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Self-congruity and volunteering : a multi-organisation comparison

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Abstract

1. **Purpose:** To examine: (1) if individuals who prefer different volunteering organisations have different self-concepts; (2) if individuals perceive their preferred volunteering organisation as more similar to their self-concept than other volunteering organisations; and (3) if self-congruity theory correctly predicts consumer (volunteer) behaviour differences across organisations and organisational missions.
2. **Design/methodology/approach:** We collected data on people's preferred volunteering organisation, their self-concept and their perceived image from eight volunteering organisations using an online self-completion survey. We then used chi-square tests and paired-sample t-tests to identify significant differences between groups.
3. **Findings:** Individuals who prefer different volunteering organisations differ significantly in their self-concept. For the three volunteering organisations with high levels of awareness and distinct images, self-congruity theory held; that is, people who volunteer for them perceive those organisations as more similar to their self-concept than other volunteering organisations. For the four organisations with lower awareness and less-distinct images, we found a tendency towards self-congruity, but results were not significant. In one case, self-congruity theory did not hold, possibly due to the more "obligatory" nature of the volunteering task.
4. **Research limitations/implications:** This research extends the application of self-congruity theory to the volunteering context. It identifies three key dimensions that affect the extent to which self-congruity holds for volunteering organisations: brand awareness, image distinctiveness and whether the involvement is actually "voluntary".
5. **Practical implications:** Self-congruity theory has the potential to be a valuable tool in helping volunteering organisations increase their productivity through better targeted marketing strategies.
6. **Originality/value:** This study is the first to apply self-congruity theory to the volunteering sector at the organisation brand level, and gives practitioners an additional tool to improve the effectiveness of their marketing.

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Keywords: self-congruity theory, volunteering, segmentation, non-profit marketing.

Paper classification: research paper.

1. Introduction

In many countries, the non-profit sector is increasingly vital in affording important social services that would not otherwise be provided by the public or private sectors. The emergence of significant global social issues, such as the global financial crisis (GFC) and the ongoing climate change crisis, have increased the need for community-based support services. Recent figures indicate that each year the volunteering sector contributes \$US162 billion in the US (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2009), over £40 billion in the UK (European Volunteer Centre, 2006) and tens of billions of dollars in Australia (Volunteering Australia, 2006).

The growing need for services has resulted in greater numbers of non-profit organisations that rely on volunteer labour. In Australia, the number of non-profit organisations increased by more than 28 per cent between 1999 and 2006 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007; Lyons, 1999). However, in the same period, the percentage of the Australian population who volunteered for these agencies did not keep pace, increasing by only 18 per cent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, 2001). These trends are not unique to Australia, but are mirrored in other countries around the world (Bussell and Forbes, 2002). The result of these trends is a more competitive third sector, which is increasingly characterised by organisations that are more pragmatic and rational in their approach, and must balance the objectives of the organisation with sound management practices. Being able to do this successfully is particularly salient for volunteering organisations because they often have very small budgets for marketing and recruitment (Peattie, 2003), and are therefore constantly looking for ways of making more efficient use of their limited marketing dollars.

The value of applying management and marketing practices which have traditionally been used in the commercial and public sectors is being increasingly recognised (Andreasen and Kotler, 2003; Wilson and Pimm, 1996; Yavas and Riecken, 1997). In the recruitment of volunteers, non-profit managers have drawn on and adapted techniques from the field of human resources. More recently, they have adopted concepts from the field of consumer behaviour, because they face issues with numerous parallels to typical marketing challenges. In this context, their challenge is to create the best match between the volunteering experience they can offer and the needs and wants of individuals who might be willing to become involved.

For many years, key consumer behaviour constructs (such as product preference, brand attitude and customer loyalty) were explained in terms of the relationship between the image perception an individual has of the brand and their own self-concept (Landon, 1974b). This has become commonly referred to as self-congruity theory, and postulates that consumers prefer the brand that they perceive to be most similar to their self-concept (Kassarjian, 1971; Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982a, 1982b). In this context, self-congruity is defined as the degree to which perceived brand image match an individual's self-concept (Sirgy and Su, 2000). Brand image is the set of image attributes associated with a brand, which are determined by the physical attributes of the brand, but also by intangible associations, such as symbols and stereotypes perceived as connected to the brand (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967; Levy, 1959); and self-concept is the "totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Rosenberg, 1979, p.7).

Hitherto, the literature has paid scant attention to the validity of self-congruity theory the non-profit sector. The present study fills this gap, but specifically tests: (1) if individuals who prefer different volunteering organisations have different self-concepts; (2) if

individuals perceive their preferred volunteering organisation as more similar to their self-concept than other volunteering organisations; and (3) if self-congruity theory correctly predicts consumer (volunteer) behaviour differences across organisations and organisational missions.

