

Every Minute Counts: Studying the Likelihood of Volunteering¹

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The purpose of the present research was to explore the effectiveness of the phrase “*every minute helps*” on volunteering among college students. Over 150 students were surveyed as to whether they would volunteer for an on-campus activity promoting school spirit. Two versions of the survey were randomly distributed to students that included one of two phrases requesting volunteers; one used the key phrase “*Every minute helps*” and the other phrase was “*Your contribution helps.*” Analysis showed that more minutes were donated when the key phrase was present in the survey. It was concluded that organizations interested in trying to increase volunteerism should look carefully at how they make their requests.

Introduction

By posing the question to participants in a way that will evoke an emotional or motive driven response, we can predict their responses when asked to volunteer minutes of time to various activities. Individuals, who hear the phrase *every minute helps*, when presented with an opportunity to volunteer, will willingly give more time than without hearing the phrase.

Research similar to the present study has been conducted by Cialdini and Schroeder (1976), regarding paltry donation. The research found that the common phrase *every penny helps* holds some truth when asking for donations, or any small favor, from target participants. When the experimenter, the solicitor, asked for a small favor with an emphasis that it was not necessary, the target felt an obligation to comply. By phrasing the statement so participants felt as if they were doing the researchers a favor by donating a small amount, the results were favorable. Therefore, including the phrase, *every penny helps*, increased the likelihood the participant adhered to any small favor when they did not feel obligated.

The goal of the present study was to expand the findings of Cialdini and Schroeder (1976) into volunteerism. Perrine and Heather (2000) expanded the work of Cialdini and Schroeder by including images to persuade willing participants to donate money. They included pleasant or vivid pictures with words that stimulated mental images

on donation boxes. Images included pictures of a disabled child or puppies. Researchers also included the phrase *every penny helps*, which tapped into the participants’ emotions and underlying motivations to donate. They found that the phrase *every penny helps* was enough to significantly increase donation amounts.

The topics of volunteerism, motivation, guilt, altruism, and group attachment are recurring themes to understanding the behavior behind paltry donations involving money and time. Kang et al., (2011) explored giving behavior in regards to time and money. They focused on college students’ habits and giving behavior surrounding donations and volunteering. It has been shown that college students are more willing to donate money, rather than time, if given the choice. Students with non-materialistic values are more likely to donate time and money, whereas participants with materialistic values were inversely motivated to take part in donating activities. Expanding the study to older individuals who are no longer in college may expose a different aspect of giving behavior that college students do not possess yet.

An interesting standpoint on why individuals volunteer is to analyze what type of perspective an individual has on a situation or opportunity. Oswald (2002) hypothesized that individuals who encounter a target in need of assistance will relate and be more willing to help through affective perspective taking, as well as identify needs through cognitive perspective taking. Participants

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who exuded characteristics of an affective perspective significantly influenced helping behavior, and therefore will be more likely to volunteer for longer periods of time. This perspective combined with prosocial behavior would ensure the longest volunteer time duration, compared to those who were utilitarian with cognitive perspective (Kang et al., 2010). Participants being engaged in a target or situation enough to evoke an emotional response will more likely result in longer volunteer minutes.

Research conducted by McClintock and Allison (1989) examined different social groups students belong to and how it affected their giving behavior. Students were categorized into three different social groups based on their behavior towards donating. Consistent with predictions, participants who were identified as being prosocial were more likely and willing to leave their contact information to participate in the future. Prosocialism was identified as the underlying quality that the majority of participants possessed who made an effort to donate their time, if the opportunity is based on a voluntary basis.

Research focusing on the manifestations of the selfless act of volunteering was conducted by Gillath et al. (2005) to conceptualize altruism in terms of attachment anxiety and avoidance. Previous research conducted by Kang et al. has already proven attachment anxiety to desire excessive reassurance, and self-enhancing motives to volunteer. Participants will engage in volunteering activities to be more socially accepted and gain better self-esteem. Individuals who were seen as displaying attachment avoidance were less motivated to help others in distress; whereas participants who showed altruistic tendencies were more motivated to assist others. Therefore, the hypothesis is that individuals who possess attachment anxiety qualities are more likely to volunteer in order to feel more included and gain more self-esteem; whereas attachment avoidance benefits less. Individuals who engage in charitable and helping activities are more likely to weaken the link between anxious attachment and interpersonal problems.

