Disaster Handling through Volunteering and Charitable Donation: The Roles of South Korean Telethon, Involvement, and Collective-Efficacy

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Abstract

This study examined whether South Koreans' philanthropic behaviors were related to the factors of two theoretical frameworks. From the involvement perspective, the study argued that three types of involvement with a telethon may be linked to volunteering and charitable donation behaviors. At the collective level, collective-efficacy may also be related to such behaviors. The study asked 279 South Koreans to respond to a Web survey that used convenience sampling. Results found that after controlling for demographics and past volunteer experiences, cognitive and behavioral involvement and collective-efficacy were positively related to volunteering behaviors, but affective involvement was not related. Moreover, only behavioral involvement and collective-efficacy were positively related to charitable donation. These results suggest that researchers and practitioners for volunteering resources need to use effective programs and contents for such behaviors in order to enhance involvement and level of collective-efficacy among community members in times of disaster

Keywords: volunteering, charitable donation, telethon, involvement, collective-efficacy.

Introduction

In situations of disaster, community members' active philanthropic participation, such as volunteering and charitable donations, is vital to managing the well-being and safety of people in need. In addition to volunteer organizations, all societal members (e.g., community residents, for-profit organizations, non-profit organizations, governments, and mass media practitioners) should closely cooperate to cope with such situations. In particular, considerable attention can be paid to the role of mass media in disaster handling because mass communication can effectively function to mobilize philanthropic behaviors in the wider population (Silverman, Robertson, Middlebrook, & Frabman, 1984). By utilizing mass communication channels, volunteer resource administrators of non-profit organizations can attempt to engage community members in philanthropic activities.

Before the time of disaster, it is crucial to prepare and maintain a positive community atmosphere that would support philanthropic participation through collective and shared efforts as well as individual concern with and preparedness for disaster. Accordingly, community members would be more likely to manage disasters' aftereffects effectively by collaborating with other members. In other words, one useful approach to disaster preparedness and handling may include understanding potential volunteers' and donors' perceived involvement with and control over the problem. Their high level of perceptions of involvement and confidence that they can control the situation may ensure their participation in volunteer and charitable activities via mass media during times of disasters. Thus, this study examines whether a mass communication channel such as a telethon can form community members' perceptions of involvement with and control over disasters, which can in turn lead to philanthropic participation. An understanding of the use of mass communication channels and those perceptions at the individual and collective level suggests practical implications for the effective management in recruiting volunteers and raising financial resources.

South Korean Telethons

A telethon, a portmanteau of "telephone" and "marathon," refers to a televised program designed to promote volunteering or charitable donations by simultaneously reaching a host of viewers. The national public broadcasting networks of South Korea have aired three weekly telethon program shows so far. The oldest telethon in the

country has aired over 700 broadcasts since its 1997 debut, while the most recent one began in 2010. South Korean telethons are characterized by their unique format consisting of the stories of clients in need (e.g., the deprived, the disabled, and patients with insufficient finances or emergencies) while media personalities or public figures often sing songs for entertainment. The stories of the clients are also often reconstructed as a drama-documentary aired during the telethon program shows, in which the masters of ceremonies encourage viewers to donate money or talents to the clients. Moreover, viewers are sometimes asked to volunteer for the clients residing even outside the country. In particular, when telling stories of the clients suffering from poverty, economic crises, and natural disasters, the telethons frequently emphasize affective and humanitarian aspects of the stories. For example, some cases tell stories of the deprived who were victims of fire or traffic accidents. Methods to donate money or apply to volunteer include making a phone call, sending a text message, or doing an account transfer. When a serious issue, such as economic crises or natural disasters, occurs inside or outside country, the telethon programs take action to improve the matter. Despite the long tradition of South Korean telethons, scholarship examining the effect of telethons on altruistic activities remains relatively undeveloped (Kim, Choi, & Kim, 2012). However, to understand the use of telethons for disaster preparedness and handling this study reviews the following theoretical frameworks: involvement and collective-efficacy.

