

Volunteer choice of nonprofit organisation: an integrated framework

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Abstract

Purpose

This paper aims to explore how volunteers choose one nonprofit organisation (NPO) rather than another. It identifies the drivers of choice, and the relationship between them, to enable NPOs to strengthen their volunteer recruitment.

Design/methodology/approach

A total of 51 service-delivery volunteers were interviewed, drawn from 5 leading NPOs. A laddering technique was used to understand the context in which the choice of organisation was made and the underlying personal needs and goals. The data was analysed using means-end chain (MEC) methodology to uncover the relationships between, and hierarchy of, the decision drivers.

Findings

Brand, cause, and role were found to be important in meeting personal needs and goals through volunteering. The paper makes three contributions. Firstly, it presents a clearer understanding of NPO choice through adopting an integrated theoretical perspective. Secondly, it identifies the decision-making process and key relationships between the attributes of the NPO, the consequences for the volunteer, and the connection to their personal needs. Finally, the study makes an important contribution to literature through presenting a new conceptual framework of volunteer decision-making in the nonprofit context to act as a catalyst for future research.

Research limitations/implications

This research is both impactful through, and limited by, its context selection: regular service-delivery volunteers from five NPOs within two causes. The paper presents a rich research stream to extend this understanding to other nonprofit stakeholders, other causes including medical volunteer, and smaller NPOs.

Practical implications

In an increasingly competitive nonprofit environment with a growing need to support the vulnerable in society, NPO sustainability is dependent on their ability to recruit new volunteers. NPOs compete not only with other organisations with similar causes but also those offering similar volunteering roles, and other uses of time to meet personal needs such as sport, career, or community. Understanding how volunteers make their choice of NPO rather than other uses of their time is of vital importance to make the most effective use of scarce marketing resources. This paper contributes to that practitioner understanding.

Originality/value

To the best of the authors' knowledge, this study is the first to extend the understanding of generic motivations of volunteers to consider specific choice of NPO. Unlike previous literature, the authors bring together theory on brand, cause, and role with personal needs. The authors are also the first to apply MEC methodology to the nonprofit context to uncover the personal underlying, less salient reasons behind NPO choice and the relationship between them.

Keywords

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