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Public Perception of "Who is a Volunteer": An Examination of the Net-Cost Approach from a Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Our aim is to enhance the knowledge regarding how the public assess and rate volunteerism. We begin by first developing the model for understanding the potential use of the net-cost concept in eliciting the public's subjective perceptions on the extent to which certain activities are perceived as volunteerism. Four hypotheses relevant to the use of the net-cost concept are developed. We developed a questionnaire consisting of 50 case scenarios and applied it in Canada, India, Italy, Netherlands, and Georgia and Philadelphia in the United States, each with a sample of 450 adults or more. With one exception, our net-cost hypotheses are supported, suggesting that the public perception of volunteering is strongly linked with the costs and benefits that accrue to the individual from the volunteering activity, and that this result holds true across different cultures. Finally, we suggest directions for future research that can shed further light on the relationship between net cost and public good.

KEY WORDS: volunteerism; public perception; net cost; cross-cultural.

INTRODUCTION

Volunteers are the cornerstones on which the voluntary sector is predicated. We are accustomed to use this phrase in every aspect of our lives, however, very

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little systematic work has been carried out to define the term *volunteer* in a rigorous and precise manner. Volunteering is the essence of the scholarly work of numerous academicians around the world, however, there many issues arise when people report their own volunteering or attempt to define the term *volunteer*. No clear-cut definition that encompasses all aspects of volunteering exists. Often, too many different activities and situations are aggregated into this concept (Cnaan, Handy, and Wadsworth, 1996; Scheier, 1980; Smith, 1995; Tremper, Seidman, and Tufts, 1994; Vineyard, 1993).

For example, a person who volunteers to help as a Big Brother for a year and a person who organizes a one-time ski trip are both legitimately termed as volunteers by most published definitions of the term volunteer (Adams, 1985; Ellis and Noyes, 1990; Fair Labor Standard Act, 1985; Scheier, 1980; Shure, 1991; The President's Task Force on Private Sector Initiatives, 1982; Van Til, 1982). Both individuals meet the required specifications of volunteers as they perform their tasks with free will, receive no remuneration, and their acts benefit others. However, these two volunteers perform tasks that are significantly distinct, hence, the term *volunteer* is too general and does not convey specific information. Such lack of clarification makes it difficult to generalize from different studies on volunteers, measure with any accuracy the incidence of volunteering, or make policy recommendations.

In the for-profit sector, nobody would consider paid employment as a monolithic activity. An employee can be a CEO, a manager, a clerk, or a janitor, and they are not all classified only as "employees." In studies dealing with various aspects of employment, it is necessary to make classifications of employees into distinct categories to comprehend issues related to recruitment, compensation, contracts, management, and so forth. Similarly, volunteering is not a monolithic activity, and the study of volunteers needs to delineate different types of volunteers. Unfortunately, the literature on volunteers does not differentiate between the volunteer who sits on the board of the orchestra, the one who delivers meals-on-wheels, and the one who organizes a ski trip.

Cnaan and his colleagues (Cnaan and Amrofell, 1994; Cnaan, Handy, and Wadsworth, 1996) have advanced the field of studying volunteering by documenting the scope and variability of the concept. They showed that studies that report on volunteers without being specific on their characteristics cannot be generalized from one setting to another because of the ambiguity and variety of interpretations of "who is a volunteer." Based on a comprehensive literature review, these authors showed that most definitions of volunteers are based on four key dimensions: free will, availability of rewards (remuneration), formal organization, and proximity to the beneficiaries. Furthermore, their conceptual and empirical analysis suggests that the public perception of the term *volunteer* is the outcome of people's conception of the net cost of any volunteer situation, which they defined as total cost minus total benefits to the volunteer. Accordingly, the public can view two people

performing the same task that equally benefits society and designate the individual who accrues more net cost as being more of a volunteer.

The logic of moving from the four key dimensions to the net-cost concept needs clarification. In each dimension the authors identified a spectrum ranging from "broad" to "pure." As one moves from the "broad" to the "pure" the cost to the individual is higher. Consider for example the dimension of free will. A student who helps the elderly as part of a school mandated social service versus a teenager helping the elderly out of his or her free will. The latter, the "pure" volunteer is assumed to bear higher net cost, ceteris *paribus*. Similarly, on the other dimensions, moving from broad to pure implies higher net cost to the individual, in either higher benefits or lower costs.

Although the study by Cnaan, Handy and Wadsworth (1996) suggested the net-cost theory as the key factor explaining public perception of who is a volunteer, it did not lend itself to hypotheses testing and was quite tentative in its ability to support the concept of net cost. In this article we extend the work initiated by Cnaan, Handy and Wadsworth (1996) and pose four key hypotheses to test the notion of net cost as an explanatory model for public perception of volunteering. Although we still cannot offer an objective answer to the question of who is a volunteer and who is not, we offer a framework to explicate public subjective perceptions of who is a volunteer. We show that the higher the net cost, the higher the individual perceived contribution, and consequently, the higher the public perceived valuation of the volunteer. Second, we study this model from a cross-cultural perspective.

This article proceeds by first developing the model for understanding the potential use of the net-cost concept in eliciting the public's subjective perceptions on the extent to which certain case scenarios depict volunteerism. Four hypotheses relevant to the understanding of the use of net cost in this field are developed. A research methods and findings section then describes and evaluates evidence, which supports the applicability of net-cost use in explicating the multiple subjective meanings attached to volunteering. In a concluding discussion, we elaborate on the importance of the findings and suggest directions for future research that can shed further light on the relationship between net cost and public good.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Given that the concept of a volunteer is a social construct, we propose that the explication of who is a volunteer or what constitutes a volunteer activity be based on the public perception of net cost of volunteering. We hypothesize that the public perception of volunteering will be based primarily on the perception of the net cost incurred by the individual—broadly defined as all costs minus all benefits associated with the volunteering activity. Furthermore, the individual

incurring higher net cost is likely to be perceived as "more" of a volunteer than someone with a lower net cost. In the concept of net cost, we argue that only costs and benefits to the volunteer are relevant and, hence, *exclude* the benefits of the volunteer work to the recipient (beneficiary) or society.

