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Persuading Others to Volunteer: Is Attitude Change Enough?

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This study has explored the attitudes-to-intention-to-behaviour path in the context of long-term volunteering by employing actual measures of behaviour. Results show that persuasion strategies should go beyond this path because initiatives based on such a model will not produce a sufficiently significant impact to promote sustained volunteering.

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ABSTRACT

This study has explored the attitudes-to-intention-to-behaviour path in the context of long-term volunteering. The first objective of this study is to assess how attitudes towards long-term volunteering are linked to the intention to volunteer and also to the observed volunteering behaviour on a long-term project. The second objective is to investigate the role of two potential cognitive antecedents of attitudes towards volunteering: affect and self-identity. A survey was administered to young volunteers of a British charity at the beginning of their activities on long-term projects. Measures of actual volunteering behaviour were taken by monitoring volunteers' participation for over four months. Affect and self-identity were found to explain attitudes towards volunteering but the results indicate that attitudes fail to predict either intention to volunteer or volunteering behaviour itself. Although they are important to encourage volunteering initiation, favourable attitudes are not sufficient to promote sustained volunteering involving long-term activities or even the intention to do so.

"It is a long way from saying to doing." Miguel de Cervantes, Spanish novelist, poet, painter, and playwright (1547 – 1616)

"Don't listen to their words; fix your attention on their deeds." Albert Einstein, German-born theoretical physicist (1879 – 1955)

INTRODUCTION

Persuasion has always been a matter of concern to organisations which rely on such helping behaviour as the donation of time for the exercise of their activities. A question with which the literature has not dealt is how to persuade volunteers to continue with their activities on the long turn as many charitable organisations struggle to find ways to motivate them to do so (Boezeman and Ellemers 2007; Dwiggins-Beeler, Spizberg, and Roesch 2011).

Fishbein-Ajzen's approach, which embraces the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein 1977; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) and the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen 1985; 1991; 2002; 2005), contemplates individual behaviour in which a process of psychological change is involved (McKee et al. 2000) and is "considered one of the most thoroughly tested and robust of the social psychological models" (Walker et al. 2004, p. 671). The TRA and the TPB have been empirically tested in a number of research contexts involving attitude formation, attitude change and attitude strength. This study explores a specific TRA/TPB path which is usually considered important to any process of customer persuasion: the attitudes-to-intention-to-behaviour path. Such a path is empirically addressed in this study in the long-term volunteering milieu.

While some previous TRA/TPB studies on volunteering (Greenslade and White 2005; Okun and Sloane 2002; Warbuton and Terry 2000) support the idea that attitude has an impact on intention, its role in the TRA and TPB is still not completely clear, mainly as regards long-term volunteering (Harrison 2005). People may change their minds about volunteering after experiencing some voluntary service, which means that with the passage of time, volunteers' initial enthusiasm may wane. The first objective of this study is to investigate how attitudes towards volunteering are linked to the initial intention to volunteer and to the observed volunteering behaviour on a long-term project. Furthermore, the extant literature on consumer behaviour has pointed to a relationship hitherto overlooked between attitudes towards behaviour and specific variables which could themselves be considered predictors of attitudes (Davies, Foxall, and Pallister 2002). Therefore, the second objective of this study is to assess the role of two potential cognitive antecedents of attitudes towards long-term volunteering: affect and self-identity.

MISMATCH BETWEEN ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR

One of the most influential definitions of attitudes was proposed by Allport (1935, p. 810), who declared that "an attitude is a mental and neutral state of readiness, organised through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence on individuals' response to all objects and situations with which it is related". A growing body of social psychological research has been conducted into the attitude-behaviour relationship. Contrary to the initial forecasts of the earliest studies, later research found that attitude does not necessarily adequately predict behaviour (LaPiere 1934; Wicker 1969; Bagozzi and Kimmel 1995). Recently, Fishbein-Ajzen's approach has dominated the discussion about the relationship between attitudes and behaviour (Bagozzi and Kimmel 1995).

The TRA and TPB are grounded in the supposition that a higher association with behaviour is likely to be found if behavioural intention is used as the mediator between attitudes and behaviour, and if attitudes towards the behaviour (rather than general attitudes) are assessed (Ajzen and Fishbein 1977; Eagly and Chaiken 1993). In addition, compatibility in terms of TACT at the same levels of specificity or generality is also important. The acronym TACT refers to the description of behaviour vis-à-vis target (T), action (A), context (C) and time (T); the higher the TACT correspondence between attitudes and behaviour then the more consistent does the relationship attitude-behaviour seem to be (Ajzen and Fishbein 1977; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975).