Three Types of Involvement

Although the definition and measurement of involvement vary (Aldoory, 2001), research has suggested that involvement with an issue is a crucial factor in exploring people's communication behaviors within the context of organization-public relationships and mass media (Heath & Douglas, 1990; Rubin, 2002). Due to the various definitions of involvement, it is necessary to identify its proper meaning to understand volunteer and donation behaviors in a media setting such as telethon. One definition states that involvement refers to the extent to which individuals are connected with an issue (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). This reflects the extent of one's psychological personal relevance to an issue. Prior research found that involvement with volunteer services generates valuable outcomes for adolescence, such as increased perceptions of community belonging and social responsibility (McGuire & Gamble, 2006). Moreover, involvement of volunteers with non-profit organizations is more likely to generate

supportive behaviors toward the organizations in the future (Bortree, 2011). Greater involvement also correlates with individuals' making larger donations (Kelly, 1998).

Based on the uses and gratifications perspective coined by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973-1974), Rubin and his colleagues (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Rubin, 2002; Rubin & Perse, 1987) articulated that media audience members' differences, such as involvement, mediate and control media effects. Audience members are variably, not absolutely, active enough to gratify their needs or wants through communication channels, instead of being passive recipients of messages. That is, media influence tends to rest on such psychological elements. Rubin (2002) indicates that television viewing enables involvement of audience with media personalities, escape from unpleasant life experiences, decrease of anxiety, opportunity for play, and agenda setting. These media functions can reveal why audience members prefer certain communication channels and contents to others. For example, some audiences may view a telethon to help those in need, whereas others may view it to seek entertainment or information.

In the mass media settings, people's involvement can comprise three levels: affective involvement, cognitive involvement, and behavioral involvement (Rubin & Perse, 1987). Involved telethon viewers react emotionally to, think about, and talk about the messages delivered by the telethon show during and after exposure. If viewers feel affection toward those in need (i.e., affective involvement), consider the messages in the show (i.e., cognitive involvement), and talk about the show with others (i.e., behavioral involvement), they are more likely to volunteer or donate, whether by telephone or by other means. This study assumes that understanding how viewers communicate and perceive its messages can help explain their actual and future donation behaviors. From this perspective, telethon viewers can be considered to be variably, not absolutely, active enough to gratify viewers' needs or wants, such as philanthropic participation during the times of disasters. This activity of telethon viewers reflects a more purposive, attentive, and involved state of telethon use, which can lead to such participation in disaster situations. Therefore, this study investigates whether greater involvement with parties that are affected by a disaster and portrayed via telethon can positively affect telethon viewers' future intended behavior to volunteer or donate money:

RQ1: To what extent do three types of involvement with a television program positively affect viewers' volunteering and donation to people in need during the situations of disaster?

Collective-Efficacy

In addition to the individual level of volunteering and donation, members of communities and volunteer organizations should find opportunities to connect to and to create a positive environment to collaborate at the collective level. Even in situations of disasters marked by damage and loss, community members often need to make collective efforts to benefit all societal members. Through interactions and relationships, they can increase the capacity for collaborative action in a process which has come to be known as collective-efficacy (Bandura, 1995). Collective-efficacy refers to the perceived capability of community members to manage, utilize, and enhance the resources available to them to resolve a certain problem. Specifically, Bandura defined this concept as "people's beliefs in their joint capabilities to forge divergent self-interests into a shared agenda, to enlist supporters and resources for collective action, to devise effective strategies and to execute them successfully, and to withstand forcible opposition and discouraging setback" (p. 33). That is, it can serve as a collective driving force of community members to manage risks, crises, and uncertainty.

Past research (Papa et al., 2000) noted that certain mass media programs can create opportunities for audiences to individually and collectively consider new thoughts and behaviors. Moreover, self-efficacy and collective-efficacy tend to be determined by involvement of audiences with programs (Sood, 2002). In other words, certain media content may have critical influence on individual and social change by drawing audiences' attention to socially desirable behaviors, including donation and volunteering. Those audiences who are affectively or cognitively involved with certain media content may attempt interpersonal communication, including conversations, among other community members. Furthermore, audiences with a strong sense of collective-efficacy formed by such media content will be more likely to consider changes in their own behavior.