Using a model based on rational economic theory, we suggest that for an individual to undertake any volunteering activity the benefits must be greater than the costs incurred for that activity. The benefits to the individual consist of private benefits of the activity and the public benefits of the activity. Private benefits to the individual include: monetary remuneration, enhancement of social status and social opportunities (reputation), improvement of potential earnings capability (wealth), social interaction and leisure activity, a sense of satisfaction from working for a cause one supports, and a good feeling about oneself (warm glow). The individual's public benefits are his or her valuation of those public benefits associated with increasing the supply of those goods and services for which the individual volunteers. For example, if the individual volunteers in an activity that increases adult literacy in the community, then the increasing adult literacy is an output that the volunteer values. As such, the public benefit of this output is valuable to society at large and the volunteer. However, the benefit of this activity that is included in the individual's rational decision-making is his or her own valuation of this public benefit. This valuation is positive (or at the least zero) because the individual, by choosing the adult literacy program, indicates a preference for the particular public benefit. The costs of volunteering to the individual include items such as the time spent volunteering, effort, money spent on supporting the activity and/or required donations to the cause, and the opportunity cost of income and social pleasures foregone.

Thus, the model for the individual i to undertake a volunteer activity can be represented by the equation:

$$\mathrm{B}i_{private} + \mathrm{B}i_{public} > \mathrm{C}i_{private}$$

By applying a rational choice approach, we assume that the sum of benefits (private and public) outweigh the costs to the volunteer. Rearranging this equation give the following:

$$\mathrm{C}i_{private} - \mathrm{B}i_{private} < \mathrm{B}i_{public}$$

In other words, the volunteer will undertake a volunteer activity provided that the net cost (private costs minus private benefits) incurred are less than the individual's valuation of the public benefit associated with volunteering.

Consequently, the higher the net cost of volunteering, the higher must be the volunteer's valuation of the public benefit associated with the volunteering. Furthermore, higher the volunteer's net cost, greater the weight the volunteer

Box I. Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: *In volunteer situations where people have different opportunity costs while doing the identical volunteer work with relatively equal benefits, the person with the highest perceived opportunity cost will be considered more of a volunteer.*

Hypothesis 2: *An individual volunteering to a recognized charity will be considered more of a volunteer than an individual volunteering to an unrecognized charity.*

Hypothesis 3: *The individual who engages in volunteer activity that is perceived to be more demanding will be considered more of a volunteer than the individual involved in a less demanding volunteer task.*

Hypothesis 4: *When an individual undertakes a certain volunteer activity presumably for no explicit personal benefit, s/he will be considered more of a volunteer than the individual who volunteers for an explicit personal benefit.*

attaches to the public benefits than private benefits and costs. Thus, the volunteer with high net cost is perceived to be more public spirited or altruistic than a volunteer with lower net cost. Hence, we argue that the volunteer with high net cost will be perceived as more of a volunteer than one with lower net cost.

Based on the above theory, we examine to what extent the public perception of who is more or less of a volunteer accords to the predictions of the net-cost theory, and to what degree these perceptions are culturally mediated or universal. The net-cost framework enables us to deduce several hypotheses and to test them empirically by varying the costs and benefits. To this end, we provide in the following discussion some examples of variations in net cost and how we use them to formulate specific hypotheses for empirical testing. Each variation is associated with a particular testable hypothesis (shown in Box I).

Variation 1: Different Opportunity Costs of Volunteering (with Equal Benefits)

Let us assess the volunteering situations represented by the doctor, the trainer, and the teenager who each volunteer an hour of his or her time to a soup kitchen. The individual benefits of serving in a soup kitchen are limited, and we may assume that these accrue equally to the doctor, trainer, and teenager. Furthermore, the costs of the volunteer activity itself are similar for each volunteer in terms of effort and time. However, their individual opportunity costs differ as explained earlier. Thus,

viewed through the filter of net costs, which includes the opportunity costs (such as forgone income), the ranking should reflect the following: The doctor whose time is expensive and who therefore foregoes most income, would be viewed as more of a volunteer than the trainer, who in turn is considered more of a volunteer than the teenager, whose time is least expensive.

Variation 2: Different Implicit Costs of Volunteering (Benefits Relatively Equal)

Similar volunteer activities may require more or less effort from the volunteers depending on where and how they are performed. Thus, the context of the volunteer activity, we argue, will change the costs incurred to the volunteer. For example, working for a recognized and reputable charity organization may require greater effort and commitment on the part of the volunteer as compared to a volunteer who may work with a less well-known agency. To protect its own reputation, the reputable agency will be more demanding of the volunteer to meet certain codes of work and ethics, thereby increasing the costs to the volunteer. For example, compare the costs to a person who assists a disadvantaged child under the supervision of a reputable social service agency (such as Big Brothers/Big Sister) with one who performs a similar activity on his or her own. The former may be required to have a fixed number of weekly contacts and help the child with certain types of services, and, in addition, may have to provide regular reports of this to the agency. Furthermore, the child, his family, or his teachers have an attentive "agent" to complain to if the service is not provided as needed and as desired. On the other hand, a volunteer who works alone in helping a disadvantaged child has a greater opportunity to shirk providing a service when it is personally inconvenient or degrade the quality of service and, hence, lower his or her cost. Furthermore, the same activity performed under the auspices of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters versus under the auspices of an unknown agency may also require higher levels of effort and commitment from the volunteer, as the more reputable agency, on the average, will have stricter supervisory procedures and will demand higher accountability and quality of service from its volunteers. Thus, a volunteer at a more reputable and organized agency will be perceived to incur higher costs because of the higher demands placed on them by the agency.

