

Helping Behaviour Models - Are They Appropriate In Australia?

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Abstract

This paper examines whether variables included in models of helping behavior developed in the US and Europe, apply in Australia. Results of two focus groups suggest that there exist two gaps, which need further exploration in order to construct a model of helping behaviour relevant in the Australian context. Additionally, emphasis placed on various variables within Australia identified in these models differs to those identified in the previous literature. Exploration of highlighted differences and the significance of these to model building in an Australian context are suggested.

Introduction

Charities are facing increasing demand on their resources because of a growing need for their services, shrinking government funding and fierce competition among charities (Bendapudi and Bendapudi 1996, Billitteri 2000). To expand and even maintain private donations charities are relying more heavily on marketing (Hibbert and Horne 1996). This is especially important given 80 percent of most charities' funding is supplied by individuals (Hibbert and Horne 1996), and on average these donations are declining (Groom 1995, Mathur 1996).

One area of literature that is particularly relevant to this issue is the work in helping behaviour area, i.e. how and why consumers help charitable causes. Bendapudi and Bendapudi (1996) undertook a literature review of helping behaviour spanning 20 years and concluded that research related to motivating charitable giving was under-represented.

Although there has been research on helping behavior in the Australian context (Mazzarol and Adam 1996; Industry Commission 1995), non of the previous models have been tested in Australia. This paper, therefore, examines various models of helping behaviour developed in Europe and the US (Sargeant 1999), using two focus groups to identify whether the variables identified in the literature are relevant for donors of one Australian charity.

Underlying Themes of Individual Helping Behaviour

Sargeant (1999) undertook a review of the helping behaviour literature and identified a range of earlier models of helping behaviour (Batson 1987; Krebs and Miller 1985; Mathur 1996; Radley and Kennedy 1995 and Schwartz and Howard 1982). Each of these models incorporated a different range of issues. These are summarised in Table 1 and are discussed in the following sub-sections of the paper.

Table 1: Issues in Helping Behaviour Models

Models	Themes					
	Inputs	Perceptual Reactions	Extrinsic Determinants	Intrinsic Determinants	Processing Determinants	Outputs
Sargeant (1999)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Batson (1987)		X		X	X	X
Krebs and Miller (1985)		X		X	X	X
Radley and Kennedy (1995)		X	X	X	X	
Schwartz-Howard (1992)		X	X	X	X	
Mathur (1996)			X	X	X	

Inputs

Sargeant (1999) is the only author to consider the importance of the charities' brand, appeals, facts and images, and mode of request, as inputs motivating helping behaviour. However, other models mention these factors, but they are not emphasised. For example, Batson (1987) suggests that appeals influences individuals' perceptual reaction and Krebs and Miller (1985) believe that it makes the charity "familiar" to donors.

Perceptual Reactions

Perceptual reactions are categorised into; portrayal of individuals in need, the fit of the charity with donor's self-image, strength of stimulus and perceptual noise. Mazzarol and Adam (1996 p.2) recognize this issue and suggest that the helping behaviour "process is set in motion by awareness of another persons need."

However, need identification is not necessarily sufficient on its own. Coliazzi et al. (1984) suggests that this is moderated by donors' empathy with recipients. Previous experience with the cause might also impact on individual's willingness to give (Nichol 1991). Sargeant suggests that the perceived urgency of situation, degree of personal responsibility, and the level of personalisation also affects giving.

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Moderating Variables

Various extrinsic and intrinsic moderating variables were identified within the earlier models. The extrinsic variables include; age, gender, social class, income and geo-demographic variables (Schwartz-Howard 1982; Costello 1999; and Newman 1996). Thus, causes "need to understand far more about the factors that can impact on giving behaviour to ensure that as wide as possible segment of society can be persuaded to give (Sargeant 1999 p. 215)"

Intrinsic factors include pity, social justice, empathy, sympathy, guilt, fear and the need for self-esteem. Batson (1987) and Krebs and Miller (1985) suggest that these factors will vary depending on whether donors are egoistic (seek rewards) or altruistic (ideological giving). There is however some disagreement over the importance of these factors with Mathur (1996), Schwartz-Howard (1982), Batson (1987) and Krebs and Miller (1985) arguing egoistic motivations are very important, whereas Radley and Kennedy (1995) suggest that altruistic motivations are more important.

Processing Determinants

Donors' past experience and the judgmental criteria the donor may use in evaluating charities for support are important for donor's processing of the need for help (Sargeant 1999). It is suggested that past donor behaviour increase future donations (Kaehler and Sargeant 1998).

Criteria for judging a cause's worth can be quite diverse. Several models suggest that, achieving some "individual" benefit is important (Sargeant 1999, Collard 1978, Mathur 1996). Schwartz-Howard (1982) goes further and suggests that individual as well as social benefits are important.

In some models the accountability of the cause is also important (Batson 1987, Krebs and Miller 1985). Donors will favor causes that are perceived to be effective and efficient.

Outputs

In all models studied the outcome of the donor decision process is some form of giving behaviour, either time or monetary contribution. Sargeant (1999) differentiates between types of outputs including loyalty, the size of the donation and gift in kind.

Focus Groups

Two focus groups were conducted with donors of one Australian charity, the Royal Blind Society (RBS). The objective was to identify whether Australian donors considered the issues identified within the literature important, and if there were gaps in the models. Discussions were organised around the motivational aspects that influence monetary giving. Each session took approximately one hour and conversations were recorded. Common themes were identified by one of the researchers, which were then checked by a second researcher to ensure they accurately reflected the proceedings.

