Factors Associated with Youth Engagement and Participation in Voluntary Activities in Malaysia

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Abstract: This paper identifies factors associated with youth engagement and participation in volunteerism. This paper is based on reviews of past studies on youth involvement in volunteering activities. In the literature review, several keywords including volunteerism, volunteering, youth, engagement and participation were identified. The theory of Planned Behavior by Ajzen (1991) was used as the basis to explain youth engagement and participation in volunteerism. In the reviews, the authors found that the main factors influencing youth engagement and participation are divided into two categories, external and internal factors including motivation, lack of time, the organizers, activities or program and demographic. Future research could provide a more definitive theoretical statement of youth volunteering and develop an additional proposition which may be derived from a more refined theory. Practical recommendations were discussed to assist individuals and organizations towards increasing youth engagement and participation in volunteerism.

Key words: Volunteerism · Youth · Youth Engagement · Youth Participation

INTRODUCTION

Youth being one of the major groups in the Malaysia, are the ones who are believed to have the ideas and opinions of their own that need to be featured in bringing change to the nation. They are the future leaders of tomorrow and has a tremendous impact on society in general. Volunteerism among the youth is not something new in Malaysia. In fact, it has developed and practiced well by the youths and recognized by many parties, including government and NGOs bodies. In developing the nation, their ‘voice’ cannot be taken for granted and they should be given the opportunity to participate in various aspects. Thus, volunteerism is one of the best approaches to ensure that their potential is not left untapped.

Theory of Planned Behavior: Apparently, this theory was introduced by Icek Ajzen (1991) and the purpose is to explain human behavior which was divided into three parts of determinant that bringing to human intention and behavior [1]. The three parts are attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. This theory was widely used and has been such an effective approach to understand volunteering execution [2].

The intention is assumed that when someone intends to do something, it will lead to the implementation by the individual [2]. This means that when a person intends to volunteer, he will practice it. Past research also verifies that volunteer involvement rely on their intention to behavior classification [3]. The intention to volunteer are influenced by three separated determinant mentioned below.

To add to the body knowledge, this theory is an extension to the theory of reasoned action formed by Ajzen, (1988) [4], which believes that human behavior can be predicted by intention and being under volitional control [5]. Moreover, this theory is adequate and is adaptable for circumstances and features of particular behavior [6].
Figure 1 shows the Theory of Planned Behavior by Ajzen (1991) [1]. There are three parts of determinants that lead to individual intention and behavior to volunteer which consists of behavioral attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control.

The first determinant is the attitude towards the behavior which is referred to as “the degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question” [1]. These attitudes will affect their own cognitive beliefs [7] which can be said that this attitude is their own individual perception of volunteerism whether it is positive or not.

Subjective norm is a social pressure [1], which comes from anyone who may be important to the person. For example, family and spouse in which they indirectly give big impact to the person’s intention and decision on whether to engage and participate in volunteerism or not.

As stated by the former of this theory, the third determinant bringing to persons’ intention is the perceived behavioral control which refers to the perceived ease or difficulty [1]; of performing volunteering act. It consists of the consideration of constraint and limitation in being a volunteer. Ajzen (1991) also mentioned that their past experience may be an obstacle and would reflect an individual behaviour [1].

**Literature Review:** Volunteerism is a noble concept in life neither done without coercion nor asking for any rewards. Clary and Snyder (1999) defines volunteers as a person who gives assistance without getting any payment with some idiosyncrasy specified as the volunteer must always look up for opportunity, willing to help after a serious thought and decision taken and activities that are in line with the wills and objectives of volunteers will determine volunteer’s readiness to start help and carry on with it [8]. Past research defined volunteerism as an organized, ongoing and pro-social behavior specifically to provide benefits to others and occur in a particular organization [9]. Clary et al. (1998) also mentioned that volunteers are defined as:

- “people [who] often actively seek out opportunities to help others; may deliberate for considerable amounts of time about whether to volunteer, the extent of their involvement and the degree which particular activities ?t with their own personal needs; and may make a commitment to an ongoing helping relationship that may extend over a considerable period of time and that may entail considerable personal costs of time, energy and opportunity” [10]

Specifically, volunteerism is one of the processes of helping individuals to plan, organize and matching personal abilities participated in volunteering activities [11]. In addition, research found that volunteers among youth contributed such a various good values to the society and gain a lot of benefits for themselves such as improving their communication skill, expanding the knowledge, raising the empowerment and many more [12].

In Malaysia, programmes and activities in institutions of higher learning that lead to volunteerism begins in 1970’s [13]. Even the Prime Minister of Malaysia stressed this in his speech during the launch of 1Malaysia for Youth (1M4U) that youth are energetic and thus, they should maximize their energy in transforming the society to the better place [14]. Higher learning institutions and 1M4U is an epitomize of the importance of volunteerism and being such a good platform for them to bring up volunteer activities to the next level and transfer their positive attributes.
The life of youth is an unstable stage because they are constantly moving in and out of institutions such as colleges and workplaces. Therefore, their involvement in volunteering is seen to be inconsistent [15]. Past research also showed that youth from destitute families’ background tend to participate less in volunteerism lower than those having a stable ones [16].