Variation 3: Different Explicit Costs of Volunteering (Relatively Equal Benefits)

In the case of different volunteer tasks, the time and effort involved can vary significantly, although the benefits to the volunteer may be relatively equal. In the first case, we take the scenario where an individual volunteers to chair a committee

or carry on a particular task and then delegates the work involved to an assistant. Which one of them is more of a volunteer? The former willingly volunteered but did little of actual work, while the latter did most of the work but, more likely, less willingly. There exist private benefits to both, in terms to status for the boss in society and status for the employee in the eyes of his boss, social contacts, among others. We assume that these benefits are relatively equal, although the costs to each are significantly different. In this scenario, the net cost to the assistant is higher than the net cost to the boss. The boss, we expect, will be regarded less of a volunteer than his or her assistant.

Another example of this variation is an individual who organizes a crime-watch group versus the individual who leads a group of joggers every week. The former task is more difficult as the individual must invest more effort to arrange a daily (and rather inconvenient) neighborhood watch than the task performed by the individual who leads a group of willing joggers every week. Because the work of organizing a neighborhood crime watch requires greater effort, it imposes greater costs on the volunteer engaging in this activity. As both tasks are neighborhood-oriented, the benefits to both individuals will be relatively equal.

Variation 4: Different Explicit Benefits of Volunteering (Relatively Equal Costs)

Similar volunteering activities can be undertaken for different benefits to the volunteer. Here we consider cases where the costs to the volunteer are kept relatively constant and the benefits to the volunteer are allowed to vary. For example, we consider a teacher who provides an hour of her/his time to help in a soup kitchen for no apparent benefit and contrast him/her with another teacher engaging in the same activity with an explicitly stated motive: in order to impress his or her date. According to the net-cost framework, the costs are the same for both cases, but in the latter case the benefits are higher, hence lower net cost. Therefore, the teacher who works to impress his or her date will be perceived as less of a volunteer than the teacher who works for no explicit benefit.

METHODS

To test the net-cost framework and its ability to explain variations in public perception of who is a volunteer, we adapted the 23 item-instrument used by Cnaan, Handy and Wadsworth (1996), based on the McCurley and Vesuvio (1985) inventory of "Who is a Volunteer." In this study we used 50 items, 27 of which were deliberately developed for this study to specifically test of the net-cost hypothesis. Each item ranged on a five-category Likert-type scale ranging from (1) not a volunteer to (5) definitely a volunteer. The questionnaires were self-administered and took 12 to 15 minutes to complete.

In each region the questionnaire had to be translated or transliterated to meet language requirements and to be relevant to the volunteering scenarios in each of the regions. For example, in India, the notion of volunteering "to impress a date" did not fit the cultural norms and was substituted by "to make personal connections." Despite careful considerations of cultural nuances, we are not certain that the scenarios developed are identical. Furthermore, as the culture and local attitudes toward volunteering differ across regions, we did not analyze the data as an aggregate but separately by region to accommodate these differences.

Our samples in each of the regions were not random samples but samples of convenience. We attempted to compensate for the lack of randomness of the sample by using a relatively large sample size of over 500 in each studied region. All data were collected in 1998.

As can be seen from Table I, the demographic characteristics of the samples are quite similar. Some notable variations include the following: In India and the Netherlands half the sample is composed of males, while in the three North American samples males constituted only about one-third of the sample. The Canadian sample is relatively younger (31.6% under the age of 24) and, hence, composed of more people who are single (49%). The Dutch sample has a relatively high rate of widowed (14.0%) and is less educated (only 16.1% are postgraduate, while 14.3% have some high school education). The Italian sample was also less educated (16.4% have only some high school education). This sample was also younger (56% under the age of 34) and mostly single (48.6%) or married (41%). The Italian sample reported the lowest rates of volunteering in the past. The Indian sample has the lowest rate of respondents who have volunteered ever or in the past 12 months, a finding that may be a reflection of the magnitude of volunteering in this country. This sample was also the most educated (55.5% are college graduates and additional 36.1% are postgraduates), a result that may be an artifact of having the questionnaire in English, the language used mostly by educated Indians. The Georgia sample is the most affluent and composed of most volunteers (93.2% volunteered in the past). Finally, the Philadelphia sample has the highest rate of people living with a significant other (8.5%) while India had none, the latter being a reflection of cultural norms. Regardless of these variations, using Chi-square tests of association reveal that the samples are not significantly different in a statistical sense.

In order to test our hypotheses, we compared means of items depicting different scenarios as suggested by the particular hypotheses under test. We do so within each sample (region) and compare the differences of means of two items using the paired T-test. In the case of comparison of more than two means, we applied analysis of variance. Given that our samples were not randomly selected and in each region the questions captured somewhat different reality, we could not apply a statistics such as MANOVA, which enables between regions analysis. Thus, we analyze the data only within regions and compared the results.

Table I. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Survey Respondents in Percentages by Region

Background Variables	Canada $N = 646$	Netherlands $N = 456$	India $N = 502$	Italy $N = 500$	Georgia USA $N = 679$	Philadelphia USA $N = 505$
Gender:						
Male (%)	35.5	46.1	55.1	39.2	32.7	36.9
Female (%)	64.5	52.8	44.9	60.8	67.3	63.1
Age:						
Under 24 (%)	31.6	22.5	18.1	31.2	15.8	13.6
25–34 (%)	17.7	21.4	18.9	24.8	18.9	19.3
35–44 (%)	20.6	20.7	18.7	17.0	22.0	19.3
45–54 (%)	20.4	19.6	23.3	19.0	29.8	29.8
55–64 (%)	5.0	12.8	12.5	7.2	7.7	13.0
65+ (%)	4.0	2.9	8.4	0.8	5.8	5.1
Marital status:						
Single (%)	49.0	29.1	29.3	48.6	24.7	36.4
Married (%)	36.2	50.7	59.3	41.0	59.6	39.4
Widowed (%)	5.4	14.0	8.4	1.8	4.0	5.8
Divorced (%)	3.8	1.1	2.6	2.0	7.2	7.0
Separated (%)	2.0	1.1	0.4	2.0	0.4	2.8
Living with significant other (%)	3.6	4.1	—	4.6	4.0	8.5
Education:						
Elementary school (%)	0.6	1.3	—	9.7	0.4	0.8
Some high school (%)	6.8	13.0	0.6	6.7	1.0	4.4
High school graduate (%)	16.3	32.0	3.0	34.3	9.6	11.7
Some college (%)	16.1	16.6	4.8	17.8	26.4	17.7
College graduate (%)	33.6	21.0	55.5	27.3	25.6	32.9
Post graduate (%)	26.5	16.1	36.1	4.2	36.9	32.5
Income:						
Lower class (%)	33.0	46.3	29.0	29.0	23.0	33.2
Middle class (%)	24.7	40.5	51.5	48.3	31.1	43.3
Upper class (%)	42.2	13.2	19.4	22.6	45.9	24.6
Volunteered ever:						
Yes (%)	85.8	78.8	64.8	47.6	93.2	85.5
No (%)	14.2	21.3	35.2	52.4	6.8	14.5
Volunteered in past 12 months:						
Yes (%)	64.5	61.1	39.0	26.6	74.9	63.9
No (%)	35.5	38.9	61.0	73.4	25.1	36.1

