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What motivates the public? The power of social norms in driving public participation with organizations

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ABSTRACT

This study examines motivating factors that impact public participation with organizations. A between-subjects lab experiment was conducted to examine the role of different types of norms (social norm vs. market norm) in initiating participation. Results suggest that when people feel recognized by an organization, their motivations are as strong as those who receive monetary rewards for participation. Three distinct underlying psychological mechanisms that drive participation are identified. Theoretical and practical implications for public relations and organizational communication are discussed.

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The concept of participation has increasingly become a core focus in public relations. The degree to which an organization is able to engage key publics and obtain participation from them has proven to be crucial to its long-term survival and success (Chung, Lee, & Heath, 2013; Kioussis & Dimitrova, 2006; McKeever, 2013; Men & Tsai, 2013). For example, companies are encouraged to consult with key stakeholders and prospective publics during decision-making processes. Furthermore, public relations theories such as Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory, relationship management theory (Ferguson, 1984) and Kent and Taylor's (1998) dialogic principles emphasize the key role of company-public relationships and how effective communication and relationship management can contribute to outcomes such as enhanced consumer trust, commitment, involvement, and engagement.

Companies and organizations have found numerous ways to invite public participation. However, a central question to be answered is: What motivates publics to participate? While the amount of individualized information and specialized products have already made it hard to involve people in any event collaboratively (Putnam, 1995), demanding consumer schedules and other logistical restrictions can decrease the amount of public participation in many capacities. Therefore, it can be argued that participation comes with a cost and that publics are becoming less inclined to participate in organizational initiatives.

Prior studies have documented the effectiveness of monetary incentives in increasing public participation (e.g., Files, 1984; Tamer Cavusgil & Elvey-Kirk, 1998). It is, however, not always possible for organizations and companies with limited resources, such as non-profit organizations. Furthermore, the growing success of several organizations calls into question the necessity of monetary rewards in motivating public participation. For instance, the popularity of Wikipedia is, by and

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large, based on voluntary public participation and contributions anonymously over the past few decades (Shirky, 2008). Why would people so actively participate in and contribute to something that seemingly delivers no direct reward like money?

Two types of norms emerge as the governing rules for participation and contribution: the social norm and the market norm. The social norm refers to the situation under which people contribute not for payment, but for certain social rules (e.g., altruism, politeness and reciprocity) that are essential to maintaining communal relationships with others (Heyman & Ariely, 2004). While individuals governed by the social norm take actions with no expectations for monetary compensation in return, researchers have suggested that recognition and appreciation are the keys for people to get involved in such communal relations (Clark & Mills, 1979; Mills & Clark, 1982). Alternatively, the market norm can motivate individuals to contribute, as it represents the most common economic rule for labor exchange – to get paid for the work done (e.g., a salary). No research so far has systematically examined how public participation with organizations might vary as a result of social norm vs. market norm incentives, which provides little guidance for corporations to develop effective and efficient strategies in this regard.

This study conducted an experiment to analyze the role that the social norm and the market norm play in promoting individuals' contribution and intent to participate again with organizations. This study examines the following questions: Would individuals be motivated to contribute to an organization when they are appreciated (social norm) vs. when they are paid (market norm)? More importantly, what are the underlying psychological mechanisms explaining such contributions in the social norm as opposed to the market norm?

1. Theoretical framework

The decline of public engagement and participation has been documented by many scholars in diverse disciplines of social science (Postman, 1985; Putnam, 1995). For companies and organizations, particularly those whose existence primarily relies on public participation like Facebook and Wikipedia, contributions from publics are indispensable in creating organizational loyalty (Holland & Stacey, 2001) and commitment (Lines, 2004; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Mayer & Schoorman, 1998). Therefore, developing effective strategies to engage the public and to initiate participation has become a focal point for both public relations practitioners and scholars.

For example, in reviewing public participation on Wikipedia, Rafaeli and Ariel (2008) proposed that individual contributions could be driven by motivations like receiving rewards (Snyder & Cantor, 1998), self-fulfillment (Cifollilli, 2003), sense of community (Rafaeli, Ariel et al., 2005), or simply altruism (Kollock, 1999).