Bagozzi and Yi (1989), while investigating the mediating role of intention in the attitude-behaviour relationship, argue that when people give considerable thought to a given behaviour (i.e., evaluating its positive and negative implications) then it is likely that the intention will be well formulated and held with conviction. Is more to be expected that well-formed intention mediates the effects of attitudes on behaviour completely, whereas poorly-formed intention does not. Foxall (1997) has argued that a higher association is to be found if the sequence is behaviour-to-attitude-to-behaviour and not simply attitude-to-behaviour. Other researchers share the same view; for example, Fazio et al. (1982, p. 340) attested that "attitudes formed on the basis of direct, behavioural experience with an attitude object have been found to be more predictive of later behaviour than attitudes formed via more indirect, nonbehavioural experience".

THE ATTITUDES-TO-INTENTION-TO-BEHAVIOUR PATH IN VOLUNTEERING

Four articles which investigated volunteering found in the TRA/TPB literature are presented in Table 1. From Table 1 it is possi-

Table 1: Description of Volunteering Behaviour in Previous TRA/TPB Investigations

Study	Description of behaviour
Harrison (1995)	Work at the shelter the next time they were scheduled to do so
Warburton and Terry (2000)	Engage in volunteering behaviour during the next month
Okun and Sloane (2002)	Volunteer through the Student Life Community Service Programme during the next two months
Greenslade and White (2005)	Engage in three or more hours of volunteer work per week during the next month

ble to infer that such investigations have specified at the very least the TACT components of 'action' and 'time' in their description of volunteering behaviour and that none of them has dealt with specific long-term volunteering projects. Harrison (1995) and Okun and Sloane (2002) employed objective measures of behaviour, including observation in the field and checking of records. Warburton and Terry (2000) and Greenslade and White (2005) used self-report measures of behaviour.

Evidence across these investigations reveals that intention is influenced by attitudes. For example, the correlation coefficient (r) between attitudes and intention is 0.33 for Warburton and Terry (2000), 0.48 for Okun and Sloane (2002) and 0.67 for Greenslade and White (2005). The coefficient (r) between attitudes and behaviour is 0.23 for Warburton and Terry (2000), 0.12 for Okun and Sloane (2002) and 0.45 for Greenslade and White (2005). In Harrison's study (1995), however, the path attitudes-to-intention-to-behaviour is only partially supported, because attitudes failed to explain intention to volunteer in the sample of experienced volunteers. Intention accounts for about 56-58% of the variance in volunteering behaviour in these studies.

THE AFFECT-TO-ATTITUDES PATH

There is a vast body of theoretical work concerning the influence of emotions on human behaviour. The broad idea of emotion is captured within the concept of affect. According to Parrot (2001, p. 4), the term "refers to any psychological state that is felt and in some way is evaluative or valenced (positive or negative)" and should be employed when all emotional feelings are considered, for example, moods, emotions, emotional episodes, pleasures, pains, likes, and dislikes. Fishbein-Ajzen's approach has been criticized for neglecting affective processes while putting too much emphasis on utilitarian beliefs (Zanna and Rempel 1988). This caveat has been acknowledged when TRA and TPB studies consider the two-pronged approach of attitude in the analysis, which combines affective and instrumental attitudes. Affective attitudes capture the emotional aspect of the construct while instrumental attitudes correspond to its cognitive dimension; they are respectively the 'hot' and the 'cold' attitudes (Rhodes and Courneya 2003; Rosenberg 1956).

Nevertheless, Manstead and Parker (1995) affirm that measures of attitude are not of much value in capturing the emotional aspects of behaviour, thus suggesting that measures of affective evaluations of behaviour (that is, affect) should be adopted and used together with measures of attitude. In fact, what is behind their argument is the supposition that attitudes and affect are distinct constructs. According to Manstead and Parker (1995), affective evaluations of behaviour are brought out by such questions as: What do you like or enjoy about performing the particular behaviour? What do you dislike or hate about performing it? On the other hand, Ajzen (2006) suggests that attitudes towards behaviour can be brought out by the following questions: What do you believe are the advantages of your performing the behaviour? What do you believe are the disadvan-

tages of your performing the behaviour? French et al. (2005) found empirical support to suggest that beliefs elicited by affective evaluations of behaviour (e.g., like/enjoy or dislike/hate) are more closely associated with the measure of affective attitude, whereas attitudinal beliefs (e.g., advantages/disadvantages) are more strongly associated with the measure of instrumental attitude. In line with the claim that the construct of affect should be represented by two different dimensions, this study uses a conceptualisation which considers both the positive and the negative (or defensive) aspects of affect and thus expresses likes and dislikes related to the performance of the behaviour concerned, beyond measures of attitudes.

