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The Perceived Usefulness and Ease of Use on Virtual Volunteerism among Youths in Malaysia: A Case Study of Yayasan AFS Antarabudaya Malaysia

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Abstract

This research paper examines the perceived usefulness and ease of use of virtual volunteering through online platforms. The study collected data from 200 participants to explore their attitudes and perceptions towards virtual volunteering. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents perceived online platforms as highly useful for volunteering activities. They strongly agreed that virtual volunteering provided a good way for volunteers and NGOs to engage in meaningful activities, and they recognized the cost-efficiency and time-efficiency of virtual volunteering. Additionally, respondents expressed positive attitudes towards the ease of use of online platforms for volunteering. They found sharing volunteering information, carrying out volunteering activities, and communicating with other volunteers to be straightforward and convenient through online platforms. Overall, the study highlights the potential of virtual volunteering to expand volunteer engagement and provide flexible opportunities for individuals to contribute to social causes. These findings contribute to the existing literature on virtual volunteering and emphasize the importance of online platforms in facilitating efficient and accessible volunteering experiences.

Keywords: Virtual Volunteering, Online Platform, Perceived Usefulness, Ease of Use, COVID-19

Introduction

Volunteering is the act of executing a service with the purpose of aiding a specific person or group that is free from external pressure and can be conducted either individually or in groups (Normah *et al.*, 2023). According to Grönlund & Falk (2019), the role of volunteering can range from providing basic welfare aids to complementing them in informal service roles. In addition, Tierney and Mahtani (2020) stated that volunteering may encourage well-being

especially to those with few social connections as through these efforts it helps to establish social ties that can generate trust which then prompt the community to feel more secure.

Volunteer support for non-profits across the globe has plummeted ever since the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world. A survey done by Fidelity Charitable elucidated that two-thirds of volunteers had reduced or stopped contributing their time entirely during pandemic (Nonprofit Business Advisor, 2021). Although this occurred due to safety reasons for some, or anxiety and fear, it somehow has caused a huge gap in available support especially for the non-profits during a period where demand for various of their services had significantly arisen. Despite the situation of the new norm, non-profits ought to stay relevant in the field by searching creative alternatives in conducting related efforts to put volunteers to use. Thus, this study is meant to discover the perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of conducting alternative volunteering efforts through online platform.

The Relevancy and Practicality of Virtual Volunteering

The relevance of volunteering in virtual space is ever-present within this connection of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the eminence of technological advancement in our contemporary times (Lachance, 2021) and the currently unraveling overarching process of digitalization (Ackermann & Manatschal, 2018). In relation to that, social distancing for instance is the most common standard operating procedure (SOP) to contain virus spread. This leads to volunteer opportunities that could be carried out virtually or remotely from own home (Lachance, 2021).

Virtual volunteering has been used by many individuals as a medium for establishing skills that could enrich their paid positions as well as for learning opportunities or exploring new experiences to be a helping hand to others. For some, virtual volunteering gives them more options on cause and organization selections, and preferred location for volunteering works. Aside from that, there are also people who volunteer as a means to obtain access to inaccessible information pertinent to their works, nevertheless there are others who are determined to volunteer due to social behavior in which the more people they encounter and recognize in real world, the more they feel attached to the virtual community (Nor *et al.*, 2019)

Resonated with the statement by Lachance (2021) earlier, physical volunteering seems quite impossible to be entirely conducted with social distancing being the main priority due to safety reason. However, virtual volunteering permits non-profits to transition their volunteering activities online and volunteers may still be engaged in their leisure activity at home during COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. And in response to COVID-19, many organizations reported conducting online fundraising campaigns, carrying out morale-boosting digital music events and venturing on internet-based advocacy (Perold *et al.*, 2021). Other tasks such as strategic planning, execution, and performance evaluation, or even preserving relationship with external stakeholders can still be completed through virtual arena during COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, making volunteering-related tasks accessible and practical through technology despite the circumstances.

Cravens (2006) agreed that virtual volunteering is beyond cost-savings, as geographical limitations are broken with virtual spaces, broadening the participation of volunteers from

different regions or countries across the globe which was also supported by (Volunteer Canada, 2019). International online volunteers occasionally provide expertise and experiences that local organizations did not have. The involvement of international volunteers could intensify the diversity and open the minds and thinking of local organizations.

