

## RECOGNITION IN SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SUPPORTING A CAUSE: INVOLVEMENT AND SELF-EFFICACY AS MODERATORS

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We investigated the effect of recognition for supporting a cause on the social networking site Facebook, and measured cause involvement and self-efficacy as moderators in intention to donate and volunteer. We used a  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  between-subject factorial design, and obtained 262 responses from an online survey. Results indicated that social recognition, high involvement, and high self-efficacy resulted in more positive behavioral responses. In addition, social recognition served as a greater motivator to donate and volunteer for individuals with low cause involvement than it did for those with high involvement. Results further suggested that the positive effect of social recognition was amplified for individuals with high self-efficacy compared with those with low self-efficacy. Practical implications for the marketing of nonprofit organizations using social media are discussed.

**Keywords:** social recognition, cause involvement, self-efficacy, online donation, social media, social networking sites.

What drives people to donate time and money to causes? One answer may be found by scrutinizing the Ice Bucket Challenge organized by the Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) Association—an online sensation that demonstrated the power of social media. Within 24 hours of being challenged, people had to either donate to the ALS Association or have a bucket of icy water poured over their head. People uploaded and shared the video recording of their response to the

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challenge and designated three friends to accept the challenge. The Ice Bucket Challenge attracted a great deal of international attention, became a social media phenomenon, and raised more than US\$100 million worldwide (Diamond, 2014). An explanation for the level of engagement on social media is described in the Engagement Pyramid (Li, 2010). As people move to the top of the pyramid, they use social media because they either want to express their identity, to be known for the content that they post on social networking sites (SNS), or to be recognized by Facebook friends. Gaining public recognition is the most important desire in social media (Schweyer & Callahan, 2012). Such recognition may have been a strong factor in the success of the Ice Bucket Challenge.

Although *recognition* is “a public expression of appreciation given by a group to individuals who undertake desired behaviors” (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998, p. 264), research findings indicate that public recognition actually increases desired behaviors (Ko, Gibson, & Kim, 2011). Public recognition has thus been used as a marketing strategy in the nonprofit sector (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998; McGee 1988). Nevertheless, researchers have paid relatively scant attention to the role of recognition, particularly in the context of online platforms. Because social media is becoming a powerful channel for promoting donations and recruiting volunteers for nonprofit organizations, more research attention on the effect of recognition is needed.

Therefore, in this study we investigated how recognition increases donation and volunteer intention in social media, namely, Facebook. In addition, we adopted the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion (ELM; Cacioppo & Petty, 1986) when obtaining information, and also examined the effects of cause involvement and self-efficacy. Although personal involvement with a cause has been identified as an effective moderator in a cause-related marketing context (Koschate-Fischer, Stefan, & Hoyer, 2012; Patel, Gadhavi, & Shukla, 2016), the role of self-efficacy in the nonprofit sector has been little explored. Two strong drivers for people to cognitively elaborate a message are personal involvement and self-efficacy (Schwarzer, 2014). Therefore, researchers should take individual factors that may affect people’s behavioral responses into account when they are processing nonprofit organizations’ marketing messages in social media. Researchers could then shed light on the practical implications for nonprofit organizations when they are using social media—especially Facebook—as their communication platform.

## **Literature Review and Hypotheses Development**

### **Use of Social Media by Nonprofit Organizations**

An important reason why marketers use *social media* is that it helps companies to foster relationships and interact with customers (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang,

2012; Harvard Business Review, 2010). More than 50% of social media users follow brands on social media (Van Belleghem, Eenhuizen, & Veris, 2011). As of October 2014, worldwide spending on marketing in social media had soared to US\$17.74 billion and was expected to increase to US\$35.98 billion in 2015 (Leggatt, 2014). SNS have become important communication platforms not only in for-profit organizations but also in nonprofit organizations. Consumer engagement is essential for brand loyalty (Wirtz et al., 2013) and can be nurtured and enhanced because of the built-in, high-level interactivity of social media.