THE SELF-IDENTITY-TO-ATTITUDES PATH

Self-identity is a multifaceted concept with a number of components (Bailey 2003). The self is conceived within identity theory as a collection of identities that reflects the roles which an individual plays in the social structure (Terry, Hogg, and White 1999). In general, the self is viewed "as a bridge between the social events that occurred outside of the individual (including both interpersonal interactions and society more broadly) and the individual's own thoughts, behaviours, and emotions" (Leary 2007, p. 318). A definition that has proved helpful posits that self-identity "reflects the extent to which an actor sees him or herself as fulfilling the criteria for any societal role" (Conner and Armitage 1998, p. 1444). The relationship between self-identity and attitudes has been overlooked in TRA and TPB models as few studies have been devoted to the exploration of such a relationship. For example, Shaw and Shiu (2002) found that self-identity has a substantial independent effect on attitudes. Sparks and Shepherd (1992, p. 396) posit that self-identity might be reflected in a positive attitude towards behaviour and declare that "the relationship between people's identities and their attitudes is undoubtedly complex, and needs to be explored critically and thoroughly".

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

In recent years, a growing interest has arisen not only in the relationship between attitudes and behaviour, but also in the conditions for this relationship (Armitage and Christian 2003) and how attitudes are formed. Based on what has been discussed so far, the following hypotheses are posed:

Hypothesis 1:   *Behavioural intention will act as a mediator for the atttude-behaviour relationship as regards long-term volunteering.*

Hypothesis 2:   *Attitudes will significantly lead to intention to volunteer on long-term projects.*

Hypothesis 3:   *Affect (positive and defensive) will significantly lead to attitudes towards long-term volunteering.*

Hypothesis 4: Self-identity will significantly lead to attitudes towards long-term volunteering.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This research was designed to collect data on actual behaviour. Data on cognitive variables (that is, attitudes, intention, affect and self-identity) were first collected by means of a questionnaire which was sent to 530 volunteers of a British charity which coordinates projects for young people. Four to six months later, when the projects ended, the coordinators of the volunteering projects provided information on how these young volunteers had behaved, whether they followed through their duties on volunteering by attending the projects for the full period or not. A total of 237 questionnaires were analysed and data on the behaviour of 161 volunteers were obtained. The behaviour under study was defined as 'volunteering through Charity X in the project that I have committed myself for the full project period'. The definition of behaviour set out the exact compatibility between behaviour and attitudes in terms of TACT (target, action, context, and time), precisely. An average of recency and frequency was taken as a measure of volunteering behaviour, in which '1' indicated the lowest level of participation in the projects and '5' indicated the highest level (M = 4.42, SD = 0.70, α = 0.71).

MEASURES OF COGNITIVE VARIABLES

Attitude towards long-term volunteering was assessed by the following bipolar adjective items rated on a 7-point scale: "meaningless-meaningful", "unpleasant-pleasant", "bad-good", "foolish-wise", and "unenjoyable-enjoyable" (M = 6.21, SD = 0.61, α = 0.84). These items were preceded by a statement which asked the respondent's opinion on what it would be like to volunteer for the full project period with the charity. With regard to the measure of behavioural intention, respondents indicated their level of agreement with the following items on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree): "I will make an effort to volunteer with Charity X for the full project period", "I definitely want to volunteer with Charity X for the full project period", and "My plan is to volunteer as I have committed myself for the full project period" (M = 6.56, SD = 0.55, α = 0.74). Affect items were rated on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) and were preceded by the statement "My volunteering with Charity X makes me feel…". Positive affect included such items as: "proud of myself", "pleased", "rewarded" and "useful to society" (M = 5.94, SD = 0.64, α = 0.75). Defensive affect included reversed scored items: "tied down", "over-committed", "under pressure", and "stressed" (M = 5.44, SD = 1.12, α = 0.78). Finally, self-identity was measured by three items which reflected the level of agreement of the respondent to the following sentences on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree): "I think of myself as someone who is concerned about volunteering", "Volunteering is an important part of who I am", and "I am a typical example of a person who volunteers" (M = 5.10, SD = 0.87, α = 0.69).

PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE

The participants identified themselves as: white (90.3%), Asian (4.6%), black (0.8%), mixed (1.7%) and other (2.5%). Of those responding 88.2% were female. Their age distribution was approximately normal (in years): 18 (6.3%), 19 (19.8%), 20 (30.8%), 21 (26.2%), 22 (11%) and 23 or above (5.9%). About one-third of the respondents reported having done more than one year of volunteer work. Most of them were originally from the UK (93.7%); 70% indicated that they had been involved in only one project since they started volunteering to work with the charity, 23.2% indicated two

projects, and 6.8%, three or more. The sample gives similar proportions to those found in the overall population of the British charity under study.

EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS

All the 19 items referring to the cognitive variables were factor-analysed using principal component analysis and Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalisation, revealing good factorability indicators (the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.79 and Barlett's test of sphericity was significant at $p = 0.000$). Factor analysis yielded five components accounting for 64% of the variance. The items loaded on the same constructs as they were originally conceived. The eigenvalues were 5.2 for attitudes, 2.3 for defensive affect, 2.0 for positive affect, 1.4 for intention, and 1.3 for self-identity. Factor loadings ranged from 0.64 to 0.82 for attitudes, from 0.63 to 0.91 for defensive affect, from 0.60 to 0.80 for positive affect, from 0.80 to 0.82 for intention, and from 0.73 to 0.76 for self-identity. It is worth noting that attitudes and affect loaded in different constructs, corroborating the argument that they should be treated as different constructs (e.g., Manstead and Parker 1995).

PEARSON'S CORRELATION AND REGRESSION ANALYSES

Attitudes did not present a significant correlation with behaviour ($r = -0.09$, ns), thereby not lending support to *H1*. Intention exhibited a weak, but significant positive correlation with behaviour ($r = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$). Attitudes did not correlate well with intention ($r = -0.08$, ns), thus *H2* is rejected. Attitudes correlated significantly with positive affect ($r = 0.51$, $p < 0.01$), defensive affect ($r = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$), and self-identity ($r = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$).

A multiple regression analysis was used to predict attitudes towards long-term volunteering. Attitudes towards volunteering were regressed at one and the same time on the predictors (i.e., positive affect, defensive affect, and self-identity). The model was significant for the prediction of attitudes towards long-term volunteering and explained 33% of the variance: $F (3, 233) = 39$, $p = 0.000$. Positive affect was the strongest predictor ($β = 0.40$, $p = 0.000$), followed by self-identity ($β = 0.22$, $p = 0.000$), and then defensive affect ($β = 0.19$, $p = 0.001$). *H3* and *H4* are, therefore, supported.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The function of attitudes in this research has proved to be more complex than was originally hypothesised. Contrary to the initial expectation, attitude has been found to be a poor predictor of intention to volunteer for long-term projects; that is, the intention to continue with the volunteer activity until the end of the project is not associated with the strength of an individual's favourable views on continued volunteering. This poor prediction reinforces the complexity of the behavioural aspect under analysis (i.e., 'long-term volunteering') and is a sign of unpredictable interactions between attitudes, intention and behaviour.

Some TPB investigations (e.g., Brenes, Strube, and Storandt 1998; Courneya, Blanchard, and Laing 2001; Moan, Rise, and Andersen 2005; Morojele and Stephenson 1994; Quine, Rutter, and Arnold 1998; Trafimow and Trafimow 1998) have also found that attitude does not necessarily lead to intention. Quine et al. (1998) suggest that this finding might be attributable to the over-whelming performance of other variables which capture the effect of attitudes on intention. But this cannot be the case with this research as even the correlation between attitudes and intention was not found to be significant. As Moan et al. (2005) argue, the contribution of attitudes in the prediction of intention may vary across behaviours and situa-

tions. The study of Trafimow and Finlay (1996) across 30 different types of behaviour illustrates this statement: when those individuals who were under normative contr increased. On the other hand, Courneya et al. (2001) posit that the lack of association between attitudes and intention in their study might have been caused by the limited variability of attitudes' reducing the magnitude of the relationship between these two variables. Courneya et al. (2001) explain that this is not to say that attitude is not an important target for interventions, this result only indicates that attitude is not likely to be important within the context of their research because participants already hold a very strong positive attitude towards the behaviour. This also seems to be the case in this present research. In this study, the sample of volunteers involved reported a high positive level of attitudes towards long-term volunteering even when they were not disposed to follow through their intention to volunteer for a long time. In his TRA study on volunteering, Harrison (1995, p. 380) found mixed support for the prediction of intention from attitudes, his findings suggested that "as volunteers gained experience, the amount of satisfaction they anticipated from doing volunteer work had less impact on their motivation to take part in it".