The Ease of Use and Flexibility of Virtual Volunteering

Exploring on virtual volunteering is something beneficially exciting. Aside from the practicality or usefulness of it, it also influences the ease of use of the volunteers involved. According to Nor *et al* (2019), perceived ease of use in this case refers to the extent to which the community consider that it is easy to use and apply any of the ICT tools for volunteering purpose. In her study, respondents prefer to volunteer through online platform since it helps them to perform volunteering activities remotely from anywhere and at any time easily.

This kind of flexibility in virtual volunteering is a worthy point of discussion among volunteers. Lachance (2019) amplified that volunteers may have the freedom of autonomously perform volunteering activities and allowing them to break the previous factors that limit their accessibility such as the time and additional commitments of family and work from the comfort of their own places mainly during COVID-19 pandemic. The ease of use of virtual volunteering permits the volunteers to be significantly involved but able to attend to other personal matters at home.

By being an easy alternative to volunteering, Nonprofit Business Advisor (2021) added that various non-profits continue to publicize information on virtual volunteer opportunities on their websites, that assist to match volunteers with suitable openings of volunteer-related works. However, it was suggested that non-profits to provide latest COVID-safe ways which could help volunteers to still participate without such concern.

Millennials, unlike earlier generations, who pursued advancement, authority and jurisdiction, accentuate more on connection and success. They are determined to join communities who share similar ideas and experiences often via volunteer works (Sengupta & Al-Khalifa, 2022). Youths especially made up the biggest portion of virtual volunteering hence giving this age group added advantage due to their technological upbringings and surroundings. As some school and university leavers were not able to seek permanent employment especially during COVID-19 pandemic, virtual volunteering grants them the opportunity to participate, gain experience and exposure, establish knowledge and skills for future self-improvement. Virtual volunteering could instill the youth's interest and give comfort to them in dealing with technology and making volunteering efforts in virtual spaces (Lachance, 2019).

Methodology

A quantitative approach was used to acquire the research objectives. Self-administered questionnaires consisting of three sections were distributed for the purpose of this study which explore the effects of perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use on virtual volunteerism among youths in Malaysia aside from the demographic profiles of the respondents. The survey was distributed through online platform to the sample of the population which is the volunteers of Yayasan AFS Antarabudaya Malaysia. Yayasan AFS Antarabudaya Malaysia is an international non-governmental organization that provides

volunteering physically and virtually. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) suggested that the suitable sample size for a population of 400 people is 196. Thus, 200 respondents were randomly selected as the sample for this study and had successfully completed answering the questionnaires. The justification for the selection of this organization is based on the activeness in volunteering activities both physically and virtually. As for the analysis method, descriptive (percentage) analysis was used for the data obtained.

Findings and Discussion

The Perceived Usefulness of Virtual Volunteering

Based on Table 1, the study's findings shows that online platform is very useful in implementing virtual volunteering where majority of the respondents respond with strongly agree to the statement of online platform provides a good way for volunteering activities to both volunteers and NGO (47.5%) and participating in virtual volunteering is more cost-efficient (62.5%). Meanwhile most of the respondents agree that participating in virtual volunteering is time-efficient (35%). Agree is the most answered by respondents which majority of them showed positive responses to all the items in Table 1 and overall respondents find online platform is useful in volunteering activities (57.5%).

Table 1

The Perceived Usefulness of Virtual Volunteering (n=200)

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
<i>Online platform makes virtual volunteering easier to perform compared to physical volunteering.</i>	2.5%	27.5%	47.5%	22.5%
<i>Using online platform allows me to expand the scale of my volunteering efforts beyond borders.</i>	5%	12.5%	37.5%	45%
<i>Using online platform makes it easier to conduct volunteering efforts.</i>	10%	15%	45%	30%
<i>Participating in virtual volunteering is more time-efficient.</i>	2.5%	17.5%	45%	35%
<i>Participating in virtual volunteering is more cost-effective.</i>	2.5%	5%	30%	62.5%
<i>Online platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet are often used to facilitate volunteering activities virtually.</i>	0	0	32.5%	67.5%
<i>Online platform widens my volunteering experiences.</i>	7.5%	22.5%	35%	35%

<i>Online platform provides a good way for volunteering activities to both volunteers and NGO.</i>	2.5%	15%	35%	47.5%
<i>Overall, I find online platform useful in my volunteering activities.</i>	2.5%	7.5%	57.5%	32.5%

According to Kathrine & Anita (2018), internet is very important for virtual volunteering where in this phase of life, mobility, costing, flexibility in time and place becomes a key factor for volunteering activities. This statement supported the respondents' responses in Table 1 for item 5 (anticipating in virtual volunteering is more cost-effective with 62.5% strongly agrees) and item 4 (45% agrees with participating in virtual volunteering is more time-efficient). Findings show that respondents perceived the usefulness of virtual volunteering in terms of expanding volunteering effort beyond borders, easy to conduct volunteering activities, time consuming and reduced cost. As supported by Urrea & Yoo (2021), the advantages of online volunteering is that they provide to a broader pool of volunteers since time and space are minimal. These findings highlight users' perceived usefulness of virtual volunteering in terms of its effort saving, time saving and cost efficiency.

