

Workshop Presentation

Topic: Information Technology and Volunteering

Effective Use of Mass Media in Promotion of Volunteering

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Volunteerism is an essence of life. It underlies individual and group action in pursuit of human values of community, caring and sharing, and through which people can exercise their rights and responsibilities as members of a community to address the challenges, while growing and realizing their talents and potentials. Volunteering not only benefits others and the volunteers themselves, but also constitutes a significant force of community participation to build trust and reciprocity which contribute to a cohesive and stable community. (<http://www.iave2005hk.org/eng/main.php>)

Abstract

In order to form a community of benevolence, the idea of helping each other voluntarily becomes more and more popular in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), as well as private sectors are using different methods in helping the promotion of volunteerism as well. As “the functions of mass communication [is]...informing...[and] persuading...”, it seems that volunteerism will be developed into a trend with the help of mass media (DeVito, 1991). Therefore, mass media should be utilized to enlist people to join the crowd of volunteers in order to form a community with love.

Among all types of mass media, radio will be the focus in this paper. According to Crisell (1994), radio is a “mass medium” with “enduring power”. Hence, radio is influential. Also, in comparison to other types of mass media like television, radio is the only medium that is portable and rather personal. People can listen to radio wherever and whatever they want. Since radio is so powerful, it should be used to cultivate the spread of volunteerism.

Introduction

Owing to the promotion of volunteerism by the Hong Kong Government as well as the NGOs so as to form a community of benevolence, the idea of helping each other voluntarily becomes more and more popular in Hong Kong. In recent years, volunteerism is strongly promoted by mass media. Due to the broadcast of fund-raising variety shows on TV, people in Hong Kong are more familiar with community works done by non-profit organizations decades ago. In this sense, mass media plays the role of introducing community services to Hong Kong citizens. As “the functions of mass communication are informing, persuading and narcotizing...”, it seems that volunteerism will be developed into a trend with the help of mass media (DeVito, 1991). Therefore, mass media should be utilized to enlist people to join the crowd of volunteers in order to form a community with love.

The nature of volunteerism

The simplest way to explain volunteerism is that it refers to “the act or practice of doing volunteer work in community service” (Merriam-Webster, 2005). Nonetheless, caring is the key factor in volunteerism. According to Dancy and Wynn-Dancy (1995), “...genuine caring is a vital dimension of volunteerism”. This demonstrates that being a volunteer who is practicing volunteerism, he/she should “care about” others. Also from Dancy and Wynn-Dancy, Noddings (1995) believes that the term “care about” is used to describe “an internal state of readiness to try to care for whoever crosses our path”. One can see that promoting volunteerism is equal to spreading the idea of caring about other people.

The core idea of volunteerism is pointed out, it involves love and care for each other which are significant for modern society, as people nowadays are often commented as cold, self-centred, and full of problems.

The reasons to promote volunteerism

As people in modern world strive for better living standard, it is speculated that this kind of “...explosion for expectations...will continue to generate distrust and competition” (Lippitt & Schindler-Rainman, 1975). This seems to imply that when people are working hard to achieve their personal aims and goals, conflicts may arise. The reason is that people will probably become selfish when they are ambitious at

attaining something they want, and may worsen their valuable interpersonal relationship. To avoid these clashes, volunteerism should be stressed so as to remind people that they should show love and care to those around them. Or else, conflicts may become more serious and relationships between people in society maybe deteriorated.

Volunteers should be recruited to provide professional service, for example, medical service, education, and some others. The reason is that most of these services are not free of charge and even very expensive. Most importantly, not all the people can afford the fee to have these services. Yet, if it is assumed that people can have the rights to use those services, free services should be provided. In this sense, it means that volunteerism should be raised as one of the possibilities for people to seek professional advice at no financial cost.

The effort of the Hong Kong Government on promoting volunteerism

In the 70s', when the Agency for Volunteer Service (AVS) started introducing people to volunteerism, it seemed that only schools in Hong Kong were encouraging their students to do voluntary works. AVS which is funded by the Hong Kong Government, the Community Chest of Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, has raised its popularity in past decade and drawn people's attention of being a volunteer in society.

Indeed, the Hong Kong Government has long been funding various non-profit making organizations (known as the NGOs), for examples, Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, Yan Oi Tong, and etc. These organizations are keen at training and searching volunteers for rendering services, which in turn promotes the idea of volunteerism.

Radio: one of the most powerful mediums to spread words

The Hong Kong Government and NGOs in Hong Kong have assisted to emphasize the importance of spreading volunteerism. In order to preach this idea to all the people in Hong Kong, the popularity of volunteerism will be maximized if mass media is used to promote the idea. Therefore, among all types of mass media, radio will be the focus in this paper.