With the advent of the Internet, resource-poor nonprofit organizations now have a new way to disseminate their message and communicate directly with stakeholders (Waters & Lo, 2012). SNS such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have provided nonprofit organizations with opportunities that require fewer resources than were previously needed to easily communicate with their potential donors, supporters, and volunteers. As Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) observed, the emergence of social media has extended possibilities for interpersonal and organizational communication that enable nonprofit organizations to communicate with their stakeholders according to the attributes of the SNS.

The American Red Cross, for example, strategically adopted a two-way dialogue with young constituents, the media, and the community via social media—mainly Facebook and Twitter (Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011). The American Red Cross personnel use social media to issue alerts for potential disasters, to recruit volunteers, and to receive immediate aid through direct monetary donations. Amnesty International has successfully used social media to mobilize their large support base and thus wield their influence to make changes. By tweeting to their many Twitter followers, Amnesty International is able to apply pressure to politicians because tweets reach a huge audience (Green, 2013).

### **Use of the Recognition Strategy by Profit and Nonprofit Organizations**

Both profit and nonprofit organizations have made extensive use of the recognition strategy. Whitney and Bombard (2014) suggested that in the profit sector, employee recognition programs, when developed and administered appropriately, can improve communication between employees and management as well as increasing employee loyalty. Many nonprofit organizations, such as American Red Cross, American Cancer Society, Young Men's Christian Association, and United Way hold dinners and special events to recognize those who contribute to their organization (American Red Cross, 1988; Fisher & Ackerman, 1998). Unlike company employees, volunteers and donors strive to do good without thought of financial reward. Recognition has thus played a pivotal role in how organizations show their appreciation to donors and volunteers.

Public recognition communicates respect from the organization for the recipients' contribution, and this elevates the recipients' status and prestige in the community (Belk, 1995). Public recognition may also result in favorable social consequences for the recipients, such as having an exhibit or building named after them (Chetty, Mobarak, & Singhal, 2014). Recipients of public recognition are likely to feel good about their giving and have increased happiness (Anik, Aknin, Norton, & Dunn, 2009). In regard to public recognition on SNS, such as Facebook or Twitter, it is plausible to assume that recognition of individuals' good deeds will increase their intention to make donations and volunteer for the cause. Thus, we proposed the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** Recognition on a social networking site such as Facebook will lead to (a) a stronger donation intention and (b) a stronger volunteer intention for the cause than will no recognition.

### **Involvement in a Cause**

*Involvement* is defined as personal relevance or the degree of consumer engagement in different aspects of the consumption process (Jain & Srinivasan, 1990; Zaichkowsky, 1985). Involvement can be categorized into product, response, and subject or issue involvement (Hajjat, 2003). Issue involvement, in particular, is important in the context of involvement with a cause. Zaichkowsky (1985) stated that high issue involvement occurs when an issue has personal relevance, which occurs when people expect the issue to have significant consequences for their own lives (Apsler & Sears, 1968). High issue involvement increases personal involvement with a cause to which a person relates.

In the ELM of persuasion, Petty and Cacioppo (1979) state that people who are highly involved seek more information, use more criteria for evaluation of the information, consider fewer alternatives, and process relevant information in depth more than do others. Thus, highly involved individuals examine message elements carefully and use their knowledge to make judgments about the validity of an advocacy (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). There are two routes of persuasion, which can occur depending on individuals' level of involvement. Individuals with high involvement use the central route and those with low involvement use the peripheral route. Thus, personal involvement leads people to do more critical processing of the information and spend more time evaluating their own actions (Cacioppo & Petty, 1986). In the context of this study, involvement with a cause may play a role in facilitating the process of seeking information on the marketing message that is promoting a cause. Tsotsou (2004) proposed that involvement with a cause is a significant predictor of giving behavior. Hence, it is plausible to assume that a high degree of involvement with a cause would lead an individual to have a strong intention to donate to, and volunteer for, that cause. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2:** Individuals with high involvement with a cause are more likely to possess (a) a stronger donation intention and (b) a stronger volunteer intention than are those with low cause involvement.