FINDINGS

Rank Order Analysis[8]

Cultural and local attitudes toward volunteering differ across the regions, and the scores on the questionnaire items (on a scale of 1–5) may, therefore, differ greatly in intensity. Of most interest is the rank of the means given to each

[8]Table of rank-order results in each region can be obtained from the corresponding author upon request.

item within the sample as compared to the other samples by region. For example, "An accountant charged with embezzling, who accepts a sentence of 250 hours of community service in lieu of prosecution" is ranked last as a volunteer in all regions except India. Community service is a relatively new concept in India, and embezzlement charges are not likely to be prosecuted. Even in the case of prosecution, trials are known to last for many years and are generally not successful. We conclude that this fact reduces the private benefits of doing community service to the accountant in India and decreases his or her net cost, explaining why he or she is not ranked last as in other regions.

We look at whether there are any general trends inherent in the way respondents over all the regions ranked volunteers. More specifically, we examine whether there are similarities in who is perceived to be at the high end "Definitely a Volunteer" (means close to 5) and at the low end "Not a Volunteer" (means close to 1) for all the regions. We argue that if similarities exist despite the cultural differences, it will enable us to better understand who is a volunteer based on a universal public perception.

Across the 50 items, we identify the five items ranked highest among all volunteer scenarios for all regions. The common items are as follows: A teenager who volunteers to serve a meal at the soup kitchen for the homeless; a teacher who volunteers to serve a meal at the soup kitchen for the homeless; and an adult who offers his or her time to be a Big Brother or Big Sister (with the exception of the latter in Italy). In the top nine rankings for all regions, moreover, we find the scenarios wherein the volunteer is either serving at the soup kitchen, teaching English to new immigrants, serving in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program, or donating blood (with one minor exception: in the Netherlands donating blood is ranked 15, a rank that may be explained by the fact that the Dutch word for "volunteer" implies work done on a regular basis). Thus, there appears to be a cross-cultural consensus in the public perception of who is considered "definitely a volunteer." None of the scenarios indicate that the volunteer receives any implicit or explicit remuneration, and the volunteer activity takes considerable time and effort on the part of the volunteer for the benefit of others. This finding supports the net-cost concept that the lower the benefits to the volunteer (therefore the greater the net cost) the more likely the person will be considered a volunteer.

At the other end of the scale, we examine the five items ranked lowest among all volunteer scenarios for all regions. There is less consensus across the regions for this end of the scale. In North America (Canada, Philadelphia, and Georgia) and Italy in the lowest five we find: The step-parenting spouse; the doctor who presents a paper at the AMA; the individuals who agree to offer services at the symphony concert in exchange for a free ticket to the concert; the paid staff person who serves on the board of a nonprofit group in a slot that is reserved for his/her agency; the six-month-old baby who accompanies her parents to visit seniors at a nursing home;

and the accountant charged with embezzling, who accepts community service in lieu of prosecution. In Italy and the Netherlands, contrary to the other regions, we find the trainer who does a free workshop for an organization as a marketing device included in the bottom five.

The six-month-old baby and the embezzling accountant were consistently ranked the lowest in North America and Italy (49/50 and 50/50, respectively). In addition, in the Netherlands, the embezzling accountant was ranked last but the baby was ranked 44/50. These findings indicate that respondents felt "free will" and considerable net costs are important components in their decision-making concerning who is not a volunteer. Step parenting may also be considered a situation where the individual has less of a free choice whether or not to engage in parenting accrue from love and having a spouse. The remaining choices indicate that those who receive overt remuneration (monetary or otherwise) are ranked lower as volunteers. This pattern is consistent with all the rankings found at the bottom third of the rankings for these three regions.

In India, the five items ranked lowest include the individual serving at the soup kitchen to impress his or her date and those working at the symphony in exchange for tickets. As the concept of dating in India is not the norm for adults, "to impress his or her date" was replaced by "to make personal connections," this change may have elicited a lower rating for these individuals in India as "personal connections" is tantamount to volunteering to further oneself socially and economically. If scenarios involving "personal connections" are excluded, the bottom five ranks include all four individuals who agree to offer services at the symphony concert in exchange for a free ticket. A parent who becomes a scout leader because of his or her child desires to be a scout is also included in the bottom five rankings. It should be noted that, unlike the case in North America, in India scout leaders are schoolteachers who take on this obligation as part of their required extracurricular duties for the school. Furthermore, scouting meetings take place on school premises. Thus, teachers may be regarded as fulfilling their professional duties and, therefore, are not considered volunteers. The next three rankings include items ranked lowest in all other regions: the six-month old baby (39/50) and the accountant charged with embezzlement (38/50).

These findings from India suggest that although the cultural context does appear to affect the ranking of a volunteer scenario, it may be through artifacts. The trend to rank individual who receives explicit monetary or nonmonetary remuneration less as a volunteer found in all regions also operates in India as well.

