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Pinpointing Suitable "Direct Service" Volunteers

Melanie Randle and Sara Dolnicar, University of Wollongong

Abstract

Volunteering managers are challenged with finding individuals who are interested in performing a broad range of volunteering roles, which could include for example, board members, accountants and gardeners. This study extends the work of Heidrich (1990) by demonstrating that by splitting the segment of "direct service" volunteers into specific functions, groups of individuals with distinct lifestyle characteristics can be identified. Theoretically, the implication is that considering volunteering as a generic entity is of limited use, and that heterogeneity of volunteering functions must be accounted for. Practically, the contribution lies in providing insight to volunteer managers about to the importance of developing customised marketing campaigns to attract volunteers for specific functions, the interests of whom match the volunteering organisation's recruitment needs.

Background and Introduction

The value of volunteering in providing important social services continues to grow. In the past, volunteer work has been largely associated with helping disadvantaged members of society and performing tasks such as serving food to the homeless or caring for the elderly. The reality, however, is that within any one non-profit organisation exists a broad range of functions which require volunteer labour, ranging from board members and project leaders to gardeners and accountants. Similar to many commercial brands, non-profit organisations are often associated with distinctive brand personality attributes (Venable et al., 2005), which results in that organisation being primarily associated with one type of role. Consequently they tend to attract particular types of people. For example, environmental organisations are associated so strongly with weeding and planting that people interested in other roles like accounting or grant writing tend not to consider environmental organisations when deciding on where to volunteer. Managers of volunteer organisations are faced with the challenge of not only recruiting more volunteers, but recruiting different individuals who are capable and willing to perform a broad range of tasks within the organisation.

In the last few decades there has been growing application of marketing techniques within the non-profit sector. Volunteer organisations are slowly accepting that they are actually competing with other organisations for the same volunteers (Andreasen and Kotler, 2003). Organisations have been forced to take a more rational view of the environment in which they are operating and make use of concepts and techniques which have traditionally been more common in the commercial arena, for example segmentation, targeting and positioning. These concepts enable them to take a more scientific approach to attracting not only more volunteers, but the right types of volunteers for all of their different roles, and who will remain with the organisation for the longest period of time.

Prior Research

Segmentation is a concept which is commonly used in the field of commercial marketing. It is the process by which a market which is heterogeneous in nature is split into smaller groups of individuals who are similar to each other in some respect (Wedel and Kamakura, 1998, Frank et al., 1972). The value of segmenting the market is that by identifying segments which contain individuals who are similar to each other in some respect, marketing campaigns can

be designed which directly address the demands and sensitivities of these particular individuals. Ultimately, this enables non-profit organisations to make more efficient use of their marketing budgets. This is particularly important for non-profit organisations which typically lack the funds of commercial organisations for marketing related activities.

Increasingly, the value of segmentation techniques for the non-profit sector is being recognised. Segmentation studies of volunteers have included simple *a priori* studies which choose one variable to form the segments and then describe the individuals in each group (Musick et al., 1999, Tiehen, 2000). More sophisticated efforts have included using motivations to segment the market *a posteriori* to establish whether certain combinations of motivations drive different groups of volunteers (Dolnicar and Randle, 2007).

In relation to the specific types of functions performed by volunteers, Heidrich (1990) segmented the market by grouping the types of roles performed by individuals into four broad categories: (1) "leadership" – including board members, committee chairpersons, project leaders, fundraisers and officers; (2) "direct service" – close contact with members or clients, for example coaches, companions, counsellors or club leaders; (3) "general support" – for example, telephone work, maintenance projects, errands, cleaning etc; and (4) "members-at-large" – who only occasionally attend meetings or activities (Heidrich, 1990, p.22). The major finding of this study was that the four generic types of roles investigated are preferred by people with distinct life-style characteristics (which, for example, included a range of socio-demographic characteristics, values, personality attributes and leisure time activities).

However practically, the limitation of Heidrich's study is that the segments derived were very broad and grouped together individuals performing very diverse roles. For example, the "direct service" segment included individuals who perform counselling and befriending type roles, as well as those who volunteered to be soccer coaches and gardeners. Intuitively it seems unlikely that the types of people to volunteer to coach a football team are going to have similar characteristics to those who volunteer to visit elderly people in a nursing home, or that they would be motivated by the same marketing and recruitment messages. For this reason it is hypothesised that the groups proposed by Heidrich are in fact too broad to be practically relevant to mangers of volunteering organisations who are trying to attract volunteers to fill a broad range of roles. It is expected that by further segmenting these groups significant differences would be found between individuals who perform each specific function. This study tests this hypothesis by taking one of Heidrich's segments – "direct service" volunteers – and further splitting it into four specific volunteer role functions: (1) befriending/supporting/counselling; (2) coaching/refereeing/judging; (3) preparing/serving food; (4) repairing/maintenance/gardening. These four groups are based on the groupings of volunteer functions used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for the General Social Survey 2006 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). They were chosen because they represent a broad range of functions performed by volunteers but all fall within Heidrich's definition of "direct service" volunteers.