We were interested to find that the concept of personal involvement has been investigated not for its direct impact on the individual's charitable behavior but as a moderating factor that influences the effect of another variable on that behavior. For example, personal involvement has been found to moderate the effect of cause-related marketing (CRM) on attitude toward the brand and purchase intention. Specifically, the effect of CRM was stronger when people were highly involved with the cause than when they were less involved (Patel et al., 2016). It has further been suggested that personal involvement moderates the relationship between consumer-company identification and behavioral responses to CRM (Bigné-Alcañiz, Currás-Pérez, Ruiz-Mafé, & Sanz-Blas, 2010). In this study, we used the ELM of persuasion (Cacioppo & Petty, 1986) to explain the moderating effect of personal involvement on recognition effect. As people's level of involvement determines how they process information conveyed in a persuasive message, when they are less involved with the product or brand, they are less likely to elaborate the persuasive message and are more likely to rely on peripheral cues. When people are more involved with the product or brand, they are more likely to be motivated to elaborate the message.

In this sense, social recognition may be a peripheral cue that affects future behavioral responses in the context of involvement with a cause. For example, when individuals are highly involved with a cause, they are more likely to rely on their cognitive elaborations of a message from the nonprofit organization or by the cause itself rather than on peripheral cues, such as social recognition. However, when individuals are less involved with a cause, social recognition may be perceived as a positive cue. This may affect their emotional response to the cause, and may result in more positive behavioral responses. In addition, for individuals highly involved with a social cause, their interest, of itself, may be a sufficient driver to lead to donation and volunteer behavior. For those less involved, additional rewards may be needed for them to continue taking part. For these people, an additional driver to donate and volunteer may be as simple as recognition on SNS. Thus, we proposed the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3:** The positive effect of recognition on a social networking site will be greater for individuals with low cause involvement than for those with high cause involvement.

### **Self-Efficacy**

*Self-efficacy*, according to Bandura (1995), refers to "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 2). In other words, self-efficacy refers to what individuals believe

they can accomplish using their skills under certain circumstances (Snyder & Lopez, 2002). The basic premise of self-efficacy theory is that individuals are more likely to engage in activities in which they have high self-efficacy and less likely to engage in those in which they have low self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy theory is well supported in many different contexts such as the workplace, academic performance (classroom settings), nursing, and weight loss. Researchers have found, for example, that individuals with high self-efficacy perform better academically (McIntire & Levine, 1991), generate more effective task strategies (Locke & Latham, 1990), and succeed more often and at a higher level than do individuals with low self-efficacy (Davis, Fedor, Parsons, & Herold, 2000).

Therefore, self-efficacy is predictive of individuals' competence and future behavior. In the nonprofit organization context, for example, individuals with high efficacy in regard to a certain cause may believe that they can make a difference by participating actively in supporting the cause. Thus, they are more likely to motivate themselves to achieve the goals of the representative organization by making donations to, or volunteering for, the cause. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 4:** Individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to have (a) a stronger donation intention and (b) a stronger volunteer intention for a cause than are those with low self-efficacy.

According to the ELM of persuasion, self-efficacy is also a critical factor in persuasion (Cacioppo & Petty, 1986). When the same logic of cause involvement is applied to explain the role of self-efficacy, people who are less confident about their ability to achieve the goals of the cause may be less likely than are others to elaborate a persuasive message. Thus, they may be more likely to use other peripheral elements as cues to determine their decision about donating to, or volunteering for, the cause. However, people who are more confident about their ability to make a difference by supporting the cause may be more likely than are others to elaborate the message about the cause, which determines their future behavioral responses. In this sense, people with low self-efficacy may be affected more by peripheral cues, such as social recognition, in supporting the cause, than are those with high self-efficacy. Furthermore, social recognition may motivate people with low self-efficacy to support the cause. As individuals with high self-efficacy already have a strong belief in their capability to execute a course of action (i.e., donate or volunteer), social recognition may not necessarily influence their decision about whether or not to do so. However, for those with low self-efficacy, social recognition may be perceived as encouragement and a reward. Thus, we proposed the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 5:** In making a decision on whether or not to support a cause, the positive effect of recognition will be greater for individuals with low self-efficacy than it will be for those with high self-efficacy.