In the Netherlands individuals receiving any paid remuneration were ranked least likely to be considered a volunteer. The bottom five rankings include: the embezzling accountant; the paid staff on the boards of nonprofit organizations; the IBM executive on a year of social service leave with pay; and the lawyer receiving half his regular fee. This listing suggests that receiving any kind of monetary

remuneration is the determining factor on who is least likely to be considered a volunteer in the Netherlands. This trend holds true for the bottom third of the rankings for the Netherlands.

In the scenarios depicting a volunteer who receives an explicitly stated personal benefit for the volunteering activity, such as tickets to a symphony, all regions (with the exception of the Netherlands) ranked these volunteers, irrespective of their status, in the bottom 20% of the rankings. This suggests that individuals who receive explicit personal benefits for their volunteering are considered less likely to be volunteers than those who do not. In other words, given equal costs, they have more private benefits and, hence, their net cost is lower. In the Netherlands, the norm is that if an individual volunteers for any association, the services of that association are freely available to the volunteer, and membership dues are exempted. As a result, free symphony tickets are not considered exceptional private benefits to the Dutch volunteer.

Hypothesis 1

To test the first hypothesis (see Box I), we used four individuals performing the same voluntary activity in *three* different situations. We compared a student, a teacher, a medical doctor, and an IBM executive each volunteering to serve a meal at a soup kitchen for the homeless, to serve on the board of a local library, and to provide a status-appropriate service to the symphony (from ushering for the teenager to board membership for the IBM executive) in exchange for free tickets. In each of the three situations, we would expect the IBM executive to be considered more of a volunteer, followed by the medical doctor, the teacher, and the student in descending order.

As shown in Table II, in Canada there were no significant differences among the four individuals regarding the symphony probably because the explicit interest in free tickets. Regarding the soup kitchen, the F-test was significant but the post-hoc analysis (Scheffe test at the 0.05 level) revealed no two groups that differ significantly. Regarding the library scenario, the difference was significant, however, not in the anticipated direction. The teacher was rated significantly less of a volunteer than all of the three other individuals, perhaps because people viewed library service more related to teacher work and, thus, as more rewarding to the teacher. With regard to the three other individuals, no significant differences were found. Thus, the Canadian sample does not support the first hypothesis. In the Netherlands, no significant differences were encountered in the scenarios of the public library and the symphony orchestra. However, regarding the soup kitchen, the F-test was significant and the post-hoc analysis revealed that teachers were significantly rated "more" volunteers than medical doctors. However, this single significant difference is contrary to our hypothesis. In Georgia and Philadelphia, also, contrary to the hypothesis no significant differences were found among these individuals with respect to the three activities.

Table II. Comparison of Means of Items Depicting Different Opportunity Costs for Similar Activities by Four Individuals (an IBM Executive, a Medical Doctor, a Teacher, and a Student) by All Regions (Using One-Way ANOVA Tests)

	Serving on the board of a local library		Serving a meal at the soup kitchen for the homeless		Helping the symphony orchestra in exchange for free tickets	
Canada	IBM executive	4.13	IBM executive	4.67	IBM executive	2.08
	Medical doctor	4.09	Medical doctor	4.67	Medical doctor	2.08
	Teacher	3.90	Teacher	4.76	Teacher	2.06
	Student	4.15	Student	4.77	Student	2.16
	F-value	6.28	F-value	3.49	F-value	1.07
	Significance	.000***	Significance	.015*	Significance	N.S.
Netherlands	IBM executive	4.55	IBM executive	4.74	IBM executive	2.41
	Medical doctor	4.54	Medical doctor	4.68	Medical doctor	2.52
	Teacher	4.55	Teacher	4.83	Teacher	2.55
	Student	4.50	Student	4.78	Student	2.52
	F-value	.33	F-value	3.65	F-value	1.12
	Significance	N.S.	Significance	.012*	Significance	N.S.
India	IBM executive	3.65	IBM executive	3.92	IBM executive	1.88
	Medical doctor	3.76	Medical doctor	4.05	Medical doctor	1.79
	Teacher	3.64	Teacher	4.48	Teacher	1.67
	Student	3.65	Student	4.56	Student	1.80
	F-value	1.21	F-value	44.59	F-value	2.91
	Significance	N.S.	Significance	.000***	Significance	.033*
Italy	IBM executive	3.60	IBM executive	4.65	IBM executive	1.73
	Medical doctor	3.55	Medical doctor	4.64	Medical doctor	1.96
	Teacher	3.48	Teacher	4.69	Teacher	2.00
	Student	3.40	Student	4.70	Student	1.98
	F-value	2.31	F-value	.73	F-value	6.56
	Significance	N.S.	Significance	N.S.	Significance	.000***
Georgia, USA	IBM executive	4.34	IBM executive	4.8319	IBM executive	2.11
	Medical doctor	4.32	Medical doctor	4.8398	Medical doctor	2.15
	Teacher	4.24	Teacher	4.8659	Teacher	2.20
	Student	4.30	Student	4.8481	Student	2.24
	F-value	1.41	F-value	.502	F-value	1.45
	Significance	N.S.	Significance	N.S.	Significance	N.S.
Philadelphia, USA	IBM executive	4.06	IBM executive	4.7163	IBM executive	2.25
	Medical doctor	4.01	Medical doctor	4.6851	Medical doctor	2.25
	Teacher	3.93	Teacher	4.7700	Teacher	2.31
	Student	4.01	Student	4.7336	Student	2.28
	F-value	1.77	F-value	1.766	F-value	.25
	Significance	N.S.	Significance	N.S.	Significance	N.S.

*Significant at the 0.05 level.
**Significant at the 0.01 level.
***Significant at the 0.001 level.
N.S. = not significant.

The hypothesis was also not supported in India and Italy. With regard to the library, no significant differences were found in Italy and India. However, in India with regard to the soup kitchen, the teenager and the teacher were considered significantly more of a volunteer than the medical doctor and the IBM executive.

In Italy, with regard to the symphony, the IBM executive was ranked significantly lower than all three other individuals. In other words the "underdog" approach (a reverse status) took precedence in India and Italy: Those who are viewed as least socially strong were considered to invest more by volunteering, hence, contradictory to the opportunity cost hypothesis.