The Role of Affect and Self-Identity on Attitudes

Some further comments about this research are worth noting. This study has found that there is an empirical distinction between positive affect and defensive affect; that is, volunteers seem to have a distinctive view on how volunteering produces favourable emotional reactions (i.e., feeling proud, pleased, rewarded, and useful to society) and how it also involves defensive emotional reactions (i.e., a desire not to feel tied down, over-committed, under pressure, or stressed). These two dimensions of affect appear to be largely attuned to the volunteering motivational functions of enhancement and protection. The enhancement motivational function relates to those people who volunteer to feel good about themselves, while the protective function relates to people who volunteer to address personal emotions and conflicts (Clary, Snyder, and Ridge 1992; Clary et al. 1998; Snyder, Clary, and Stukas 2000). In this sense, Snyder et al. (2000, p. 371) argue that:

> In accord with recent theorizing suggesting that positive and negative affect fall along separate dimensions (e.g., Watson, Clark, McIntyre, & Hamaker, 1992; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), the enhancement function represents a distinct but complementary partner to the protective function, focusing instead on increasing the ego's positive standing.

It is possible that positive affect and defensive affect are allied to each other on the same premise as these two volunteering motivational functions (i.e., enhancement and protection) are interrelated. Positive affect deals with the enjoyable side of volunteering, while defensive affect seems to deal with the possible unpleasant side. Both types of affect are important determinants of attitudes towards long-term volunteering.

Self-identity has been found to predict attitudes towards long-term volunteering, which implies that the stronger the self-perception of being a volunteer, the more favourable the evaluation of long-term volunteering will be. People who identify themselves with the volunteer role tend to have a more favourable appraisal of the act of volunteering as such, including that for long-term activities. As the literature on volunteering has commonly held (e.g., Benson et al. 1980; Wilson 2000; Penner 2002; 2004), volunteering in the context of completing a specific long-term project implies deliberation and planning since it is not usually a behaviour which takes place impulsively. There might be a lot of thinking involved in both the decision to become a volunteer and also in the decision to continue working as such. This deliberation flows from the need to weigh up the potential 'costs' and 'benefits' of volunteering. In terms of costs, as a long-term activity, continued volunteering demands a considerable amount of effort and self-sacrifice (Omoto and Snyder 1995). For example, volunteering might involve emotional distress as it often involves dealing with challenging situations (Bennet and Barkensjo 2005). It also involves high opportunity costs because time donors forego the opportunity to use their time to do paid work or to pursue recreational and leisure activities (Fisher and Ackerman 1998; Bussell and Forbes 2002; Mowen and Sujan 2005). On the other hand, the benefits a volunteer gains from the volunteering experience involve a unique combination of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards (e.g., Guy and Patton 1989; Batson 1991; Manner and Gailliot 2007), varying from having 'peace of mind' to career development. People who feel themselves to be true volunteers have been through all this process of weighing pros and cons and have eventually decided that volunteering is the best thing for them.

SUMMARY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Persuasion is a theme of great importance for charitable organisations which depend on the willingness of others to ensure their survival, prosperity and the continuance of their activities. One of the prevailing challenges for charities is to keep volunteers working actively on the long term. This research has shown that investing in attitude strengthening is not the key to promote sustained volunteering or even the intention to maintain their long-term volunteering. The process of persuasion to encourage long-term volunteering goes beyond fostering favourable views on volunteering. Having positive attitudes towards volunteering may be a necessary condition but is insufficient to keep volunteers working on a prolonged project. Conversely, a helpful way to construe favourable attitudes to long-term volunteering is to augment the affect and self-identity of volunteers. The more the volunteers feel emotionally involved with a project, the charity or the act of volunteering itself, the more favourable will be their views on volunteering. Similarly, the more complete the volunteers' recognition of themselves as such, the more favourable will be their appraisal of volunteering. In brief, persuasion strategies should go beyond the attitude-to-intention-to-behaviour path because, at least in the context of this research, initiatives based on such a model will not produce a sufficiently significant impact to promote sustained volunteering.

Future research should continue to examine within the contexts which the lack of association between attitudes, intention and behaviour occurs. This study has hypothesised that self-identity leads to attitudes. However, based on the argument that "a bidirectional causal link is likely to exist between a person's self-identity and his attitudinal evaluations" (Sparks and Shepherd 1992, p. 390), further research should consider attitude as a predictor of self-identity. The direction of causation between the variables studied here was determined by a specific literature review (e.g., Shau and Shiu 2002). It is worth considering in future studies whether the opposite of what has been proposed here might be the case. Therefore, attitudes towards behaviour should also be questioned as regards their influence on affect and self-identity.

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