## Method

### Participants

Participants in this study were taken from 312 students at a major north central public university in the United States of America. After removing responses from students who failed to complete the survey, we had responses from 262 students for further analysis. In return for participating they received a course credit. The mean for participants' Facebook use was 6.5 years and 7 hours was the average period of time per week that participants used Facebook. On average, participants had 4.3 social media accounts.

### Study Design and Procedure

To test the proposed hypotheses, we employed a  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  between-subject factorial design. The three factors were recognition (no social recognition vs. social recognition), participants' level of involvement with a cause (low involvement vs. high involvement) and their level of self-efficacy (low vs. high). A website designed for the study opened with an informed consent notice. Participants were asked to click the "proceed" button if they agreed to participate in the study. Participants in the no social recognition group were exposed only to factual information about the charity organization, Save the Children. Participants in the social recognition group were first exposed to factual information about Save the Children and then received a fictitious recognition message from the staff of Save the Children. The recognition message was in the format of a thank you note based on participants' hypothetical donation to Save the Children. After responding to an item about their intention to donate and volunteer, participants responded to items about their involvement with the cause and their level of self-efficacy. Finally, participants supplied demographic information concerning their age, sex, race, and years at college.

### Measures

To measure cause involvement, we modified five items used in a previous study (Maheswaran & Meyers-Levy, 1990;  $\alpha = .94$ ). The five items were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. The individual cause involvement scores were then divided by median split into low versus high groups. To measure self-efficacy, we adopted three items from a previous study (Wang et al., 2011;  $\alpha = .94$ ). They were measured on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = *not at all confident* to 7 = *extremely confident*. Individuals' scores were then divided by median split into low versus high groups.

Basil, Ridgway, and Basil (2006) proposed that donation intention effectively predicts actual donation. Thus, we measured donation intention on a 7-point

scale, ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*, using two items. We adopted two items (Wang et al., 2011) to measure volunteer intention on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

## Data Analysis

Using the statistical package SPSS version 22.0, we performed reliability tests of all the measures, independent sample *t* tests, and a series of two-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs).

## Results

To test whether or not there were any significant differences in demographic variables and social media use across the two groups (social recognition vs. no social recognition), we conducted *t* tests. The results showed nonsignificant differences across the two conditions in terms of age ( $p > .05$ ), sex ( $p > .05$ ), Facebook year ( $p > .05$ ), and Facebook hours ( $p > .05$ ), suggesting that participants in the two conditions were equal in these demographic variables and in their level of use of social media. Therefore, these variables were not included as control variables in the following analyses for hypotheses testing.