The following section reviews prior research relating to self-concept and self-congruity theory in the context immediately relevant to this study: volunteering. Section 3 explains the empirical study, including the methodology, sample and measures used. Section 4 details the analysis and results of the empirical study. Finally, Section 5 draws some conclusions and discusses theoretical and practical implications, as well as limitations and avenues for future research.

2. Prior Research

Volunteers as Consumers

Debate exists as to whether the problem of gaining sufficient number of volunteers is a problem of recruitment (that is, an employment issue) or a problem of attraction (a marketing issue). However, in practice, in the case of volunteering, the key factor central to human resource recruitment — payment for work — is absent. Previous research in this area discusses how managers of volunteer organisations are hesitant to apply human resource concepts to managing volunteers because they are in such short supply that managers are reluctant to turn them away, even if they lack appropriate skills or are not very effective at performing the role (Hartenian, 2007).

In contrast, those who view volunteers as consumers see volunteer attraction as a marketing challenge, whereby managers seek to match the needs of consumers (or the benefits sought from volunteering) with the product (or the volunteering experience) offered. Many argue that it is essential to view volunteers this way, and that increasing pressures and competition in the voluntary sector have made organisational survival reliant on careful application of consumer behaviour concepts and marketing management tools (Riecken, *et al.*, 1994; Shapiro, 1974; Yavas and Riecken, 1997), for example, an effective promotional strategy and integrated communications program (Bendapudi, *et al.*, 1996). This view is reinforced by those who consider volunteering as a form of symbolic consumption, whereby consumers use their involvement in volunteering as a way to express to important social groups who they are and what they believe in (Wymer and Samu, 2002). We therefore approached the problem of volunteer attraction from a marketing perspective, and drew from the field of consumer behaviour to form the foundations of this investigation.

Consumer Behaviour and Self-Concept

For many decades, “self theory” has postulated the interaction between an individual’s self-concept and the symbolic value of the brands they purchase (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967). Nowadays, within the field of consumer behaviour, it is generally accepted that insight into the perception individuals have of themselves is valuable for understanding why they choose particular brands over others (Sirgy, 1982a). In marketing, this is particularly valuable, because if we know how individuals see themselves, then marketing and branding strategies can be developed that reinforce characteristics central to the self-concept of the target market. The concept has attracted much debate, particularly in relation to whether the construct is uni- or multidimensional (Belk, 1988; Landon, 1974a;

Malhotra, 1988). Researchers propose several different dimensions of self, including one's "actual self" (how the individual sees themselves); the "ideal self" (how they would like to be seen); the "social self" (how others see them); and the "ideal social self" (how they would like to be seen by others) (for a comprehensive review see Sirgy, 1982a). Aaker (1999) further suggests that an individual's self-concept changes according to their social situation, which in turn affects their attitude towards brands.

While self-concept has not yet been investigated in the context of volunteering, it has been used effectively as a segmentation technique in the field of tourism (Todd, 2001). There, segments are identified within the tourism market with distinctly different self-concepts. Not only do individuals have different perceptions of themselves, they are also characterised by distinct profiles in terms of socio-demographic characteristics and consumption behaviour. Todd's study is particularly relevant for the investigation of volunteering because of the many similarities which can be drawn between tourism experiences and volunteering experiences. Both are intangible experiences, and individuals often have little material evidence to show from their involvement. However, participants can gain a sense of social prestige associated with volunteering (Bussell and Forbes, 2002) — tending to talk about their volunteering involvements — similar to many individuals' desire to brag about their travel experiences (Todd, 2001), in order to enhance their self-concept.

Self-concept takes on particular relevance for volunteering if considered in terms of the definition proposed by social identity theory, which postulates that self-concept is comprised of one's personal characteristics, but also how they classify themselves in terms of social groupings (Hogg and Abrams, 1988; Hogg, *et al.*, 1995; Tajfel and Turner, 1985). In a volunteering context, this might manifest as belonging to a particular cause or mission,

the values and characteristics of which they consider consistent with their own characteristics and abilities. Thus, involvement in volunteering organisations represents a fundamental part of one's self-concept, and it is likely that volunteering organisations which represent different values and missions attract individuals with considerably different definitions of self.

This notion is consistent with the discussion in Wymer and Samu (2002) of volunteering as “symbolic consumption”, where an individual's consumption behaviour shapes and asserts their identities (Schouten, 1991). In the case of volunteering, Wymer and Samu argue that by associating and belonging to different groups, volunteers can fulfil the different functions that serve symbolic consumption (as proposed by Hoyer and MacInnis, 2004). These include communicating messages about their personal values and beliefs (emblematic function), fulfilling a new role in their lives (role acquisition function), reinforcing personal ties with important people or events (connectedness function) and communicating their unique characteristics (expressiveness function).