According to Crisell (1994), radio is a "mass medium" with "enduring power" which is influential. In comparison with other types of mass media like television, radio is the only medium that is portable and personal. People can listen to radio wherever and whenever they want, including on the Internet. Since the content of radio can

penetrate to people everywhere, radio should be used to cultivate the spirit of volunteerism. Radio is also a good companionship for audiences no matter they are working, studying, doing housework, driving, etc. It helps to penetrate the idea of volunteerism into audiences' mind.

Organizing activities to promote volunteerism

Radio helps to raise the awareness of people on volunteerism, which the gist is to show love and care to each other. As a result, a community of love will be built. Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) continually holds activities that emphasize volunteerism. The most current example is the fund-raising concert jointly organized by electronic media in Hong Kong for the tsunami victims in Southeast Asia. Though it was not a program to recruit volunteers, it still spread the message of the need to care about people from all over the world.

Regarding to the tsunami disaster, some affected areas faced the problem of communication breakdown. In response to the appeal by Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU), RTHK and The Salvation Army have co-organized a "Radio Aid" Campaign to invite public donation of radio sets to refugees in Aceh, Indonesia and Sri-Lanka. RTHK has been making on-air donation appeals to encourage public donation of usable radio sets. As said by the Director of Broadcasting, Mr. CHU Pui Hing, 'It's not just about giving radio sets, we believe it's about giving refugees a chance to access to important news about their country and the outside world'. Spirit of volunteerism is cultivated and the idea of volunteers beyond borders is created.

After the Asia's slumping economies in 1997, Hong Kong was undergoing economic hardship and more and more people chose to end their lives in these few years. In 1996, the suicidal rates were 11.2 per 100,000 persons while there were 12.1 per 100,000 in 1997. The rates kept on increasing. In 2002, there were 16.4 per 100,000 persons ended their lives. Therefore, RTHK and other mass media organizations, as well as NGOs, helped to publicize an event called "Life Angel" with the theme "Caring others and respecting lives" to remind people. that they should help each other, be responsible for their lives, and obliged to live positively, so as trying to stop people from thinking of ending their lives. Without the collaborating power of the mass media organizations in Hong Kong, for certain including radio stations, people might not pay much attention to the needy whose were suffered from the personal problems.

Motivating people to join voluntary works

Though radio is able to arouse people's interests to those who need help, what radio

can do more is to provide chances for audiences to join community services. Radio should play the role to publicize the idea that people from every sector can be volunteers. Due to the constant promotion of volunteerism in schools but not in whole society, people in Hong Kong seem to have the perception that only students can do voluntary works. Added to this, one of the other ways is to produce programs especially for introducing community services. For instance, “Love is All Around”, a program of Radio 2, Radio Television Hong Kong, aims at demonstrating different voluntary works to the audiences. It is through the above ways that radio will be able to persuade people to be volunteers, and to build up a harmonious atmosphere in the community.

As close companion of the audiences, the radio presenters can have voluntary work with the audiences as well. Furthermore, presenters can help to educate people the way to hold volunteer activities. Other than sharing of the presenters, guests who have organized voluntary works can be invited to share their experiences on air, especially focusing on how they arranged and promoted the activities. There are two main purposes of such programs. On one hand, people can learn from the experience and apply those skills when come up with organizing voluntary activities. For instance, the organizers have to learn building up a close relationship with the participants. As a result, the participants will continue to join voluntary works and activities with better arrangements and qualities will be held. On the other hand, it is to let people understand how an activity is organized and promoted, so that people will be able to know how they should assist the activity coordinators and when they should render help in voluntary works.

Problems brought by occasional volunteerism-promotion activities

It is encouraging to see radio paying lots of efforts to exploit its influence and to bring in the important idea of volunteerism. However, there will be problems if radio simply devotes their resources to hold events that draw people’s attention to a group of needy annually but not to uphold the notion of volunteerism over all the people continuously. During the period when radio organizes such activities, those people in need will receive sufficient services. Yet, after that, those people in need may not be aided anymore. Consequently, it is essential for radio and all other mass media to bring up the idea of volunteerism continuously and to convince people helping the disadvantaged ones simultaneously.

Conclusion

All in all, both the Hong Kong Government and Non-Governmental Organizations

have been paying their great efforts in bringing in the idea of volunteerism to society. Radio, as the major portable and rather personal mass medium with enduring power, it can be the supportive tool for the spread of spirit of volunteerism for the works of the government, NGOs, as well as private sectors' voluntary services.

According to the great painter, Andy WARHOL, 'everyone will have their 15 minutes of fame'. It is believed that everyone will have their passion to serve others and to make a better world. By making use of the power of mass media, can volunteerism be boosted in Hong Kong.

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