### Main Effects of Social Recognition, Cause Involvement, and Self-Efficacy

To test the proposed hypotheses, we conducted a series of two-way ANOVAs on intention to donate and intention to volunteer. As shown in Table 1, ANOVA results indicated that social recognition led to stronger donation intention,  $F(1, 260) = 4.66, p < .05$ ;  $M_{\text{social recognition}} = 4.57$  versus  $M_{\text{no social recognition}} = 4.23$  and stronger volunteer intention,  $F(1, 260) = 8.88, p < .01$ ;  $M_{\text{social recognition}} = 3.41$  versus  $M_{\text{no social recognition}} = 3.82$ . Thus, Hypotheses 1a and 1b were supported. In addition, as we predicted, high cause involvement led to stronger donation intention,  $F(1, 260) = 37.93, p < .001$ ;  $M_{\text{low involvement}} = 3.95$  versus  $M_{\text{high involvement}} = 4.86$  and stronger volunteer intention,  $F(1, 260) = 43.42, p < .01$ ;  $M_{\text{low involvement}} = 3.20$  versus  $M_{\text{high involvement}} = 4.05$ . Hypotheses 2a and 2b were, therefore, supported. Results further demonstrated that, compared with low self-efficacy, high self-efficacy led to stronger donation intention,  $F(1, 260) = 25.64, p < .001$ ;  $M_{\text{low self-efficacy}} = 4.03$  versus  $M_{\text{high self-efficacy}} = 4.79$  and stronger volunteer intention,  $F(1, 260) = 28.57, p < .001$ ;  $M_{\text{low self-efficacy}} = 3.26$  versus  $M_{\text{high self-efficacy}} = 3.98$ , supporting Hypotheses 4a and 4b.

### Moderating Effects of Cause Involvement and Self-Efficacy

Results showed that there were significant interaction effects between recognition and cause involvement in regard to both intention to donate,  $|F(1, 254) = 17.44, p < .001$ , and intention to volunteer,  $F(1, 254) = 15.70$ ,

$p < .001$ . As shown in Figures 1 and 2, social recognition generated stronger donation and volunteer intention for individuals with low cause involvement than did no social recognition. However, social recognition produced weaker donation and volunteer intention for individuals with high cause involvement. Planned contrast tests were conducted to further test the statistical significance of the differences in each of the dependent variables between social recognition and no social recognition for each of the two involvement groups. For donation intention, no significant difference emerged between the social recognition and no social recognition groups in the condition of high cause involvement ( $p > .05$ ), but there was a significant difference between the social recognition and no social recognition groups in the condition of low cause involvement;  $M_{\text{social recognition}} = 4.38$ ,  $M_{\text{no social recognition}} = 3.36$ ; contrast value = -1.01,  $SE = .21$ ,  $t(129) = -4.77$ ,  $p < .001$ . Hypothesis 3 was thus supported.

Table 1. *Results of Analysis of Variance of Study Variables*

Source	Dependent variables	df	F	p value	Partial eta squared
Social recognition (A)	Donation intention	(1, 254)	8.46	< .01	.032
	Volunteer intention	(1, 254)	11.24	< .01	.042
Involvement (B)	Donation intention	(1, 254)	25.85	< .001	.092
	Volunteer intention	(1, 254)	24.96	< .001	.089
Self-efficacy (C)	Donation intention	(1, 254)	8.84	< .01	.034
	Volunteer intention	(1, 254)	11.56	< .01	.044
A × B	Donation intention	(1, 254)	17.44	< .001	.052
	Volunteer intention	(1, 254)	15.70	< .001	.060
A × C	Donation intention	(1, 254)	0.65	> .05	.000
	Volunteer intention	(1, 254)	7.96	< .01	.030
B × C	Donation intention	(1, 254)	0.42	> .05	.001
	Volunteer intention	(1, 254)	0.77	> .05	.003
A × B × C	Donation intention	(1, 254)	0.97	> .05	.003
	Volunteer intention	(1, 254)	0.00	> .05	.001

Further, results showed that the interaction effect between social recognition and self-efficacy was nonsignificant in regard to intention to donate ( $p < .05$ ). However, the interaction of the two independent variables on intention to volunteer was significant,  $F(1, 254) = 7.96$ ,  $p < .01$ . As shown in Figure 3, contrary to our expectations, depending on whether or not recognition was given on SNS, intention to volunteer was more greatly affected among individuals with high self-efficacy than it was among those with low self-efficacy. Thus, Hypothesis 5 was not supported. An additional planned contrast test was performed for the high and low conditions to establish whether or not the difference in volunteer intention was statistically significant for these conditions.