Empirical Study

Data used for this analysis was collected in 2006 using a national online internet panel in Australia. The panel is constructed and managed in a way that is representative of the population. The sample included individuals who had volunteered in the past 12 months for only one of the four volunteer functions under investigation. The sample size was 210.

For segment formation and testing of significant differences, participants were asked a range of lifestyle-related questions which covered (1) volunteering behaviour in the past 12 months and specific roles performed; (2) socio-demographic characteristics; (3) leisure time activities; (4) personal values; (5) importance of different things in their life; (6) self-image; (7) reasons for volunteering; and (8) media usage. A commonsense (Dolnicar, 2004) or *a priori* (Mazanec, 2000) segmentation approach was applied using the specific roles performed as the basis for grouping volunteers. Only volunteers who have acted exclusively in each of the roles under study are included in the analysis. Differences were assessed using Chi-square tests and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Once the significantly different characteristics were identified, profiles were provided using percentage values. Unless otherwise specified all results reported in this paper are significant at the 95% ($p<0.05$) level.

Results

Segments were found to be distinctly different on a number of the lifestyle-related variables measured. The descriptions provided below describe the segments using only those characteristics which were found to be significantly different between segments.

Segment 1 Profile: Befriending/supporting/counselling functions (n=62)

Individuals who provide befriending/supporting/counselling services in a voluntary capacity are likely to be female (61%) and middle income earners, with the majority earning $20,000-$60,000 per annum. In their leisure time this is the group has the highest proportion of individuals who enjoy writing (19%) and the lowest proportion of individuals who participate in sports/fitness activities (45%). Regarding personal values, this group rates "helpfulness" (working for the welfare of others) and "creativity" (uniqueness, imagination) significantly more importantly than the coaching/refereeing/judging segment (means out of 7 of 6.7 compared to 5.9, and 6.3 compared to 5.4 respectively). In terms of the important things in their lives this group has the highest proportion of individuals who consider it "extremely important" to give something back to society (40%), support an important cause (45%) and to help those less fortunate than themselves (42%).

This is the group with this highest proportion of individuals who cite a wide range of reasons for volunteering in befriending/supporting/counselling roles. It gives them a chance to help others (82%), they believe it will improve their community (68%), they can meet different types of people (66%), it allows them to support and important cause (63%), put faith into action (39%) and many know someone who has benefitted from the organisation (32%). Regarding media usage, this group is the most likely to listen to classical music (36%) and talkback stations (60%) on the radio. It has the highest proportion of women's fashion/lifestyle magazine readers (58%), and the lowest proportion of sporting/health magazine readers (39%).

Segment 2 Profile: Coaching/refereeing/judging functions (n=50)

People who volunteer for coaching/refereeing/judging roles are mostly males (74%) and have the highest proportion of high income earners, with 26% earning over $80,000 per year. In their spare time they enjoy entertaining with friends (58%), gourmet food and wine (46%) and participating in sports/fitness activities (72%). In terms of values this group rated three values – "helpfulness", "creativity" and "a varied life" – significantly lower than other segments. This segment has the highest proportion of individuals who describe themselves as being

masculine (24%) and reputable (54%), and the lowest proportion who describe themselves as loving (48%) and caring (60%).

In relation to why they volunteer, the coaching/refereeing/judging group had the lowest proportion of individuals who nominated many of the motivations listed as the reason they are involved. These reasons included because they want to meet different types of people (36%), because it will improve their community (40%), they can support an important cause (36%), put faith into action (16%), feel like they are doing a good job (34%) and because they know someone who has benefited from the organisation (16%). Regarding media usage, segment 2 is the group most likely to listen to sport on the radio (44%), and has the highest proportion who read business investment (60%) and sports/health (68%) magazines.

Segment 3 Profile: Preparing/serving food functions (n=47)

Individuals who prepare/serve food in a voluntary capacity are most likely to be female (72%) and low income earners, with 70% earning $40,000 or less. In their leisure time this is the group least likely to be found at the theatre or cultural events (15%), or enjoying gourmet food and wine (21%). This group has the highest proportion of members who describe themselves as compassionate (77%), loving (77%) and caring (89%), and the lowest proportion who describe themselves as masculine (2%) and reputable (30%). Food preparation/service volunteers also have the highest proportion who consider it "not at all" or only "moderately" important to give something back to society (38%) and to help those less fortunate than themselves (43%).