The only minor support to the theory occurred in India. Regarding the symphony, the teacher was considered significantly less of a volunteer than the IBM executive, while all other differences were not statistically significant. Given these findings, it is evident that our first hypothesis was not supported by our findings.

Hypothesis 2

To test the second hypothesis (see Box I), we compared volunteers in three different situations where the same volunteer engaged in similar volunteer activities at recognized charities versus unrecognized charities. To test this hypothesis, we used paired t-tests for each region.

As can be seen in Table III, our hypothesis is largely supported in the volunteer scenarios involving the Breast Cancer Foundation and the United Way, but not supported for the Special Olympics, with the exception of Italy. The trainer who does a workshop for the Breast Cancer Foundation is ranked significantly more of a volunteer than the trainer who does the workshop for an unrecognized organization. This finding was also true for the individual who sat on the board of the United Way versus an unrecognized nonprofit organization.

In the case of the Netherlands, our hypothesis was supported only for the scenario involving the Breast Cancer Foundation but not supported in the case of the United Way and the Special Olympics. In the case of United Way, no significant differences were detected while in the case of Special Olympics a significant difference was found, but in the opposite direction. Italy was the only country to support the hypothesis in the case of Special Olympics, which raises an issue about local and cultural influences. One possible explanation is that Special Olympics, which provides sporting opportunities for individuals with mental developmental disabilities, is unknown in Europe and was therefore substituted by the term Para Olympics in the questionnaire, and may not have been an appropriate substitution.

In general, our findings support the hypothesis in two out of the three volunteer scenarios: the United Way and the Breast Cancer Foundation scenarios (for all of the regions in our study except the Netherlands).

Hypothesis 3

To test the third hypothesis (see Box I), we compared two pairs of questions in each region. We compared a CEO of a local corporation who is volunteer

Table III. Comparison of Means of Items Depicting the Same Volunteer Activity to Unrecognized and Recognized Charities by All Regions (Using Paired T-Test)

	The student who is doing a community service project as part of a high school graduation requirement vs. The student who is helping Special Olympics as part of a high school graduation requirement		The trainer who does a free workshop for an organization as a marketing device vs. The trainer who does a free workshop for the Breast Cancer Foundation as a marketing device		The paid staff person who serves on the board of a nonprofit group in a slot that is reserved for his/her agency vs. The paid staff person who serves on the board of United Way in a slot that is reserved for his/her agency	
Canada	Mean UNREC charity	2.64	Mean UNREC charity	2.46	Mean UNREC charity	1.95
	Mean REC charity	2.65	Mean REC charity	2.59	Mean REC charity	2.17
	T-value	−.534	T-value	−3.70	T-value	−5.07
	Significance	N.S.	Significance	.000***	Significance	.000***
Netherlands	Mean UNREC charity	2.27	Mean UNREC charity	1.78	Mean UNREC charity	1.54
	Mean REC charity	2.22	Mean REC charity	1.87	Mean REC charity	1.45
	T-value	2.45	T-value	−3.08	T-value	−.70
	Significance	.015*	Significance	.002**	Significance	N.S.
India	Mean UNREC charity	2.67	Mean UNREC charity	2.58	Mean UNREC charity	2.34
	Mean REC charity	2.72	Mean REC charity	2.77	Mean REC charity	2.97
	T-value	−1.54	T-value	−4.65	T-value	−9.64
	Significance	N.S.	Significance	.000***	Significance	.000***
Italy	Mean UNREC charity	1.91	Mean UNREC charity	1.67	Mean UNREC charity	2.25
	Mean REC charity	1.96	Mean REC charity	1.81	Mean REC charity	2.61
	T-value	−2.46	T-value	−4.88	T-value	−5.30
	Significance	.015*	Significance	.000***	Significance	.000***
Georgia, USA	Mean UNREC charity	2.58	Mean UNREC charity	2.47	Mean UNREC charity	2.13
	Mean REC charity	2.60	Mean REC charity	2.59	Mean REC charity	2.29
	T-value	−0.73	T-value	−4.12	T-value	−3.39
	Significance	N.S.	Significance	.000***	Significance	.001***
Philadelphia, USA	Mean UNREC charity	2.86	Mean UNREC charity	2.71	Mean UNREC charity	2.27
	Mean REC charity	2.89	Mean REC charity	2.84	Mean REC charity	2.35
	T-value	−1.04	T-value	−3.35	T-value	−1.40
	Significance	N.S.	Significance	.001***	Significance	N.S.

*Significant at the 0.05 level.
**Significant at the 0.01 level.
***Significant at the 0.001 level.
N.S. = not significant.

Table IV. Comparison of Means of Items Depicting Volunteer Activities with Different Costs to the Volunteers by All Regions (Using Paired T-Test)

	The CEO of a local corporation who is volunteer chairperson of the United Way campaign and who delegates all the work to his assistant vs. the assistant to this CEO who does the job for his boss		A member of a community sport club who leads a group of joggers every week vs. the home owner who helps create a crime watch group to safeguard his own neighborhood	
Canada	Mean CEO	2.47	Mean joggers leader	3.67
	Mean assistant	2.73	Mean crime watch	4.07
	T-value	−3.37	T-value	−6.96
	Significance	.000***	Significance	.000***
Netherlands	Mean CEO	2.76	Mean joggers leader	4.50
	Mean assistant	3.00	Mean crime watch	4.48
	T-value	−2.65	T-value	.328
	Significance	.008**	Significance	N.S.
India	Mean CEO	2.02	Mean joggers leader	3.81
	Mean assistant	2.54	Mean crime watch	2.54
	T-value	−7.90	T-value	15.69
	Significance	.000***	Significance	.000***
Italy	Mean CEO	2.10	Mean joggers leader	3.12
	Mean assistant	2.39	Mean crime watch	3.00
	T-value	−4.18	T-value	1.54
	Significance	.000***	Significance	N.S.
Georgia, USA	Mean CEO	2.35	Mean joggers leader	3.66
	Mean assistant	2.84	Mean crime watch	4.22
	T-value	−5.37	T-value	−8.16
	Significance	0.000***	Significance	.000***
Philadelphia, USA	Mean CEO	2.25	Mean joggers leader	3.68
	Mean assistant	2.86	Mean crime watch	4.13
	T-value	−7.84	T-value	−7.04
	Significance	.000***	Significance	.000***

*Significant at the 0.05 level.
**Significant at the 0.01 level.
***Significant at the 0.001 level.
N.S. = not significant.

chairperson of the United Way campaign, and who delegates all the work to his assistant, with the assistant who is delegated this task. We also compared an individual who organizes a crime-watch group with a member of a community sport club who leads a group of joggers every week.