Results demonstrated no significant difference between social recognition and no social recognition in the low self-efficacy condition ( $p > .05$ ), but the difference in the high self-efficacy condition was significant;  $M_{\text{social recognition}} = 4.26$ ,  $M_{\text{no social recognition}} = 3.65$ ; contrast value =  $-.61$ ,  $SE = .177$ ,  $t(129) = -3.447$ ,  $p < .01$ .

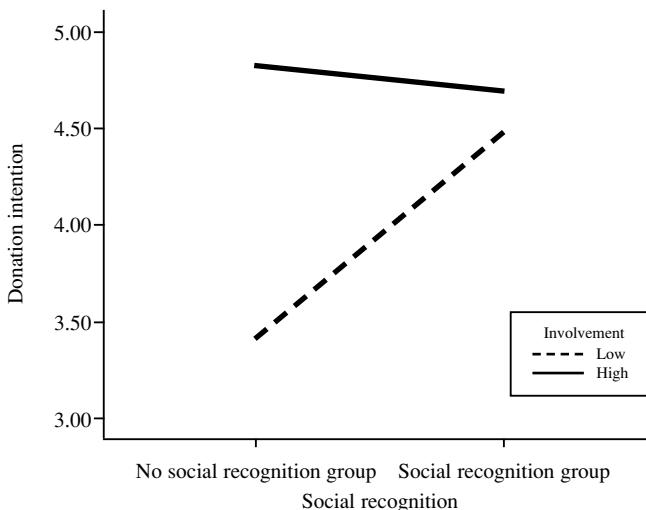


Figure 1. *Effect of interaction between social recognition/no social recognition groups and involvement on donation intention.*

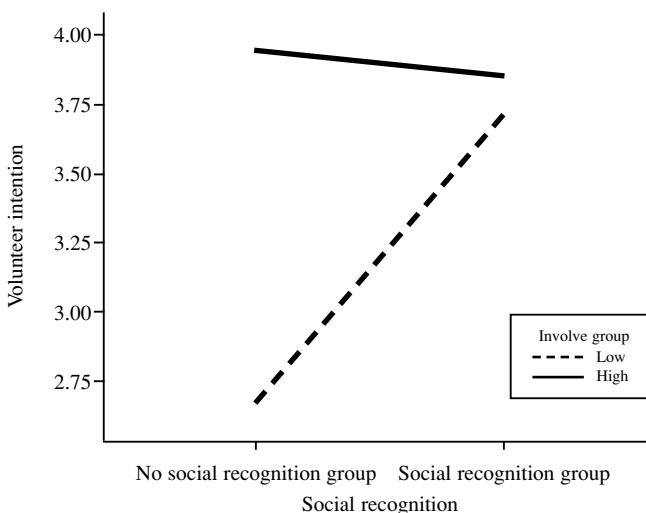


Figure 2. *Effect of interaction between social recognition/no social recognition groups and involvement on volunteer intention.*

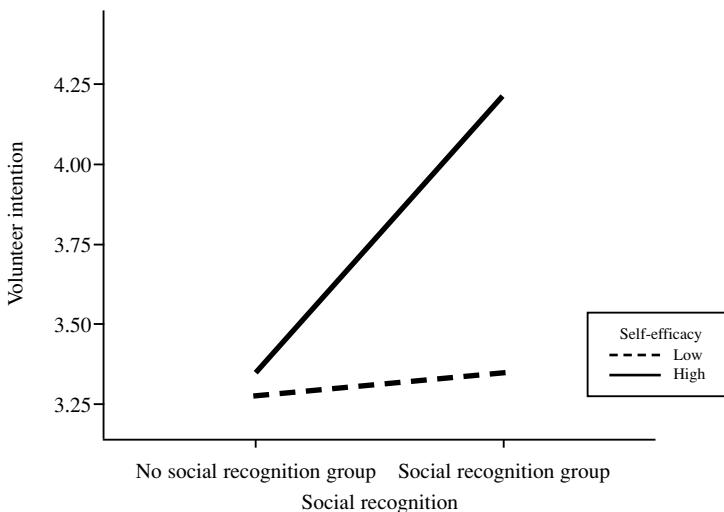


Figure 3. *Effect of interaction between social recognition/no social recognition groups and self-efficacy on volunteer intention.*