The above research leads us to argue that self-concept is a valuable factor in identifying distinct groups within the volunteering market and explaining volunteering organisation preference. Based on this, we hypothesise that:

H1: Volunteers who prefer a specific volunteering organisation above others significantly differ in their self-concepts.

Self-Congruity Theory

Consumers attribute symbolic value to brands, and by consuming these brands, they reinforce their own self-concept, and also gain social recognition with reference groups important to them (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967). “Self-image congruity” is the process

consumers use to purchase brands they feel have symbolic characteristics similar to those they see in themselves. Self-congruity theory has mostly developed its base of empirical support in the field of commercial brands. Evidence for the theory has been found in relation to a broad range of product categories, including, but not limited to, automobiles (Kressmann, *et al.*, 2006), travel destinations (Chon, 1992), key chains (Barone, *et al.*, 1999) and clothing (Ericksen and Sirgy, 1992). The consensus from these studies is that self-congruity is an important predictor of brand preference and loyalty. Similar findings have also been produced for services industries. For example, in their investigation of retail stores, Chebat, Sirgy and St-James (2006) found a positive correlation between the level of self-congruity and the perceived quality of the store. Sirgy *et al.* (2007) also extended self-congruity theory to the field of corporate sponsorships, and found that higher levels of self-congruity with a sponsored event resulted in higher levels of loyalty towards the sponsoring brand.

One of the most common ways of measuring self-congruity has been through the use of personality traits which individuals use to describe their perceptions of self (Malhotra, 1988). Studies have repeatedly shown that individuals are able to use personality traits not only to describe themselves, but also to describe and differentiate between brands and to relate those brands to themselves (Aaker, 1997). Individuals prefer brands that they perceive to have similar personality traits because of an intrinsic preference for things that reinforce their self-perception and that are familiar and predictable (Swann, *et al.*, 1992). As a result, empirical investigations of self-congruity have found brand personality attributes to be effective in measuring the extent to which individuals see their own self-concept to be congruous with that of brands (see, for example, Kressman (2006) in relation to automobiles and Murphy *et al* (2007) in relation to travel destinations).

The overall conclusion from self-congruity research in the commercial arena is that the theory is a valuable predictor of consumer behaviour across a range of products and services. This finding is practically important because it enables marketing managers to develop customised marketing mixes to target people with specific self-concepts.

Hitherto, however, little work has been done to investigate whether self-congruity theory is relevant to the volunteering sector (Vaccaro, 2008). One exception is a Spanish study by Beerli, Diaz and Martin (2004), which compared collaborators with charitable and ecological non-profit organisations to investigate the level of self-congruity between the two groups. Results indicated that self-congruity was more predictive for ecological organisations than charity organisations. However, this study has several limitations. First, it is unclear what is meant by the term “collaborators” with these organisations, and whether this includes volunteers, donors, other members or all of these individuals. Second, definitions are not provided of what is meant by “charitable” and “ecological” organisations (p. 36). The report claims that on the island of Gran Canaria, 60 per cent of non-profit organisations are charity organisations and 40 per cent are ecological, suggesting that all non-profit organisations are classified as either one or the other, so the groupings under comparison are extremely broad. This is particularly so with the “charitable” group, which could include a wide range of causes, from helping sick children to volunteer emergency rescue services. Third, the applicability of findings in other contexts is unknown, due to the limited geographical area where the data were collected (Gran Canaria, Spain). These limitations, and the lack of any other self-congruity studies in the field of volunteering, call for (1) a study of volunteering self-congruity in a different context (for example, Australia), which involves (2) a comprehensive investigation at the specific organisation brand level, which compares (3) multiple volunteering organisations with different missions, to provide (4) findings that reflect the actual competitive

environment where these organisations operate. This study fills these gaps by testing whether self-congruity theory holds in the volunteering sector. If so, then we can expect that:

H2: The self-concept of volunteers who prefer a specific volunteering organisation more closely match the perceived brand image of that volunteering organisation.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its application of self-congruity theory to the volunteering sector at the organisational level, while accounting for heterogeneity of self-concept within the marketplace. Practically, this information is potentially valuable, because if self-congruity theory holds in the volunteering sector, it offers marketing and recruitment managers a powerful tool to better understand the market and make more efficient use of their limited marketing dollars by developing more targeted communications campaigns.

3. Methodology

We collected data using an online research panel which is maintained to be representative of the Australian population. Panel members are recruited online, but also through phone, mail and face-to-face methods. This overcomes the bias that can occur when panel members are recruited through one channel only.

