the horizontal axis and the humor, represented on the vertical axis. The sample consists of 220 youth from Romania.

**Figure 2** - Linear and quadratic curve estimation of universalism (universalism) and humor (umor)



There is a very high correlation between universalism ( $m=4.30$ ,  $SD=1.045$ ) and humor ( $m=4.49$ ,  $SD=0.981$ ) of  $r=.258$  significant at a  $p<.01$ , which methodologically allows us to proceed with multiple linear regression analysis (Balas-Timar, 2014).

For the curvilinear relationship testing, the present study proposes a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, the dependent variable being universalism, and the independent variable in step 1 humor, and in step 2 squared humor.

Table 2 presents the fitting of the two models, linear – Model 1 and curvilinear/quadratic – Model 2. As we can see in Model 1 the model that supposes linear relationship, universalism accounts for 6% of the variance in humor with an  $F=15.557$  significant at a  $p<.01$ . In Model 2, the model that supposes curvilinear relationship, universalism accounts for 8% of the variance in humor with an  $F=5.461$  significant at a  $p<.05$ .

**Table 1.** The relationship between humor and universalism as personal values, model summary, ANOVA and coefficients

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.258 <sup>a</sup>	.067	.062	.94946	.067	15.557	1	218	.000
2	.299 <sup>b</sup>	.090	.081	.93990	.023	5.461	1	217	.020

a. Predictors: (Constant), Universalism

b. Predictors: (Constant), Universalism, sqrt\_universalism

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	14.024	1	14.024	15.557	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	196.523	218	.901		
	Total	210.547	219			
2	Regression	18.848	2	9.424	10.668	.000 <sup>c</sup>
	Residual	191.699	217	.883		
	Total	210.547	219			

a. Dependent Variable: Umor

b. Predictors: (Constant), Universalism

c. Predictors: (Constant), Universalism, sqrt\_universalism

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.451	.272		12.691	.000
	Universalism	.242	.061	.258	3.944	.000
2	(Constant)	1.708	.793		2.154	.032
	Universalism	1.122	.381	1.196	2.942	.004
	sqrt_universalism	-.104	.045	-.950	-2.337	.020

a. Dependent Variable: Umor

All standardized coefficients of Beta ( $\beta = .258$ ;  $\beta = 1.196$  and  $\beta = -.950$ ) are significant at  $p < .05$  which gives a high consistency to our both models. Changing Beta coefficient's sign from + to - means that the effect is growing in the opposite direction, which demonstrates that the relationship between the two variables: universalism and humor is not linear, but curvilinear. The additional incremental predictive capacity of 2 percent, added by including the squared humor variable which is accounting for the band in the regression line, indicates that there is a curvilinear relationship between universalism and humor.

This curvilinear relationship demonstrates that extreme aspects, extremely reduced and extremely high levels of humor, significantly influences the universalism value, in a negative way. Normal levels of humor triggers a high level of universalism value prioritization. Thus a too humoristic person and a low humoristic person will envisage a low level of universalism seen as a self-transcendence value, compared to a person with normal humoristic value prioritization that is associated with a high level of universalism.

#### 4. Conclusion and implications

This study brings evidence to interclasses dynamic relationships between universalism as a self-transcendence value and humor as an openness to change value. The curvilinear relationship demonstrates that extreme aspects, extremely reduced and extremely high levels of humor, significantly influences the universalism, in a negative way. Normal levels of humor triggers a high level of universalism value prioritization.

This study is limitative, respondents are 220 youth from the West side of Romaina, being needed additional research is needed in order to generalize the conclusion to the total population.

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