Disaster preparedness and handling is a collective behavior performed by all community members rather than an individual decision-making. They should develop a shared action to help those in need by participating in volunteer and charitable donation activities. In addition, because they sometimes work with members of non-profit

organizations, greater perceptions of confidence in control over the disaster as a collaborative effort with other societal members may help them believe that they can attain their goal more easily. That is, their collective beliefs in managing their problems and difficulties tend to produce desired outcomes through collective action (Bandura, 2000). Notably, collective-efficacy is found to be a significant precondition for change in altruistic behavior, such as donating blood (Jin & Lee, 2012). Accordingly, at the collective level, community members' strong joint beliefs in coping with their problems during the time of disaster may determine the initiation of philanthropic behaviors, including volunteering and donations. If so, community members, as social animals, will be able to resolve their problems more effectively. Therefore, the following research question is suggested:

RQ2: To what extent does collective-efficacy positively affect individuals' volunteer and donation behaviors towards people in need during the situations of disaster?

Method

Because 97% of South Korean households have Internet access and 65% of individuals aged 16 to 74 use the Internet at least once a day (SK & ES, 2012), it was reasonable to conduct a Web survey. A South Korean research firm, which had approximately 2,000 pre-recruited panel members residing in South Korea, conducted the survey. The survey was set to collect data from 300 respondents via email on a first come, first served basis in exchange for monetary compensation. Web survey participants were assured that their participation is voluntary and that their information and responses are anonymous. The survey first screened unqualified respondents (21 cases) who have not watched any South Korean telethons over the last year. Therefore, the valid cases included 279 respondents (N=279).

This study adopted and modified Rubin and Perse's (1987) measures of different types of involvement: 1) Affective involvement (α = .662, M = 5.138, SD = 1.095) was assessed with two statements: "I felt sorry about the difficulties of the deprived on the telethon show" and "I felt that I wanted to meet the deprived on the show to encourage them." 2) Cognitive involvement (α = .805, M = 4.934, SD = 1.024) was measured with three statements: "I have thought about the story of the deprived on the show after

watching it," "I have thought about the future life of the deprived on the show after watching it," and "I have thought about the importance of helping the deprived on the show. " 3) Behavioral involvement ($\alpha = .837$, $M = 4.389$, $SD = 1.267$) was reflected by the following two items: "I have talked about the life story of the deprived on the show with others" and "I have talked about the difficulties of the deprived on the show with others." All items were measured on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) Likert scale.

Collective-efficacy was gauged by adopting items from previous research (Jin & Lubbers, 2006). It included three items measured on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) Likert scale: "I am certain that, as community members, we are able to create a positive community environment to handle disasters through our shared efforts," "I am convinced that, as community members, we are able to share an interest in disaster preparedness since we are capable of handling it," and "We, as our community members, have control over managing disasters because we stick together" ($\alpha = .877$, $M = 4.047$, $SD = 1.135$). Finally, participants also provided information about their demographics — sex, age, level of education, religion (no or yes), monthly income, and volunteer experiences (no or yes) — and indicated their overall exposure to telethons on a six-point scale ranging from 1 (never watched) to 6 (almost always watched): ($M = 2.890$, $SD = .973$).

This study also measured two dependent variables: 1) Intent to volunteer for people in need during a disaster situation ($M = 4.180$, $SD = 1.362$) and 2) intent to donate money for people in need during a disaster ($M = 4.100$, $SD = 1.369$). These two items were also measured on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) Likert scale.

Results

Of the 279 respondents, the majority were male (51.6%), held a college degree (53.4%), were a member of a religion (50.9%), and had volunteer experience (64.9%). The respondents ranged in age from 13 to 62 with the mean age being 31 years ($SD = 9.212$). The monthly income of most participants (29.0%) ranged from 1,000,000 to 2,000,000 won (approximately $1,084 to $2,169 USD). Moreover, as presented in Table 1, all correlations among the observed key variables were significant at a p-value of .01 (two-tailed).

Table 1

Zero-Order Correlation Coefficients for Observed Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Telethon viewing	-						
2. Affective involvement	.188	-					
3. Cognitive involvement	.342	.731	-				
4. Behavioral involvement	.408	.461	.593	-			
5. Collective-Efficacy	.397	.360	.416	.343	-		
6. Intent to volunteer	.403	.322	.420	.398	.468	-	
7. Intent to donate	.357	.241	.339	.347	.426	.613	-

$N = 279$

Note: All the correlations are significant at the .01 of *p*-value (two-tailed).