We invited participants to complete a 30-minute survey that included questions about past volunteering behaviour, organisation preference, self-concept and organisation image. The questionnaire was available for completion for approximately four weeks, which delivered a sample size of 1,415. The survey structure meant that respondents could not proceed to

the next question until they had provided a useable answer to the previous question, therefore all questionnaires were complete and useable.

Sample

Because the invitation to participate in the survey was sent to a nationally representative group, it included both active volunteers (that is, individuals who had volunteered in the past 12 months, comprising 60 per cent of the sample) and non-volunteers (40 per cent of the sample). This sample structure was considered appropriate because volunteering organisations increasingly face the challenge of competing with other organisations for volunteers. Including only volunteers in the study would provide managers with guidance about how to “steal” individuals who already volunteer for other organisations; but this is not an optimal solution. Ideally, new people would be attracted to join the current pool of volunteers, and information on how to achieve this cannot be derived from studying current volunteers only.

To avoid the sample becoming skewed towards individuals with a specific type of self-concept, we structured the survey to include individuals with a preference for eight different types of volunteering organisations. We selected the organisations to represent a broad range of volunteering organisations in terms of their sizes and missions, and chose them following consultation with volunteering experts from Volunteering Illawarra, Volunteering Australia and other local volunteering organisations. They were:

1. Bushcare — an environmental program coordinated by local councils, which relies on volunteers to help conserve and restore the local natural areas.
2. Red Cross — crosses the boundaries of humanitarian and emergency work and is arguably the most well-known volunteering organisation globally.

3. State Emergency Service (SES) — helps communities cope with emergencies such as flood, storms and other crisis situations.
4. St Vincent de Paul — assists people in need and combats social injustice by providing support, friendship and material assistance.
5. Rural Fire Service — responsible for combating bushfires and enabling the community to be better prepared and protected from bushfires.
6. Parents and citizens (P&C) associations — primarily made up of parents of children at a particular school, which are involved in a variety of school activities from policy to financial planning, as well as tuckshops, fundraising and school functions.
7. Surf Life Saving — actively patrols Australian beaches and provides emergency rescue and first aid services to beach-goers.
8. Rotary — business and professional leaders who provide humanitarian and community services and help build goodwill and peace.

Measures

Organisation Preference

To identify their preferred volunteering organisation, we presented participants with a list of eight organisations. We asked: “If you had to give unpaid help to one of the following organisations, which one would you choose?” The phrase “if you had to” referred to the fact that respondents for this particular question actually had to limit their answer to one choice only. Therefore, the online questionnaire required respondents to select one (and only one) of the eight organisations before proceeding to the next question. The sample sizes for the preferred organisations were: Bushcare: $n = 83$, Red Cross: $n = 448$, SES: $n =$

302; St Vincent de Paul: n = 228; Rural Fire Service: n = 85; P&C associations: n = 145; Surf Life Saving n = 60; and Rotary: n = 64.

Self-Concept and Organisation Image

In measuring self-congruity, we were mindful of the importance of a battery of attributes capable of describing and differentiating between volunteering organisations. The only tool that was designed with this purpose and therefore considered appropriate for this study was the measure of non-profit brand personality developed by Venable, Rose, Bush and Gilbert (2005). This scale was originally developed for the US market, so before using it for an Australian study, we qualitatively tested the attributes to assess their relevance in the context of volunteering. The 156 participants included managers of volunteer programs, active volunteers and non-volunteers. They were given lists of different volunteering organisations and asked to suggest attributes that described each. Once the full list of attributes was collected and frequency counts computed, we compared them with the battery developed by Venable *et al.*

The result of this test was that many of the attributes included in the scale were used by Australians to describe and differentiate between volunteering organisations. However, we made some necessary changes to the scale: the attribute “popular” replaced “good looking”, “heroic” replaced “tough” and “prestigious” replaced “glamorous”. One attribute, “Western” was eliminated, because rather than being associated with “ruggedness”, Australians interpreted it as being “Westernised”. We also used two attributes to describe Australian volunteering organisations, and added “Aussie” and “political”. The final list of 18 attributes on which respondents were asked to evaluate themselves and volunteering organisations were: honest, mainly for men, prestigious, compassionate, political, reputable, outdoorsy, upper class, loving, reliable, Aussie,

popular, caring, well organised, committed, heroic, supports local community and positive influence.

For themselves and each of the eight volunteering organisations, respondents were presented with the list of 18 randomly ordered attributes. Participants were asked to select all of the traits that they felt described themselves, and then do the same for each of the eight volunteering organisations. This is the most common method of measuring self-congruity, whereby self-image and brand image are measured separately using a predetermined battery of attributes, and then the differences (or in this case, matches) are summed to arrive at an overall score of congruity (Beerli, *et al.*, 2007; Kastenholz, 2004; Kressmann, *et al.*, 2006; Quester, *et al.*, 2000).