Focus group methodology is a suitable approach to further examine the themes identified in the literature (Dillion, Madden and Firtle, 1993). This methodology allowed for examining the themes on an intensive in-depth level rather than a broad level (Bellenger, Berhardt and Golstruck, 1979). Additionally it allowed for discrimination between the themes on importance to be highlighted by respondents during discussion.

The participants were sourced by the RBS from their records and consisted of current RBS donors who resided in a region of Australia. Ten participants were invited to each focus group session. Nine attended the first session and two attended the second. The primary limitation of focus group is the lack of generalisability due to the small sample size (Keown 1983; Calder 1977). This limitation was further compounded by the small turnout for the second session. Additionally current donors from one particular charity were selected for the focus group. Focus groups were used to ensure themes identified in previous research were valid, and no issues had been overlooked. While it is not the aim to generalise findings, the results may need to be incorporated in the research of Australian giving behaviour.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Inputs

Focus group participants felt that heavily promoted appeals were more successful in attracting donations, although it was unclear whether the RBS was effective in promoting its activities as compared with other charities. Respondents also felt that well promoted appeals increased awareness of causes' activities. The respondents had an evoked set of charities, which they felt was influenced by these charities' appeals. This appears to emphasize the importance of marketing tools in attracting new donors.

Perceptual Reactions

Respondents strongly believed that people generally donate to charities that fit with the donor's self image. For example, one respondent indicated, "I probably donate to ones (charities) where the money stays in Australia." Additionally, there was a strong suggestion that personal experience was also extremely important. For example, one visually impaired respondent indicated that "when I had sight I didn't give a damn, but now I give."

It was suggested that a personalized stimulus was more effective as it creates an individual link to the cause. However, the increased use of technology to facilitate giving was perceived to be a negative development in relation to personalization.

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Determinants

Respondents believed that while altruistic reasons play an important role in giving, individuals place stronger emphasis on egoistic reasons (i.e. individual benefits). For example, one respondent indicated "I have some set charities that I donate to and I want to help people in a way that I think that in the future will use and need." One egoistic issue related to the financial benefit of giving, as respondents generally agreed that many people give to get tax deductions. No issues related to extrinsic issues were emphasised by respondents. This is an important issue, as many authors have emphasised the moderating affects of these variables. It is unclear whether this gap is due to the procedures used in the focus group or that the respondents did not consider them important.

Processing Determinants

Past giving behaviour and judgemental criteria featured prominently in the giving discussion. There was general agreement that once a donor supported a charity, they tended to continue their support. The strongest influence in relation to judgemental criteria was that respondents believed people that they were more likely to help charities that address issues, which effected them or their loved ones today or might affect them in the future. The respondents also identified organisational accountability as being important in their decision process, but they were unsure how charities could address this issue.

Implications and Conclusions

Although the participants identified the majority of factors identified in the literature as impacting on helping behaviour, two gaps were highlighted, one regarding the limited emphasis on extrinsic determinants and the importance of social support in Australia. Additionally, there were differences in the emphasis respondents placed on different variables and the emphasis of these within the literature. The managerial (if they are indeed generalisable) and research implications for model building of those variables with differences in emphasis are discussed first followed by the two gaps.

A charity's brand and its appeals (i.e. inputs) seem to be important in the initial stage of developing a relationship with the donor. If donor "loyalty" exists, as has been suggested, then it is important for charities to create awareness among potential donors as well as to reinforce existing donors' "loyalty". Appeals might attempt to make a link between the appeal/brand and the donor (i.e. the dominant perceptual reaction), given that donors are inclined to support charities that they had/have experience with. Reinforcing how helping the cause helps the local community may therefore be appropriate, although this may not necessarily be easy for wider global causes. While it appears that inputs are important, further research should analyse the importance of these inputs in relation to model development globally as well as in the Australian context.

The respondents expressed a general dissatisfaction with the use of less personal mechanisms. This perceived lack of personalization arose from the increased use of technology influenced by the shift of charities towards traditional business mechanisms to become efficient and the lack of resources to personalise the relationship. The managerial implication of this is that while charities become more business like, these changes need to be internal and donors must not perceive that this is a shift in overall philosophy. As such internal, behind the scenes processes need to become more effective, while maintaining an outwardly donor and societal focus. Further research should analyse the perception of the donors of what factors differentiate between a business orientation and a charitable orientation.

The first gap identified relates to the perception of the respondents that people perceived that government supports the needy and thus individuals do not need to support charities. For example, "Because of all the handouts...I think there is a lot of people that say a lot of people are getting paid, I'll just look after myself ... you can virtually be supported from birth to death under the present government policy". Thus, some types of charities might have difficulty gaining public support, especially from donors with this view. There are differences in the level of support from the government for organisations in Australia as compared to government funding in the United States. This in-turn reduces the perceived need for public donations and lowering community expectations towards giving (Lyons 1991). Additionally this support has created a culture where giving is not a large part of Australian life (Industry Commission 1995). This gap needs to be further explored because the extent of its significance may have an impact on a helping behaviour model in the Australian context.

The second gap relates to the respondent's perception that the intrinsic determinants have a greater moderating affect on giving than does extrinsic determinants. This is contrary to the emphasis placed on this in the literature. This limited emphasis on the extrinsic variables needs to be explored further to have clearer idea of how it may affect model building in the Australian context.

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