The Perceived Ease of Use of Virtual Volunteering

The study's findings, as shown in Table 2 reflect positive responses from the respondents where 47.5% agree that sharing volunteering information via the online platform is simple and flexible. Researcher also found that 52.5% of respondents strongly agree that the use of online platform is more convenient for volunteering activities and can be conducted anywhere and anytime which is strengthened by Haski-Leventhal *et al* (2022) stating that virtual volunteers are attracted by its convenience and accessibility as it is considered a low-threshold activity that does not necessitate extensive resources, social networks, or psychological engagement but still holds significant values to volunteers such as warm glow and positive self-esteem. This findings echoed with a study by Norzaila *et al* (2022) stating that the virtual volunteering works were completed in a range of settings including at work (during break time), after working hours (while driving back home, over the weekend) or at home.

In addition, 57.5% of respondents agree that carrying out volunteering activities through online platform is easy and interesting. According to Norzaila Mohamad Nor *et al.* (2019), volunteering through online is very effective and efficient where it can improve social behaviour among volunteers just as onsite where there are no time commitment and very flexible platform. Findings show that respondents perceived the ease of use of virtual volunteering as it is very effective and efficient. Based on Table 2, overall 57.5% of respondents agree that online platform is convenient for volunteering activities and easier to participate.

Table 2

The Perceived Ease of Use of Virtual Volunteering (n=200)

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>
<i>I am familiar with the online platform used for volunteering purpose.</i>	12.5%	22.5%	32.5%	32.5%
<i>I can volunteer virtually using my existing hardware and software.</i>	10%	7.5%	47.5%	35%
<i>Volunteering activities through online platform is often straightforward.</i>	2.5%	20%	40%	37.5%
<i>I often received clear instructions and guidelines when participating in virtual volunteering.</i>	10%	32.5%	40%	17.5%
<i>Sharing of volunteering information via online platform is simple and flexible.</i>	5%	5%	47.5%	42.5%
<i>Carrying out volunteering activities through online platform is easy and interesting.</i>	5%	0%	57.5%	37.5%
<i>Communicate with other volunteers is easy through online platform.</i>	7.5%	32.5%	32.5%	27.5%
<i>The use of online platform enables immediate voluntary support to be channel to whenever needed.</i>	2.5%	15%	52.5%	30%
<i>The use of online platform is more convenient for me to join volunteering activities anywhere anytime.</i>	0	12.5%	35%	52.5%
<i>Overall, I find online virtual volunteering is easy to participate.</i>	2.5%	7.5%	55%	35%

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world. Volunteerism is very important where it provides essential services to the community. Data obtained from this study could help to educate and inform youths on how and why volunteerism should be conducted not only physically but also virtually. This study would significantly add value particularly to non-profit organizations who organize and conduct various volunteering effort. It could notably helps to motivate the publics at large when experiencing unexpected situations in which the

volunteering works crucially need to be conducted virtually in times of pandemic or similar crises.

In conclusion, the findings of the study indicate that virtual volunteering through online platforms is perceived as highly useful and easy to use by the respondents. The majority of the participants expressed positive attitudes towards virtual volunteering, highlighting the advantages of using online platforms for volunteering activities.

Regarding the perceived usefulness of virtual volunteering, respondents strongly agreed that online platforms provide a good way for volunteering activities for both volunteers and NGO. They also recognized the cost-efficiency and time-efficiency of virtual volunteering, with a majority agreeing that participating in virtual volunteering is more cost-effective and time-efficient compared to traditional physical volunteering. These findings align with prior research that emphasizes the importance of internet accessibility and the benefits of virtual volunteering in terms of expanding volunteering efforts beyond borders and reducing costs.

Similarly, the perceived ease of use of virtual volunteering was positively reflected in the respondents' attitudes. They agreed that sharing volunteering information through online platforms is simple and flexible, and they found carrying out volunteering activities online to be easy and interesting. Respondents also acknowledged the convenience and flexibility provided by online platforms, allowing them to volunteer anywhere and anytime. These findings support the notion that virtual volunteering is an effective and efficient approach that enhances social behavior and provides flexibility without significant time commitments.

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