As can be seen in Table IV, the assistant to the CEO exercised little or no free will in carrying out the task delegated to him by his boss (the CEO), however, the assistant is perceived as more of a volunteer than the CEO who willingly accepted the task but did not do the work himself. This was the case in all regions. This comparison examined the case in which both individuals

received different benefits, however, the higher costs of the "volunteer" work accrue to the assistant as compared to the CEO. The findings suggest that the individual who incurs higher net cost and does the work is considered more of a volunteer.

In another comparison relevant to this hypothesis, we vary the amount of work done by two individuals. We compare the individual who has a relatively easier task—to organize a local group of joggers every week—to an individual who daily has to coordinate the difficult task of arranging nightly watch shifts in the neighborhood. We hypothesized that the net cost to the homeowner are higher and, consequently, he or she will be perceived as more of a volunteer than the organizer of the jogging group. This hypothesis was supported only in North America. In the Netherlands and Italy, no significant difference was detected, while in India the leader of the joggers was significantly rated more of a volunteer than the crime-watch coordinator. The latter findings may be because in these countries (the Netherlands, India, and Italy) crime-watch groups are not prevalent, and the description of this activity was not self-explanatory as it was in North America.

In addition, we should discuss one item from the rank order analysis: the "six-month old baby who accompanies her parents to visit seniors at a nursing home." This baby was rated very low (49/50) in all regions (with the exception of India where the baby was ranked 39/50). We suggest that this low ranking is the result of the fact that this baby does not perform any work but simply accompanies her parents; hence, there is no cost nor benefit to the baby. The baby also does not exercise any free choice in whether to join the mother or not, and, thus, may not be considered a volunteer. In other words, the baby performed no work and, hence, her cost was zero. As such, she was not perceived as a volunteer.

Hypothesis 4

To test the fourth hypothesis (see Box I), we compared four individuals (a student, a teacher, a doctor, and an IBM executive) each engaging in the same activity twice, once without an explicit personal benefit and once with a benefit. In the first instance, we presented them as providing time and effort to a soup kitchen, while in the latter we presented them doing the same work to impress a date. It was our hypothesis that if the benefits of the volunteer service increase (i.e., impressing a date, or in India enhancing social contacts) the net costs are lowered, and, hence, the individual who undertakes the volunteer service to impress a date will be perceived as less of a volunteer than the individual who does it for no explicit personal benefit. As can be seen in Table V, in all comparisons in all regions the hypothesis was strongly supported.

Table V. Comparison of Means of Items Depicting the Same Volunteer Activity Performed With and Without Explicit Personal Benefits by All Regions (Using Paired T-Test)

	An IBM Executive		The Medical Doctor		The Teacher		The Teenager	
Canada	Mean w/per ben	2.71	Mean w/per ben	2.66	Mean w/per ben	2.76	Mean w/per ben	2.77
	Mean w/out per ben	4.67	Mean w/out per ben	4.67	Mean w/out per ben	4.77	Mean w/out per ben	4.77
	T-value	−30.92	T-value	−32.69	T-value	−31.83	T-value	−32.77
	Sig.	0.000***	Sig.	0.000***	Sig.	0.000***	Sig.	0.000***
Netherlands	Mean w/per ben	3.61	Mean w/per ben	3.45	Mean w/per ben	3.54	Mean w/per ben	3.60
	Mean w/out per ben	4.74	Mean w/out per ben	4.70	Mean w/out per ben	4.83	Mean w/out per ben	4.79
	T-value	−15.64	T-value	−17.19	T-value	−18.76	T-value	−16.93
	Sig.	0.000***	Sig.	0.000***	Sig.	0.000***	Sig.	0.000***
India	Mean w/per ben	1.24	Mean w/per ben	1.81	Mean w/per ben	1.77	Mean w/per ben	1.94
	Mean w/out per ben	3.92	Mean w/out per ben	4.05	Mean w/out per ben	4.49	Mean w/out per ben	4.56
	T-value	−33.93	T-value	−29.90	T-value	−39.03	T-value	−35.57
	Sig.	0.000***	Sig.	0.000***	Sig.	0.000***	Sig.	0.000***
Italy	Mean w/per ben	2.02	Mean w/per ben	2.00	Mean w/per ben	2.00	Mean w/per ben	2.37
	Mean w/out per ben	4.65	Mean w/out per ben	4.64	Mean w/out per ben	4.69	Mean w/out per ben	4.70
	T-value	−40.30	T-value	−39.74	T-value	−42.31	T-value	−34.63
	Sig.	0.000***	Sig.	0.000***	Sig.	0.000***	Sig.	0.000***
Georgia, USA	Mean w/per ben	2.839	Mean w/per ben	2.81	Mean w/per ben	2.87	Mean w/per ben	2.85
	Mean w/out per ben	4.83	Mean w/out per ben	4.84	Mean w/out per ben	4.87	Mean w/out per ben	4.84
	T-value	−33.43	T-value	−34.43	T-value	−33.69	T-value	−33.32
	Sig.	0.000***	Sig.	0.000***	Sig.	0.000***	Sig.	0.000***
Philadelphia, USA	Mean w/per ben	2.44	Mean w/per ben	2.41	Mean w/per ben	2.40	Mean w/per ben	2.46
	Mean w/out per ben	4.72	Mean w/out per ben	4.68	Mean w/out per ben	4.77	Mean w/out per ben	4.76
	T-value	−32.50	T-value	−31.14	T-value	−34.11	T-value	−32.82
	Sig.	0.000***	Sig.	0.000***	Sig.	0.000***	Sig.	0.000***