RQ1 and RQ2 asked whether 1) greater involvement with difficulties that telethon shows portray and 2) heightened perception of collective-efficacy can positively affect telethon viewers' future intended behavior to volunteer or donate money for people in need during a disaster situation. To determine the unique variance of the key independent variables (i.e., three types of involvement and collective-efficacy) in two different dependent variables (intent to volunteer and intent to donate), two hierarchical regression analyses were performed. For control purposes, demographics (block 1: sex, age, level of education, monthly income, and religion) and past volunteer experiences (block 2) entered each regression model.

As presented in Table 2, the first regression model accounted for 34.5% of the total variance in the intent to volunteer for people in need during times of disaster, indicated by its total R^2. In the first block [$F(5, 273) = 2.181, p > .05$], only one variable — sex ($\beta = .131, p < .05$) — significantly affected the intent. Past volunteer experiences ($\beta = .251, p < .001$) entered in the second block also showed a significant effect on the intent to volunteer. The variables entered in the second block contributed 6.2% of the explanatory power [$F(1, 272) = 18.767, p < .001$] by its R^2 change from 3.8% to 10%. In the third block [$F(4, 268) = 25.006, p < .001$], R^2 change from 10.0% to 34.5% occurs, the results indicated that cognitive involvement ($\beta = .199, p < .05$), behavioral involvement ($\beta = .152, p < .05$), and collective-efficacy ($\beta = .328, p < .001$) significantly affected the first

dependent variable. These findings show that when controlling for the effects of demographics and past volunteering, individuals' greater perceptions of cognitive and behavioral involvement with people in need appearing in telethon shows tend to increase their future intended behavior to volunteer for people in need during a disaster situation. Moreover, their heightened perception of collective-efficacy of control over managing disasters is also more likely to increase their intent to volunteer. Additionally, women and those who had any volunteer experiences in the past may be positively associated with the intent to volunteer.

Table 2.

Hierarchical Regressions on Intent to Volunteer and Donate

		Intent to Volunteer		Intent to Donate	
Predictors		β (*t*)	R^2	β (*t*)	R^2
Block 1	Sex	.131 (2.108)*		.079 (1.272)*	
	Age	.072 (1.054)		-.010 (-.148)	
	Education	.043 (.627)		-.063 (-.932)	
	Income	.096 (1.309)		.195 (2.649)	
	Religion	.070 (1.136)		.090 (1.464)	
			.038		.037
Block 2	Past volunteer	.251(4.332)***		.085(1.427)***	
			.100***		.044
Block 3	Affective Involvement	-.037 (-.505)		-.069 (-.877)	
	Cognitive Involvement	.199 (2.439)*		.143 (1.630)	
	Behavioral Involvement	.152 (2.405)*		.158 (2.325)*	
	Collective-Efficacy	.328 (5.730)***		.339 (5.520)***	
			.345***		.248***

Notes. Values are standardized regression coefficients with *t* values in parentheses. Gender was coded as 0 (male) and 1 (female); Religion as 0 (no) and yes (1); Past volunteering experiences as 0 (no) and yes (1). *$p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 2 also shows that the second regression model explained 24.8% of total variance in the intent to donate money in disaster situations. Except for monthly income (β = .195, p < .01), none of variables in the first block significantly affected the intent to donate money to people in need [$F(5, 273)$ = 2.101, p > .05]. Past volunteer experiences (β = .085, p > .05) added in the second block also failed to significantly affect the dependent variable [$F(1, 272)$ = 2.036, p > .05]. In the final block [$F(4, 268)$ = 18.107, p < .001], only behavioral involvement (β = .158, p < .05) and collective-efficacy (β = .339, p < .001) had a significant impact on the dependent variable. Thus, these findings indicate that after controlling for the statistical effect of demographics and past volunteering, higher levels of behavioral involvement with people in need presented on telethons and collective-efficacy will be more likely to increase donations for people in need during disaster situations. In addition, monthly income tends to affect donating behavior.

Discussion

Volunteer resource administrators (VRAs) of non-profit organizations should develop effective strategies and program content to recruit volunteers and raise financial resources. By drawing on two theoretical concepts, this study added important dimensions of involvement and collective-efficacy during disaster handling or preparedness. The findings revealed that telethon viewers' cognitive and behavioral involvement with a telethon show related positively to their behavioral intent to volunteer during times of disaster, while only behavioral involvement related positively to the intent to donate money. In addition, individuals' strong perception of collective-efficacy is more likely to increase their intent to volunteer and donate money during disaster handling or preparedness. These findings provide the following critical implications for the profession in South Korea and perhaps other countries.