A participant exhibiting anxious attachment orientations hearing the phrase *every minute helps* while being asked to volunteer a portion of their

time to a cause, may be assumed to be more likely to engage in volunteering activities with greater enthusiasm than one exhibiting avoidance attachment tendencies (or who did not hear the phrase). Volunteering among college students can be seen as competitive and success oriented to show potential employers they are capable of performing (Handy et al., 2010). Contrary to the motivations for volunteering in research cited previously, Handy et al. hypothesized college students' motivations to volunteer (MTV) are driven by résumé building and career advancement. Motivations include altruism, social, and utilitarian values. Participants who identified with altruistic motivations are hypothesized to show more involvement and long-term volunteering than utilitarian and social motivations.

It is not possible to foretell a participant's motives to volunteer based on a single predictor, although altruism is a constant factor when analyzing the types of individuals volunteering. An interesting analysis would be how emotional responses (Oswald 2002), motives (Gillath et al. 2005) and behaviors (Kang et al. 2011) influence an individual's decision to volunteer any amount of time.

Based on findings of Cialdini and Schroeder (1976) it can be hypothesized that including the phrase *every minute helps* when asking for paltry contributions involving time will evoke a greater emotion response and moral obligation compared to not hearing the phrase.

Method

Participants

In the present study, 200 college-aged students enrolled in various general and upper level psychology courses were asked to participate in a volunteer opportunity by completing a survey. Students participating were enrolled at a small private college in south-western Pennsylvania.

Design

A between subjects design was used in the present study. The independent variable Phrase-Type had two levels such that approximately half of the participants received a survey with the key phrase *every minute helps* while the remaining

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participants received the generic phrase *your contribution helps*. The dependent variable was the numbers of minute's participants were willing to donate to volunteering.

Materials

Two nearly identical versions of a survey were created. The survey described a volunteer activity to promote campus unity and boost morale among students. The proposed hypothetical volunteer activity was to take place on campus for convenient access to more students.

The surveys differed only in regards to the key phrase used to elicit volunteerism. The survey was generally constructed to ask general questions related to interest in volunteering. To gauge the participant's potential commitment, a question was included to ask if they were, or were not, interested in the idea of the activity. If the participant was interested in participating in the volunteer activity, they were further prompted to answer the question asking how many minutes they would be willing to volunteer. General questions included information about their sex, year standing at school and major.

Procedure

All participants in the general and upper level psychology courses were asked to complete a survey about introducing an on-campus volunteer activity. Prior to administering the survey to participants, a brief introduction to the activity and objectives were given. It was made clear to participants that the on-campus activity they were being asked to volunteer for was not yet happening. The goal was only to gauge general and initial interest in the activity. Participants were randomly given one of two versions of the survey to complete. One version included the key phrase, *every minute helps*, while the other version included the more generic phrase, *your contribution helps*. Completion of the survey took approximately ten minutes.

Results

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed on number of minutes volunteered as a function of Phrase-Type (*every minute helps* vs. *your contribution helps*). As predicted, the phrase *every minute helps* produced more volunteer minutes than the generic phrase, $F(1,138) = 3.37$, $p = .068$.

Data from subjects who responded by indicating it was not a worthwhile idea and subjects who volunteered 0 minutes were excluded from the final analysis.

It was encouraging to find that the phrase *every minute helps* produced more volunteer minutes ($M = 101.2$ minutes, $SD = 63.0$) than the generic phrase ($M = 83.4$ minutes, $SD = 51.0$).

Discussion

The present study provides strongly suggestive evidence in support of the hypothesis that college students will willingly volunteer more time after hearing the phrase *every minute helps* than those without hearing the phrase. This was observed in a study using an adjustable measure of volunteering with a fairly sizeable sample representing a wide variety of majors.

Because the present results closely approached conventional levels of significance, it is an encouraging start for a pilot study. However, it might be valuable to examine volunteerism as a function of major as there was some evidence that psychology students tended to volunteer especially more minutes after hearing the phrase *every minute helps* than those who received the generic phrase.

For the future, we propose to create an additional condition to the study. In addition to administering the survey to students, a live version of the study should be considered. That is, in order to gather more *real world* responses, we can improve the ecological validity of the current study by organizing a booth in a populated area on campus asking students to participate in a volunteer activity. The booth could be arranged to alternate prompting students using the key phrase, *every minute helps*, and the generic phrase.

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