Regarding reasons for being involved, segment 3 volunteers are involved because they can socialise with people who are similar to themselves (55%), they feel like they are doing a good job (62%) and they know someone who has benefitted from the organisation (32%). In terms of media usage this group is the least likely to listen to classical music (13%), sport (17%) and rock music (32%) on the radio. Segment 3 also has the lowest proportion who read business/investment (23%) and computing (32%) magazines.

Segment 4 Profile: Repairing/maintenance/gardening functions (n=51)

Volunteers involved in repairing/maintenance/gardening roles are most likely to be male (73%). Segment 4 has the highest proportion of individuals who enjoy going to the theatre/cultural events (41%) and the lowest proportion who entertain friends in their leisure time (33%). In terms of personal values, this group rates having "a varied life" and "creativity" significantly higher in importance than do individuals who volunteer for coaching/refereeing/judging roles. They are the group most likely to describe themselves as Aussie (59%) and least likely to describe themselves as compassionate (51%), and have the highest proportion who think it is "not at all" or only "moderately" important to support an important cause (35%).

Repairing/maintenance/gardening volunteers are the group least likely to be involved because they can socialise with people who are like them (26%) or because it gives them the chance to help others (49%). In terms of media usage this group is the segment most likely to listen to rock music (61%) and least likely to listen to talkback (33%) on the radio. It has the highest proportion of computing (67%) magazine readers and the lowest proportion of women's fashion/lifestyle magazine (35%) readers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study investigates the characteristics of volunteers who choose particular roles within the organisation, and whether distinctly different profiles characterise individuals who perform these roles. It builds on the study by Heidrich (1990) by taking one of the four broad segments identified – "direct service" volunteers – and demonstrating that further splitting this segment produces groups which are distinctly different from each other in terms of life-style related characteristics. According to Heidrich's findings, "direct service" volunteers are characterised by being female, younger, less educated and more likely to be home makers. The findings of the present study clearly show that these generic conclusions cannot be applied to each of the four specific role functions investigated here. Indeed, if the Heidrich findings were used to develop a marketing campaign to recruit sporting coaches or referees, it would be unlikely to reach these individuals or contain messages which resonate with them, because it would be targeting the wrong demographic and psychographic profile.

Practically, the results of the present study are valuable to managers responsible for volunteer recruitment because they are often trying to fill a range of different job functions within their organisation, and cannot assume that the same types of people would be attracted to all of these types of roles. For example, a football club may require volunteers for not only coaching staff, but also to serve food at the canteen located at the sporting grounds. This study shows that the types of people likely to be interested in coaching a football team have significantly different characteristics to those likely to be interested in serving food at the canteen. Therefore, the marketing messages and channels used to recruit each type of person should be designed specifically to match this profile. Individuals involved in coaching roles are likely to be male, enjoy sports/fitness activities in their spare time, listen to sport on the radio and read sporting/health magazines. They are also likely to see themselves as masculine and reputable. Marketing messages to this group should centre on the physical and masculine nature of football, the health benefits and leadership role involved with coaching younger individuals in a team environment. They would be reached by advertising through sporting-related radio programs on weekends, or through men's sporting competitions in the local area.

Attracting individuals to serve in the canteen, however, is an entirely different challenge. These individuals are not involved because they want to help other people, but are instead interested in socialising and gaining a sense of job satisfaction. Messages to this group should centre on the social nature of the work and could, for example, advertise for groups of friends to volunteer rather than aim communications at individuals. Although not significantly different from the other segments, the media usage information for this group shows these people mostly listen to easy listening and Top 40 radio stations, and read entertainment and cooking magazines. These channels would be most likely to reach volunteers interested in food preparation/service roles. Clearly in this case, if the football club were to use one generic strategy to recruit volunteers for all roles they are likely to have limited success.

Theoretically this research supports the notion that volunteers are extremely heterogeneous, and that the behaviour of volunteering cannot be generalised but be must be made specific to the context in which the behaviour is occurring. In the present case, the specific function required of the volunteer will be attractive to very different types of people, and any marketing or recruitment efforts should take this into consideration when designing an appropriate marketing mix. Of course, the specific role function should be further considered in light of the particular organisation in which the role is required, as this will also influence the attitudes of individuals in terms of perceived importance of the cause and values and culture of the organisation as a potential place of volunteer work.

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