From the traditional perspective, volunteerism has long been practiced by bodies and organizations. Voluntary associations are the backbone of which it is act as a support for youth involvement [17]. However, youth involvement in volunteerism may differ across the world [18], in which the differences in individual belief and cultural institutions being practiced of a country allow it to be the reason for the differences in their participation and involvement [17].

The enthusiasm of the X generation is well known for their readiness to transform the world generally and the society of the country, particularly [19]. Moreover, they also expressed that their voluntary engagement is giving such an ample compomy which research also found that it is able to deliver high impact to their individual improvement and development.

Apart from that, many studies have been conducted to examine the involvement of volunteers in terms of their motivation and satisfaction of volunteering [20-27]. Researchers have used diverse techniques to estimate their engagement [28]. By understanding their motives, indirectly, practitioners and organizations involved can help in reaching out to the youth to continue to participate in activities and voluntary organizations. Since the importance of youth in the development of the state and society in particular is enormous, then this issue gets the attention of either academicians as well as practitioners. Therefore, it is important to review the theoretical basis of the study precisely to understand the youth and volunteerism.

**Factors Associated:** There are a lot of factors that may influence the youth in Malaysia to engage and participate in volunteerism. However, based on the review of study, we have found that several major factors give high impact in affecting their engagement and participation towards voluntary activities such as motivation, lack of time, the organizers, activities or program and demographic.

**Motivation:** Undeniably, plenty of research has been conducted and the impact towards youth engagement and participation in volunteerism has been proven. Widjaja (2010) divided youth motivation into two parts [29]; intrinsic and extrinsic which both were supported by past research [30-31]. Finkelstien (2009) defined intrinsic motivation by the value of the activities in which their involvement would give them satisfaction and enjoyment [30]. On the contrary, extrinsic motivation as explained in past study is instrumental [31], in obtaining separable outcome [30]. Meanwhile, there are a lot of researches since 1980’s that described the motives of youth volunteering [32-34]. For the overall view of motivation to volunteer, it is considered as the most crucial part as it is associated between satisfaction and retention [35].

**Lack of Time:** Past research showed that lack of time would be a major constraint which influences youth participation and engagement towards volunteerism [36-37]. Other researches such as Jackson and Rucks (1995) and Shannon, Robertson, Marrison and Werner (2009) also identify time as the structural constraints of youth from them to volunteer [12,38]. Specifically, research found that youth at the age range of 15 to 34 attest time as a barrier to volunteer [39-41]. Shannon et. al. (2009) also discovered in their research that youth tied with other leisure activities and commitments as getting in the way of them being to participate in volunteer activities [12]. Youth in this era prefer to focus on their study, social life and advancing their career goals [36]. Thus, managers or organizers of volunteering activities should know how to attract them to get involved in voluntary activities.

**The Organizers:** As mentioned above, organizer plays an important role in ensuring youth participation and engagement. They have the responsibility in managing the activities or program and reaching the objectives. Therefore, the organizers should provide the favorable voluntary activities for the youth in order for them to express their potentials such as personal values by learning and applying their knowledge, skills and abilities [42].

**Activities or Programs:** As important as the organizers, activities or programs give high percentage in influencing them to get involved. Volunteering could provide them with such meaningful activities so that they can express their values through it [43]. In addition, the success of such activities is seen as important to the society and gives personal satisfaction to the individual. These aspects are important in ensuring and maximizing the outcomes [44]. On the other hands, there are several factors that may influence youth from participating in certain activities which it will not equally influence the others such as income factors, individual attributes and family composition [45]. Above all, the effectiveness and successful of the programs will be laid on the meaningful tasks or activities of the programs [46].
Demographic: Drawing upon voluntary activities, we should consider the volunteers’ demographic profile as participants of the activities. Research has proven that the levels of volunteering vary across different demographic groups [47]. In their research, it also indicated that demographic profile gives different impact to the volunteers. Past research identified that socio-demographic factors such as education [48], age [49] and religion [50] consistently related to volunteering. However, other factors of demographic such as age, income, gender and career led to inconsistent results [48]. Thus, youth with different demographic practically will choose to engage and participate in different types of voluntary activities or programs.

CONCLUSION

In general, it is concluded that the more positive attitude and subjective norm on behavior volunteerism, the stronger will be the intentions to volunteer. Nevertheless, there are several other theories and models that are also suitable to be studied to understand the engagement and volunteer participation in volunteerism. In short, volunteerism gives high impact to the development of nation and society in a positive way. Thus, volunteers should be recognized and not to be taken for granted as they can bring a lot of good values alongside and can transform the country into a better position. By understanding the volunteer’s antecedents’ behavior, responsible parties involved should act accordingly so that volunteerism can be sustained and enhanced.

Recommendation: There are various theories and model that can be studied to support human behavior. Nevertheless, making a revision of the theory alone is not enough to prove the level of engagement and participation of volunteers in Malaysia. In fact, further studies should be conducted to get the valid answer to the engagement and participation in volunteerism among youth in Malaysia so that enhancement and effort to maintain the spirit of volunteerism among Malaysians can be improved.

References