*Significant at the 0.05 level.
**Significant at the 0.01 level.
***Significant at the 0.001 level.
N.S. = not significant.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings from the rank order analysis suggest that across all regions in the study, a broad consensus exists regarding who is most definitely a volunteer. Although some variation surfaced regarding who is least likely to be considered a volunteer, the findings show that remuneration (monetary or otherwise) to the individual has a definite negative impact on people's perception of who is a volunteer across all regions. Whether monetary or nonmonetary remuneration is of greater importance in the ranking varies with the region and the cultural context. Nevertheless, private benefits of either kind reduce the net cost to the volunteer and, accordingly, play a significant role in the public perception of who is a volunteer. When people observe an individual personally benefiting (monetary or socially) from volunteering, they rank the individual as less of a volunteer than those who receive no such benefits but incur similar costs.

With the exception of opportunity costs, many of our hypotheses regarding net cost were supported in all the studied regions. As can be seen from the results for Hypothesis 4, when an individual can perform the same service to society with or without a private benefit, people regard the individual receiving a private benefit as less of a volunteer. In addition, when the costs to the individual of volunteering are higher (demanding agency—Hypothesis 2, or demanding work—Hypothesis 3) he or she is rated more of a volunteer.

The intriguing fact that the Hypothesis 1 concerning opportunity cost is not supported in any of the regions needs explanation. The finding that opportunity costs of volunteering do not enter the calculus of net cost, a priori, contradicts the net-cost theory. However, we suggest that in light of the strong support for the net-cost theory from our other hypotheses, it may be the lack of cognition of opportunity costs as predicted by economists. This fact, true across cultures, may be unique to the case of volunteering and needs to be explored further. Another likely explanation for this finding may be that the time taken for volunteering is perceived to come from an individual's leisure time. In this case, the opportunity cost of the volunteer is relatively equal and, hence, opportunity costs do not need to enter the net-cost calculus. Although there exists some literature in the area relating volunteerism to leisure (Stebbins, 1996) this issue also needs further research before conclusive arguments can be made.

As we noted earlier, the "six-month-old baby who accompanies her parents to visit seniors at a nursing home" was rated very low in most regions. We suggested that this low ranking results from the fact that the baby does not incur any cost and accrues no benefits. This case raises an important issue in understanding the net-cost framework. The baby's net cost of zero may serve as a benchmark point for public perceptions regarding who is a volunteer. Furthermore, when the benefits of volunteering outweigh costs to an individual (even with no remuneration), net costs are negative and the individual is no longer considered a volunteer. This deduction may explain why the accountant who embezzled and was required to provide

250 hours of community service in lieu of prosecution was ranked lowest 50/50 in all regions (except India). The accountant in this scenario is viewed as having far more benefits (not losing his professional license, no discomfort and danger of jail, keeping his practice afloat, staying with his family) than the cost he is to incur (250 hours of community service that can be performed at his convenience). In India, as we noted earlier, the benefits are perceived to be far less than in other regions because the probability of successful prosecution leading to a jail sentence is very low, and hence the ratings were higher.

The data strongly support the theory of net cost in explaining public perceptions of who is "more" a volunteer. However, what actually constitutes benefits and costs to the volunteer is a complex calculus requiring further research. Nevertheless, the data show that the higher the perceived net cost to the volunteer of a certain volunteer activity the higher the individual is ranked as a volunteer. This trend is prevalent for all the regions, and without exception it is significant at the two polar ends of who is "definitely" a volunteer and who is not.

Our model suggests that the public views the private net cost to the volunteer and infers from this the volunteer's valuation of public benefit of the activity. Hence, we focused our attention on the net cost and ignored the other side of the inequality, the public benefit. Support for this approach comes from the ranking of a few activities that depicted volunteer work where there was no free will. For example, the assistant to the CEO and the high school students who were required to provide community service in order to graduate were ranked at the middle. Being forced to do the work indicates no free will in the choice of the activity and, hence, very little or no personal valuation of public benefits associated with the specific activity undertaken. However, ranking of these individuals in the middle indicates that these individuals are indeed perceived as volunteers. Thus, our model suggests correctly that net costs are used to infer the individual's valuation of the public benefits associated with the activity and not vice versa. This finding lends strong support to the fact that the public assesses the individual's net cost as a means to assess who is more or less a volunteer.

We also note that the public perception of a volunteer is much more sensitive to the benefits the individual receives from the volunteering activity than to the costs incurred. This is especially true in the case of opportunity costs to the individual of volunteering, which do not seem to enter the cost calculus. The data showed the absence of any effect of opportunity costs on the ranking of the volunteers for all regions studied and for all scenarios. By contrast, the monetary and nonmonetary benefits received from the volunteering activity did play a crucial role in how the individual was perceived as a volunteer.

We are not able to say much about other motives for volunteering that are not explicit. We do assume that most volunteers are not purely altruistic, and acknowledge the fact that they benefit from the volunteer experience (or else they would soon quit). However, for an individual to be perceived as a volunteer, the perceived costs should clearly outweigh the benefits.

In this article we demonstrated that net cost serves as the common denominator of all four dimensions of volunteering identified by Cnaan, Handy, and Wadsworth (1996). In all four dimensions the more altruistic the person, the higher the net cost. It seems to us that this application of net cost to understanding volunteering is helpful in defining who is not a volunteer (the person whose net cost is negative) and who is perceived as more of a volunteer. One should keep in mind that there can be a positive net cost in activities that are outside the realm of volunteering, thus it is required that the output of the volunteer activity produces public or private benefits for others. Still, we need further conceptual and empirical work to clarify the ambiguity inherent in the term *volunteering*, and we hope that our contribution is a modest step in that direction.

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