Given that telethon viewers react to its messages and content by thinking and talking about the messages delivered by telethon shows, managers of volunteer resources should design a volunteer program with appropriate messages and content, such as logical appeals, for a volunteer recruitment during times of disaster. Surprisingly, this study found that emotional involvement was not related to viewers' behavioral intent to volunteer. This suggests that cognitive and behavioral dimensions of involvement have a stronger effect on volunteering and donating in disaster situations as compared to

emotional ones in disaster situations although emotional involvement should not be ignored. Through a range of volunteer recruitment programs and contents, VRAs can attempt to increase a high level of cognitive and behavioral involvement among non-active volunteers in disaster handling and preparedness. For example, they can conduct volunteer recruitment programs in which messages underscore the serious consequences of the difficult times.

For a charitable fund drive through mass media channels, theoretical implications should be noted, including the importance of the role of media in influencing involvement. As Rubin (2002) maintained that mass media, by themselves, do not necessarily cause audience effects. Therefore, emphasis should be placed more on psychological aspects of media users. For example, understanding attention, utility, intentionality, selectivity, and audience involvement can help to explain how particular attitudes and behaviors emerge. Individuals' telethon viewership reasons, motivations, plans, and choices can mediate such media effects as donation behaviors, and individuals' affective, cognitive, and behavioral involvement with the content of a telethon can also affect intent to volunteer and donate.

In addition to the involvement at the individual level, collective-efficacy at the community level acted as a strong precondition for volunteering and charitable donation in this study. This offers some guidance for VRAs who want to increase the likelihood of recruiting potential volunteers and charitable donors. First, VRAs need to create opportunities for potential volunteers to collaboratively share skills and experiences. That is, experienced volunteers may encourage potential volunteers to participate in volunteering programs where knowledge and skills can be learned from experienced volunteers. By creating such a positive environment, they will be able to actively search for solutions when the need for volunteers and donors during times of difficulty in their community. Furthermore, offering such opportunities for collaboration through diverse volunteering programs may strengthen experienced volunteers' internal confidence in control over emergency management.

Moreover, positive volunteer experiences need to be offered to all community group members. By working together with colleges, religious organizations, the military, or mass media (e.g., television, newspapers, or the Internet), those who have poor perceptions of volunteering because of their experiences or have few, although

satisfactory, volunteer experiences may benefit greatly from observing all community groups overcome their difficulties via collaboration. In particular, if those people experience the positive process and outcomes of volunteering (e.g., efficiency of volunteering management process and detailed performance feedback), their collective-efficacy would also improve.

Ways to increase collective-efficacy for volunteering and charitable donation may vary with different cultures and situations. It should be noted that other factors, such as trust and neighborliness, could also affect collective-efficacy. In some cultures where lower levels of trust and neighborliness exist, more effort needs to be made to enhance such factors through proper community activities that would reflect their cultures and contexts. VRAs of non-profit organizations need to consider this to increase the collaborative efforts of all the community group members to prepare for serious disasters.

Moreover, this study suggests another theoretical implication for collective-efficacy and telethons. Collective-efficacy was found to be a critical determinant of philanthropic behaviors. In particular, collective-efficacy appears to be helpful in solving a community problem in difficult situations and may be affected by media programs such as a telethon. If telethon viewers perceive a strong sense of collective-efficacy through mass media, they will be more likely to perform socially desirable behaviors with other community members to solve their problems.

Despite its theoretical and practical implications, this study is subject to a few limitations. First, its cross-sectional analyses may preclude insight into the causal direction of the effects of involvement and collective-efficacy. Moreover, a more balanced random sample would broaden the generalizability of similar research. This study also needs to develop more reliable measures of the two types of involvement because they were measured with only two items. For example, additional items for affective and behavioral involvement may be developed as follows: "I felt that I understand the emotions of the deprived on the telethon show experiences and felt sorry about their difficulties," and "I have talked about my emotions of the deprived on the show with others." For these reasons, future research, which uses other measures and datasets as points of comparison with the results of this study, is called for.

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