In both cases, we used a “pick any” answer format, so that respondents only indicated if they felt that the attribute applied. We chose this answer format after consideration of the trade-off between respondent fatigue versus grey shades in responses. We decided to minimise respondents’ efforts because comparative studies show that binary measures perform equally as well as multi-category answer formats (Dolnicar, 2003), and because we believe that the information that someone perceives Surf Life Saving as “rather masculine” is in fact very hard to interpret, and thus of little managerial use.

4. Analysis and Results

H1: Volunteers who prefer a specific volunteering organisation above others significantly differ in their self-concepts.

Because the self-concept attributes were all nominal (binary) variables, we used chi-square tests to test for significant differences between the two groups. These tests identified whether the proportion of each group selecting a particular attribute to describe themselves was significantly higher or lower than expected. If personality plays no role in preference for volunteering organisations we would expect that the cell frequencies could be determined purely on the basis of how many people prefer a particular organisation (column total) and how many perceive themselves as having a particular attribute (row total). This is, in fact, not the case.

Table 1 compares whether self-concept differs for individuals with different organisation preferences. The figures represent the percentage of people who prefer that organisation who think that the image attribute describes them. Significant differences were found for 10 of the 18 attributes, as indicated by the asterisk (*) next to the attributes shown in bold typeface. To summarise extreme results, for those attributes which were significantly different between groups the highest and lowest values are underlined.

Table 1: Self-Concept of Individuals who Preferred Different Volunteering Organisations

	Buscare (%)	Red Cross (%)	State Emergency Service (%)	St. Vincent de Paul (%)	Rural Fire Service (%)	P&C associations (%)	Surf Life Saving (%)	Rotary (%)	Average % across groups	p
Prefer the organisation (percentage of sample)	83 (6)	44 8 (32)	30 2 (21)	22 8 (16)	85 (6)	14 5 (10)	60 (4)	64 (5)		

Honest	84	84	85	87	79	88	82	84	85	0.608
Masculine*	8	8	15	<u>6</u>	19	14	<u>23</u>	9	11	0.000
Prestigious ⁺	1	5	6	6	11	7	10	8	6	0.197
Compassionate	70	65	66	72	65	69	57	55	66	0.125
Political*	<u>18</u>	9	10	14	13	<u>5</u>	8	<u>5</u>	10	0.010
Reputable*	40	33	42	42	44	43	<u>30</u>	<u>50</u>	39	0.017
Outdoorsy*	<u>58</u>	24	35	22	36	23	47	<u>19</u>	29	0.000
Upper Class ⁺	4	4	3	7	2	6	12	6	5	0.083
Loving*	<u>58</u>	67	63	72	62	<u>79</u>	70	59	67	0.004
Reliable	75	81	82	81	80	86	77	78	81	0.612
Aussie*	31	<u>27</u>	37	32	<u>42</u>	38	<u>42</u>	28	33	0.008
Popular	18	19	27	28	27	29	22	19	24	0.051
Caring*	77	79	73	85	71	<u>86</u>	77	<u>69</u>	78	0.003
Organised*	<u>47</u>	57	56	64	61	<u>70</u>	52	58	59	0.000

										9
Committed	57	64	64	66	60	69	58	59	64	0.54 0
Heroic**⁺	7	5	10	4	13	4	<u>15</u>	<u>3</u>	7	0.00 2
Supports local community*	29	<u>24</u>	29	37	35	37	25	<u>41</u>	30	0.00 2
Positive influence	51	51	53	58	56	58	58	63	55	0.48 5
<p>* Differences between groups significant at the 95 per cent level ($p < 0.05$).</p> <p>+ One or more cells have expected count less than 5.</p>										

Our results show that individuals who said that they preferred Bushcare were the most likely to describe themselves as political and outdoorsy, and the least likely to describe themselves as loving or organised. Those who preferred the Red Cross were the least likely to think of themselves as Aussie or supporting the local community. This does seem consistent with the Red Cross organisation, which is known as a global organisation that assists many international causes, so those who prefer the Red Cross probably see themselves more as supporting issues on a global basis, rather than their local community specifically. The two groups more likely to describe themselves as Aussie were those who preferred Surf Life Saving and the Rural Fire Service. The Surf Life Saving group were also most likely to describe themselves as masculine and heroic, but did not consider themselves to be particularly reputable. Those most likely to consider themselves reputable were those who preferred Rotary, and they were also the group most likely to describe themselves as supporting the local community. They had the smallest proportion who thought they were outdoorsy or caring. The group which preferred P&C associations had the highest proportion who thought they were loving, caring and organised. This could be

because they are probably parents caring for school-aged children whose lifestyles required them to be very organised to manage a family. They were also the group least likely to describe themselves as political. Those who preferred St Vincent de Paul were the least likely to say they were masculine, perhaps because this organisation is associated with more humanitarian-type work, which may resonate with the nurturing side of females. Finally, the group that preferred the SES was neither strongest nor weakest on any of the attributes that differed significantly between other groups. They represented a mid-ground group that is probably more representative of mainstream Australia than the others measured. Because significant differences were found in 10 out of the 18 image attributes measured, Hypothesis H1 cannot be rejected.

