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Determinants of social commitment in the young. Applying the Theory of Reasoned Action



P. Zarzuela, C. Antón*

Universidad de Valladolid, Spain

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Abstract Framed within the Theory of Reasoned Action, the current work aims to further our knowledge of how social commitment is engendered and what volunteers' determinants are. Findings to emerge from the empirical study conducted amongst a sample of 488 youngsters aged between 16 and 18 evidence that youngsters' intention to cooperate with non-government organisations is determined directly by the attitudes they display towards these organisations and towards social issues, and by their immediate environment, and indirectly by their beliefs concerning social conflicts. We highlight the twin role played by attitudes towards non-government organisations (NGOs) throughout the whole process as it proves to be the major determinant of commitment, transforming part of the attitude towards problems into an intention to cooperate, making it a core variable and underscoring the power an organisation's image has to attract volunteers.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Adolescentes;
Compromiso social;
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Teoría de la Acción
Razonada;
Actitudes

Determinantes del compromiso social en los jóvenes. Una aplicación de la Teoría de la Acción Razonada

Resumen El presente trabajo, al amparo de la Teoría de la Acción Razonada, quiere ahondar en el conocimiento del modo en que se genera el compromiso social de los adolescentes y de cuáles son los determinantes del voluntariado. Los resultados del estudio empírico realizado con una muestra de 488 jóvenes de entre 16 y 18 años demuestran que la intención de colaboración de los jóvenes con organizaciones no gubernamentales viene determinada directamente por las actitudes que muestran hacia las propias organizaciones y hacia la problemática social en general y por su entorno más cercano e, indirectamente, por las creencias que posean acerca de los conflictos sociales. Destacamos el doble papel que desempeña la actitud hacia las ONG en todo este proceso, ya que es el principal determinante directo del compromiso y canaliza parte

* Corresponding author at: Departamento de Organización de Empresas y Comercialización e Investigación de Mercados, Avda. Valle Esqueva 6, 47011 Valladolid, Spain.

E-mail address: anton@eco.uva.es (C. Antón).

del efecto de la actitud ante los problemas hacia la intención de colaborar. Esto la convierte en una variable crucial y pone de manifiesto las posibilidades de las organizaciones de atraer voluntarios a través de su imagen.

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Introduction

A growing awareness of social responsibility has led citizens, occasionally individually although mainly through organisations, to play an increasingly vital role in designing and implementing action aimed at satisfying the general interest and, in particular, eliminating marginalisation and building a caring society able to provide a decent standard of living for all.

Non-government organisations (NGOs) are nonprofit organisations which are not dependent on any government and which pursue the general interest. They are founded on the values of solidarity and social justice. Specifically, Social Action NGOs are citizens' way of expressing their views by forming groups which seek social, altruistic and caring goals, benefiting those who are underprivileged, excluded and marginalised from society. Their twin objective is to offset the problem of inequality and under-privilege and to promote the structural changes required to ensure these situations do not re-emerge.

Before 1960, social solidarity was very much the domain of religious institutions, families and state welfare policies. Yet, the recession and economic crisis of the 1970s evidenced the limitations of the welfare state and gave rise to the emergence of the so-called Third Sector in developed economies, in the shape of nonprofit and social volunteer organisations (Beerli, Diaz, & Martin, 2004).

In certain countries, the significance of the Third Sector is such that its contribution and size is comparable to other sectors. Over the last three decades in Spain, the Third Sector in general, and the Social Third Sector in particular, has steadily increased in importance and relevance in a social context of growth and expansion (Vidal, 2013). According to data from the 2012 Spanish Social Third Sector Report published by the Luis Vives Foundation, the number of social organisations in Spain stands at around 29,000, who employ 635,961 people and draw on the cooperation of 1,075,000 volunteers. To a large extent, such organisations function thanks to public funding, this representing almost 1.88% of Spain's GDP for the year in question. Yet, because of the financial crisis in 2008, said growth came to a grinding halt. The crisis led to an increase in social needs and to a dramatic cutback in public resources (Vidal, 2013).

There is little doubt that without volunteers devoting their time and effort and without donors contributing funds, NGOs could not survive. Now, more than ever, NGOs must be able to generate social involvement since they are no longer able to count on sufficient public funding to undertake projects without the support of other social groups. They need to know how to encourage people so as to engage them in their mission and to gain people's support by getting them to devote time and money. The key lies in securing

and managing said social commitment. Attempts to unearth what drives this have long been a focus of marketing research, and many are the studies which have sought to ascertain what the determinants of social commitment are (e.g. Bendapudi, Singh, & Bendapudi, 1996; Briggs, Landry, & Wood, 2007; Michel & Rieunier, 2012; Wymer & Starnes, 2001). Despite the abundant research, interest in the matter remains as keen as ever, the truth being that individuals simply do not respond to new marketing strategies in the same way when it comes to NGOs (Lwin, Phau, & Lim, 2014).

The current work focuses on the Third Sector and seeks to explain the process which prompts youngsters to commit socially, and specifically to cooperate actively with an NGO. Drawing on the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), we propose a model in which an awareness of social problems, attitudes towards such problems and towards NGOs, and youngsters' environment interact to shape and define the process of social commitment. As set out in the Theory of Reasoned Action, our approach posits that a greater awareness of social problems generates a positive attitude towards them and that said attitude will in turn engender a greater likelihood of youngsters making a social commitment.

In order to complete the explanation of commitment, we add to this sequence the youngster's contextual or environmental effect and their attitude towards NGOs. The contextual effect aims to reflect the influence which the opinion and behaviour of other individuals close to the youngster might exert through the socialisation process on young people's decision to make a commitment (García Mainar, Marcuello Servos, & Sanz Gil, 2014). Attitude towards NGOs involves evaluating those intermediaries who transfer resources from donors to recipients (Bendapudi et al., 1996). NGOs are currently the most common vehicle for ensuring help reaches those who need it and as such their image may impact on an individual's social commitment and behaviour vis-à-vis helping (Bendapudi et al., 1996; Lwin et al., 2014; Michel & Rieunier, 2012; Sargeant, Ford, & West, 2006; Webb, Green, & Brashear, 2000).

We feel that the current work makes a two-fold interesting contribution to volunteer marketing literature. Firstly, the study focuses on young volunteers. Various works (McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997) state that the participation of teenagers in volunteer work not only has short-term effects but also long-term consequences, since many of those who work as volunteers when they are young continue to do so when they are older. Youngsters represent the future of volunteer work. We know that they do not behave or respond in the same way as others to the work done by NGOs and yet there are comparatively far fewer studies into youngsters and volunteer work than

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