The Salience of Motivations in Recruitment Messages for Environmental Volunteerism

Alicia Shapiro
Advisor: Stanley Asah
University of Washington, School of Environmental and Forest Sciences, Summer 2014

ABSTRACT
Considering the extensive environmental issues our planet is currently facing, ecological restoration initiatives are an increasingly important tool. While immensely influential, these initiatives are faced with extensive financial constraints, turning to stakeholder and volunteer involvement to achieve their restoration goals. Organizations implement a variety of social and ecological motivational themes to recruit volunteers, and the closer these values line up to personal motivations, the more likely they are to attract and retain volunteers. Calculating the frequency and position of these themes within the text, and images of recruitment messages will help us better understand the salience of motivations for environmental volunteerism. Social themes were utilized more within the text of recruitment messages, while ecological themes were more salient in titles and images. Organizations use social motivations because they are often able to fulfill the motives of the volunteers while addressing larger societal problems as well as environmental issues. Evaluating the social and ecological motivational strategies currently employed to recruit for ecological restoration projects will help us understand how to enhance the number of volunteers participating, and how to retain existing volunteers.

INTRODUCTION
Efforts to conserve and restore the environment face financial, labor, time and resource limitations. The economic downturn resulted in overall budget cuts and “the role of the government in financing various services is decreasing” (Widjaja 2010). This puts greater pressure and responsibility on non-profit organizations to provide these services. Environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity are becoming more pressing issues, so the demand for conservation is growing yet “volunteer-dependent conservation organizations are constrained by low volunteer involvement” (Asah & Blaha 2012). With financial struggles of their own, these organizations are increasingly relying on volunteers to participate in conservation programs. In order to accomplish these ecological goals, we need to understand how to effectively attract and retain volunteers.

Functionalism proposes that “the success of efforts to change attitudes and behaviors depends on the extent to which such efforts address the functions those attitudes and behaviors serve” (Asah & Blaha 2013). These functions, referred to as motivations, are the driving force behind volunteer involvement. Research regarding social motivations explains, “motivations are the guiding forces of people’s decisions to volunteer, their search for appropriate volunteer opportunities, and their continuing service” (Dunning 129). Thus, in order to enhance involvement, the recruitment motivations must match the personal motivations of the volunteer.

Due to the importance of volunteer involvement, we must make sure the recruitment themes match the motivations of the volunteers. We will explore which motivational themes are most salient in order to improve recruitment and retention for environmental volunteerism. “Several scholars have shown that both environment-related and several non-environmental factors, including emotions, motivate pro-environmental volunteering behaviors” (Asah, Lenentine, Blaha 2014). These factors are often categorized as social motivations or ecological motivations. By assessing the position and frequency of social and ecological themes within the title, text, and images of recruitment messages, we can determine the salience of motivations. Organizations can then use this information to improve recruitment strategies and enhance volunteer participation and retention.

METHODS
For both the title and body of the recruitment messages, record: The motivational themes found within the message
- Frequency of social themes
- Frequency of ecological themes
- Position of the social themes
- Position and ecological themes
For images (other than logos) within the recruitment message, record:
- The number of people within the image
- Diversity (number of different ethnicities)
- Percentage of the image that represents social themes
- Percentage that represents ecological themes

RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Common In Text Representation</th>
<th>Social Themes</th>
<th>Ecological Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Volunteerism</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recruitment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION

Based on the frequency and position, ecological themes were more salient in the titles of recruitment messages. The title is of a message, in this case an email, is meant to briefly describe the contents or the purpose. If the message aims to recruit environmental volunteers, the title will likely contain a short description of the volunteer opportunity. The majority of the environmental volunteer opportunities are ecological in nature, so the titles tend to focus on ecological motivational themes. I think the reason for doing this is to give the reader information on the type of opportunity they are advertising, rather than convince them to participate. This type of conventional strategy is informative, but it may not be the most influential in attracting volunteer attention. Previous studies found that “ecologically focused strategies are likely to be less effective for motivating more frequent participation than motivationally based appeals to personal and social motivations of urban conservation” (Asah & Blaha 2013). Due to the fact that the title is the first thing the potential volunteer will see, organizations ought to optimize social themes as well, which are more salient in volunteer motivations.

Overall, social motivations were much more salient within the text of the recruitment messages based on their frequency and position. Social themes were more frequent in roughly 65% of the message texts, showing that they were the dominant motivational tools used. Organizations emphasized these specific motivations because “attention to these personal, social and community-building motivations may help enhance volunteers’ commitment to conservation stewardship and address the pressing challenge of retaining urban conservation volunteers” (Asah & Blaha 2013). Social motivations cover a more diverse range of themes, which could be helpful in recruitment when the messages are not personalized. Social themes are more likely to reach a wider audience and there is a greater chance that one of the many different social themes is going to match with a possible volunteer motivation. Ecological motivations are all related to the environment, so the audience that they reach is smaller and more specific.

Social and ecological themes were represented equally within the images of the recruitment messages, with the number dominated by social themes (15) equal to that dominated by ecological themes. The average percentage of each photo that exemplified social motivations was 42.3% and social themes was 50.9%. This is due to the fact that the images often consisted of volunteers participating in fieldwork. This shows social interactions while in an ecological setting. Although “social-psychological benefits appear to be more salient than pro-environmental motivations to volunteers,” this seemed effective method to portray the work of their organization (Asah, Blaha, Lenentine 2014). Although this strategy doesn’t optimize social themes, it instills a sense of connectedness or closeness of people and the environment. The range of 0-21 people within the photos, with an average of 5 people, shows that the organizations want to promote diversity. This is a social motivation, and is likely done to appeal to a wider audience of volunteers and fosters an attitude of diversification.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Thank you to Stanley Asah for your guidance and advice throughout my college career.

LITERATURE CITED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Social Themes</th>
<th>Ecological Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Volunteering is a great way to get involved in your community and make a difference”</td>
<td>“Volunteering is a great way to get involved in your community and make a difference”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>