H2: The self-concept of volunteers who prefer a specific volunteering organisation most closely matches the perceived brand image of that volunteering organisation.

We used SPSS to calculate how many times each participant ticked an image attribute as applying to them, and also selected the same attribute as describing the volunteering organisation being rated. For each attribute and each organisation, the following scenarios applied: no tick for self-concept and no tick for organisation image produced a score of zero (indicating a neutral answer); a tick for self-image and no tick for the organisation (or vice versa) produced a score of zero (indicating a mismatch); and a tick for self-concept and a tick for the organisation image produced a score of 1 (indicating a match). We only counted “1” matches in order to take a conservative approach. Given that we recorded significantly more zero matches than 1s, results would have been inflated if the zero matches were included. Taking matches of 1s only is the stricter criterion.

We then summed all matched attributes to count the matches between the individual and that particular organisation. In theory, this could range from 0 to 18, but empirically, this is not actually a perfect match, given that people do not always assign all 18 attributes to themselves. The perfect match depends on the number of attributes each respondent has assigned to themselves. In the present study, this number was on average 7.5, so a match of 5, for example, was reasonably good.

To avoid inflating self-congruity results due to some people being unaware of some of the eight organisations, respondents were offered an option (next to the image list) where they could indicate that they had never heard of that particular volunteering organisation before. Those respondents were eliminated before conducting the data analysis.

We computed the average level of match for all groups, and used paired sample t-tests to test for significant differences between the preferred organisation and each of the other seven organisations.

Table 2: Self-Congruity with Volunteering Organisations

Average number of matches with each organisation	Prefer Bushcare	Prefer Red Cross	Prefer State Emergency Service	Prefer St Vincent de Paul	Prefer Rural Fire Service	Prefer P&C Association	Prefer Surf Life Saving	Prefer Rotary
Bushcare	4.24	3.13*	4.21*	3.57*	4.21*	4.17*	4.85*	2.96*
Red Cross	4.47	<u>5.16</u>	4.92*	5.22*	4.79*	5.50*	5.00	<u>5.10</u>
State Emergency Service	<u>4.58</u>	4.30*	<u>5.47</u>	4.94*	<u>5.61</u>	<u>5.73*</u>	5.14	4.74
St Vincent de Paul	4.32	4.21*	4.56*	<u>5.63</u>	4.15*	5.58*	4.72*	4.47

Rural Fire Service	4.25	3.69*	4.79*	4.62*	5.51	5.44*	4.78*	3.98*
P&C associations	2.51*	3.04*	3.13*	3.38*	3.32*	4.97	4.33*	2.53*
Surf Life Saving	4.30	3.43*	4.40*	4.17*	4.81*	5.04	<u>5.77</u>	3.79*
Rotary	2.56*	2.94*	3.61*	3.90*	4.14*	4.62	3.73*	4.73
* Statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) from the average number of matches for the preferred organisation (shown in bold on the diagonal axis of the table).								

Table 2 displays the average number of matches for each organisation. The columns represent the people who nominated each organisation as their preferred organisation (or in this study, the eight segments that made up the total sample of 1,415). The rows represent the eight organisations respondents rated in terms of their perceived image. The numbers in the cells indicate the average number of times an individual chose an image attribute as describing themselves and also indicated that they thought that attribute described the volunteering organisation (which theoretically could range from 0 to 18).

If self-congruity held, the diagonal axis shown in bold typeface would be the greatest number in each column. Or, the organisation with the most attribute matches should be the one they preferred. The underlined figures highlight the greatest number in each column, or the organisation that actually had the highest average number of matches for that preference group (or the highest value in each column).

We used paired sample t-tests to compare the average number of matches between the preferred organisation (shown in bold in each column) and each of the other organisations.

Where we found a significant difference between the average number of attribute matches for the preferred organisations and the average number of matches for one of the other organisations, the figure for the other organisation is marked with an asterisk (*). For example, the first column of the table represents those individuals who most preferred

Bushcare. We computed seven paired sample t-tests to test for significant differences in the average number of matches between Bushcare and the other seven organisations. Only two of these t-tests revealed significant differences — between Bushcare and the P&C associations, and Bushcare and Rotary. The average matches for the other five organisations did not differ significantly from the value for Bushcare. However, the average number of matches for the Red Cross differed significantly from the average number of matches for all the other seven organisations.