## Discussion

Our findings suggest that social recognition plays a pivotal role in the nonprofit sector by increasing individuals' donation and volunteer intention. Saxton and Wang (2014) suggested that donations to causes through Facebook are likely to be small, to be determined by Web capacity, and to be affected by types of causes. This implies that social media-driven charitable behavior has different features from those of traditional behavior in the nonprofit sector. In particular, any functions that facilitate Web capacity for boosting online donations are critical to the success and expansion of social media-driven fundraising. The social recognition strategy should facilitate charitable behavior in social media, because, according to the Engagement Pyramid (Li, 2010), a major reason for social media use is receiving public recognition.

Our findings further support Tsiotou's (2004) proposition that high involvement with a cause motivates giving behavior, demonstrating that, regardless of whether or not they receive recognition through Facebook, highly involved individuals are more likely to have stronger donation and volunteer intention than are less involved individuals. Cacioppo and Petty (1986) proposed that high issue involvement increases personal involvement. When staff in nonprofit organizations are seeking to recruit donors or volunteers, they would do well to employ strategies aimed at increasing personal involvement in their cause.

Our results also support the notion that individuals' level of self-efficacy influences their donation intention. In other words, when people have high self-efficacy, they tend to have stronger donation intention than do people who have low self-efficacy. When they are communicating their messages to potential donors or volunteers, staff in nonprofit sector organizations need to communicate clearly and emphasize that donors' or volunteers' participation in their cause can make a difference. Such persuasion, when effective, could lead to high self-efficacy among the potential donors or volunteers, which could positively influence their donation and volunteer intention.

In regard to donation and volunteer intention, for individuals who have little involvement in a cause, social recognition on SNS is a more positive influence than it is for those who are highly involved, so a social recognition strategy will be more effective with individuals involved in the cause at a low level than with those involved at a high level. This finding suggests that, for individuals less involved in a cause, social recognition may serve as an additional motivation for them to begin actively supporting the cause. As suggested in the ELM of persuasion (Cacioppo & Petty, 1986), this may support the argument that social cognition can function as a cue to determine behavioral responses from individuals who have little involvement in a cause. However, to confirm the role of social cognition as a peripheral cue, future researchers should further investigate the underlying mechanism of information processing in the context of cause involvement, self-efficacy, and social recognition.

According to our results, a social recognition strategy was more effective for individuals with high self-efficacy than it was for those with low self-efficacy. This suggests that social recognition accelerates the course of action (i.e., volunteering) for individuals with a strong belief in their capacity to bring about change, as this effect was more pronounced than was the effect of encouraging individuals with low self-efficacy to actively support a cause. This result suggests that social recognition may not be effective as a peripheral cue in the information processing of individuals with low self-efficacy, but further investigation should be conducted to identify other possible explanations.

A limitation in this study was that the participants were university students who, as a group, may have different levels of involvement in a cause and of self-efficacy from those of the general population. Our results would have probably been different if participants had included an older population and/or the general population. To make the results more representative and generalizable, future researchers should include the general population as participants. A second limitation was that we used a real nonprofit organization, Save the Children, as the cause. It might, however, be appropriate to use a fictitious nonprofit organization to prevent any confounding effects. The third limitation was that the two moderating variables—cause involvement and self-efficacy—

were measured as continuous variables and were then median-split. Various researchers argue that dichotomizing a continuous measure in effect means that information is discarded because individuals within a subgroup are treated as if they were identical with respect to the attribute under consideration. This loss of information typically reduces measurement precision, underestimates the magnitude of bivariate relationships, and lowers statistical power for detecting true effects (Maxwell & Delaney, 1993). Future researchers could use other analyses, such as regression or path analysis, to measure the direct or indirect effects of involvement and self-efficacy without dichotomizing variables.

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