If self-congruity theory held in the context of volunteering organisations, we would expect that: the bolded figures on the diagonal axis (indicating the level of match with the preferred organisation) (1) would also be the underlined figures (representing the greatest level of match for the column); and (2) would be significantly higher than *all* of the other seven organisations (marked by an asterisk next to each of the other figures in the same column). This is the case for three of the eight organisations: the Red Cross, SES and St Vincent de Paul. For these organisations: (1) the highest level of average match between the individual's self-concept and the perceived image of the organisation was with the preferred organisation; and (2) the level of self-congruity was significantly higher for the preferred organisation than for *all* of the other organisations measured. Notably, these three organisations were also the ones with the strongest brands. The percentage of respondents who indicated they had never heard of these volunteering brands before ranged from 1.5 per cent for the Red Cross to 5.8 per cent for the SES. The percentage of respondents who had never heard of the other five brands was higher, ranging from 6.1 per cent for Surf Life Saving to 47.1 per cent for Bushcare. This suggests that self-congruity theory applies to a greater extent if the organisation brand is well known within the general population and has a stronger positioning in the competitive volunteering marketplace.

The responses regarding the remaining five organisations (Bushcare, Surf Life Saving, Rotary and the Rural Fire Service) displayed a tendency consistent with self-congruity theory. In each case, the preferred organisation was one of a group of the more congruous organisations; however, the group could not be separated by significant differences. For instance, for Surf Life Saving, the highest level of match was with the preferred organisation, but this was significantly higher than only five of the other seven organisations. The other two organisations with the highest average number of matches — the Red Cross and the SES — were not found to be significantly lower.

In the case of Rotary, the group which preferred this organisation had the most matches with the Red Cross, the SES, Rotary and St Vincent de Paul, but we found no significant differences between these in the average number of matches. However, Rotary was significantly higher in self-congruity than the other four organisations measured. This tendency provides some support for self-congruity theory, because in each case, the preferred organisation was one of the more congruous.

The results for one group (those who preferred P&C associations) showed a pattern different from the other seven. Here, the level of congruity was significantly lower than four of the other seven organisations measured. This is contrary to the expectations of self-congruity theory, because the preferred organisation was not even in the top half of those which matched their own attributes. This is unsurprising when we consider the nature of their involvement with the organisation. Individuals who are involved with P&C associations probably have school-aged children and are involved only to support the school, and in turn, their child. It is also likely that as soon as their child leaves the school, their involvement and preference to volunteer for the P&C ceases. In this sense, we might question the extent to which their volunteering is actually “voluntary”. Their involvement

could be more aptly described as “obligatory volunteering”; that is, they see it as part of their role as a responsible and active parent and are involved because they feel they have to be to support their child, rather than because of a particular personal affinity between them and the organisation.

Based on these findings, Hypothesis H2 cannot be rejected; however, self-congruity was not evident in all cases.

5. Conclusions and Limitations

The aim of this study was to test: (1) if individuals who prefer different volunteering organisations have different self-concepts; (2) if individuals perceive their preferred volunteering organisation as more similar to their self-concepts than to other volunteering organisations; and (3) if self-congruity theory correctly predicts consumer (volunteer) behaviour differences across organisations and organisational missions.

Results from our research support the hypothesis that individuals who prefer different organisations have different self-concepts. This finding is consistent with studies of other experientially-based industries such as tourism (Todd, 2001). We also found that self-congruity theory held for three organisations that were well known, strongly positioned and where the nature of people’s involvement was truly voluntary. Again, this result is consistent with the many other studies of commercial products and services which provide support for self-congruity theory (including Barone, *et al.*, 1999; Chon, 1992; Kressmann, *et al.*, 2006).

For the four organisations that were less well known and less strongly positioned, but for which volunteers chose to contribute, the preferred organisation was amongst a set of organisations with a higher congruity, but not the most congruent. One organisation showed a pattern different from self-congruity altogether. This organisation was characterised by what might be termed “obligatory volunteering”. People were probably involved for reasons other than their personal preference, and were not actually free to opt out until their child left the school, even if they did not identify with the organisation’s profile.

In sum, these results indicate that self-congruity theory has significant potential for volunteering organisations, especially those that are well known and have a differentiated positioning within the market.

Practically, this study is important because if self-congruity theory holds in the non-profit context, valuable guidance for volunteering managers can be derived regarding the marketing messages most likely to attract and retain volunteers. Results suggest that volunteering organisations need to be aware of their own brand image, but also of the self-concept of people who prefer them over other organisations. They need to decide which segment they want to target and then develop an image strategy to achieve this by actively positioning themselves to match most closely the self-image of the segment targeted.

For example, Surf Life Saving knows that individuals who prefer their organisation are more likely to describe themselves as Aussie, masculine and heroic. This suggests that in their marketing and recruitment campaigns, Surf Life Saving should target individuals with a similar self-concept by emphasising the manly and physically active aspects of their volunteering, and the important role the organisation plays in the historical development of Australia’s beach-oriented culture. Messages along these lines are likely to resonate with

this group and reinforce the self-concept of those who prefer their organisation. Results also give insights about where these types of people might be found. We might expect, for instance, that people who see themselves in this way are likely to be found at men's sporting competitions or participating in other outdoor activities, such as being at the beach. Distributing flyers or other promotional material at these venues is more likely to reach individuals with this type of self-concept.

However, organisations should not lose sight of their mission in an attempt to promote an image to attract targeted segments of the market. On the contrary, and by necessity, organisations should clearly specify their core values and mission, and ensure they remain consistent, to ensure the positioning of the brand is strengthened over time. Within this core values framework, the specific benefits gained from involvement with the organisation which are then communicated to the different target groups can be customised to match particular self-concepts. Most volunteering experiences offer a wide range of benefits to (1) the volunteers themselves, (2) the beneficiaries of the service being provided and (3) the community as a whole. The communications strategies developed for each target group should focus on the combination of these benefits likely to appeal most to a specific self-concept, but which do not contradict the core values and mission of the organisation.

Theoretically, these findings are important because our research extends self-congruity theory into a new application area: volunteering organisations. This study has also determined factors that may systematically influence the strength of the relationship between preference and self-congruity: (1) general brand awareness of an organisation (this holds for our data); (2) the distinctness of volunteering organisations' positioning; and (3) the true ability of people to opt in or out of volunteering for these organisations. For

instance, Rotary is quite well known (only 15.8 per cent indicated they had never heard of it before), but self-congruity is low. This is perhaps because it is associated with a wide range of activities and attracts a broad range of members; therefore it does not have a clear and distinct image. Bushcare, on the other hand, had the lowest levels of awareness (47.1 per cent had never heard of it before) and an image that was not clearly differentiated from the Rural Fire Service. In this case, if achieving high levels of brand awareness is too difficult or expensive to achieve, creating a clear positioning in a small segment should increase the potential for self-congruity and targeted marketing strategies.

The three additional constructs which this study identified (brand awareness, distinctiveness of positioning and ability to opt in or out) represent an extension of self-congruity theory and require additional work to assess their role in explaining preference. Future research could test this proposition by collecting data from organisations fitting these specific profiles (both in the area of volunteering and beyond). An additional avenue deserving of research attention relates to the influence of volunteer motivations on the strength of self-congruity theory. For example, whether self-congruity plays a greater or lesser role in choice of volunteering organisation, depending on whether the motivations for involvement are primarily altruistic or egoistic. Another extension to this research would take a view of self-concept broader than only “actual self”, which this study examined, including, amongst others, one’s “ideal self” (how one would like to be perceived), the “social self” (how one thinks others perceive them); and the “ideal social self” (how one would like others to perceive them) (Sirgy, 1982a). Also worthy of investigation is whether certain types of volunteering organisations are more congruent with different types of selves, considering the different causes, types of work involved and beneficiaries of the services provided.

It should also be noted that since this study was designed and fieldwork conducted, there have been other attempts to gain insight into the role of brand personality in the non-profit sector. For example, Voeth and Herbst (2008) used Aaker's scale as a basis to develop a non-profit brand personality scale for the German market, while Sargeant, Ford and Hudson's (2008) study of monetary donors found that while some personality traits were common to multiple organisations, others were able to discriminate effectively between organisations. With the recent emergence of numerous non-profit brand personality scales, future studies which critically evaluate and compare these measures would be valuable in providing further insight for researchers and practitioners in the third sector.

A limitation of this study relates to the data collection methodology, which utilised an online research panel. This approach afforded several advantages, such as the ability to collect a national sample, randomly order responses and ensure questions were answered correctly. However, this method has some limitations. While the invitation to complete the questionnaire was sent to a nationally representative sample, the final sample was probably skewed towards younger and more technologically savvy internet users, who respond more quickly to electronic invitations. Ideally, future research should involve a mixed-method approach that combined online data collection with other methods to ensure non-internet users are represented in the sample.

With hindsight, we also recognise that the study would have been enhanced by a greater sample size. This would have provided larger segment sizes of each of the eight preference groups, and therefore greater opportunity for detailed analyses at the segment level. The smaller sizes of some groups was likely due to the lower profile of the organisation and less awareness in the market (as in the case of Bushcare), or the highly skilled nature of the work involved (Surf Life Saving). Nonetheless, these agencies provide important social

services and rely heavily on the work of volunteers; therefore greater sample sizes for these groups and the resultant insight gained from detailed analysis is an important consideration for future investigations.

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