1.1. An interpersonal approach: the social norm and the market norm

In an effort to analyze individual motivations in a systematic way, public relations scholars have argued the value of an interpersonal approach as it humanizes the relationship between an organization and the public with a personal touch (Men & Hung, 2012; Men & Tsai, 2015). According to Fiske's (1992) relational theory, there are four basic types of social relationships: communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching, and market pricing. These four relationships were later re-classified as the market norm and the social norm to specifically examine individual participation (Ariely, 2009).

Individuals in the market norm generally offer contributions or involvement due to market pricing – to get paid. Therefore, participation under market norm hinges upon cost-benefit analysis of individuals. The amount of financial compensation determines the level of an individual's contribution in the market norm. The more people get paid, the more contributions they choose to make (Clark & Mills, 1993; Fehr & Falk, 2002; Rabin, 1993).

Conversely, no known correlation exists between the level of contribution and reward in the social norm, because people contribute with no intent to get payment back in exchange for participation. Therefore, they tend to ignore compensation amount, as individual effort is shaped by social rules like altruism (Batson, Sager, Garst, & Kang, 1997; Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997; Harman, 2015; Trivers, 1971). This concept is representative of the dimensions of stewardship, which focus on behaviors that underline the norms of maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship with an organization's stakeholders (Kelly, 2001). As the concept suggests, stewardship is focused on reciprocity between an organization and its stakeholders (Kelly, 2001). That is, people and organizations alike work together to benefit the common good. As such, organizations are then encouraged to recognize stakeholders who choose to become involved with the organization by demonstrating gratitude toward them to nurture relationships with publics. Organizations should strive to be good stewards to all of its stakeholders to demonstrate acknowledgement of and commitment to those who contribute to a greater goal.

1.2. Psychological outcomes of the social norm and the market norm

Certain psychological outcomes could further explain the drivers of the two norms in participation. For example, the social norm is most likely to come into play when individuals perceive their efforts as being needed, valued, and appreciated (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998; Trivers, 1971; Unger, 1991). Hence, perceived recognition, the extent to which individuals feel their contributions are appreciated, serves as the major psychological gratification in the social norm, where individuals are essentially making contributions voluntarily as a favor to organizations instead of getting paid (Kollock, 1999). However, monetary payment could also serve as another form of recognition, as receiving payment may elicit positive feelings like self-sufficiency (Furnham & Argyle, 1998; Vohs, Mead, & Goode, 2006).

Another key psychological outcome is satisfaction with performance appraisal, which refers to the extent to which an individual is satisfied with the organizational evaluation of his or her contribution, reflected in certain tangible outcomes such as salary or promotion (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001; Murphy & Cleveland, 1995). Different from perceived recognition, satisfaction with performance appraisal hinges upon the degree of how an organization has accurately and fairly evaluated one's work and given proper awards consequently (Fassina, Jones & Uggerslev, 2008). Satisfaction with performance appraisal is especially important to individuals who make efforts in exchange for payment, as their contributions are essentially award-driven. Their satisfaction, therefore, is very likely to correlate to the amount of monetary compensation received. Researchers over time have found satisfaction with performance appraisal pivotal to organizations in maintaining and boosting contributions from employees and/or publics (Douthitt & Aiello, 2001; Salanova, Agut, & Peiró, 2005).

In addition to recognition and satisfaction, the level of enjoyment of the task that requires one's contribution could be another major outcome (Mason & Griffin, 2005; Park, Jun & MacInnis, 2000). Though such enjoyment could intertwine with factors like recognition and satisfaction, it might also work independently during participation. For example, literatures have suggested that the incorporation of gamification in public relations helps practitioners to better engage key publics due to a more enjoyable and fun experience for people to participate in an organizational initiative (Seiffert & Nothhaft, 2015; Theaker & Yaxley, 2012). Task enjoyment matters especially under conditions when individuals receive low payment for their contributions. In his classic experiment, Festinger (1957) found participants receiving an one-dollar payment were significantly more likely to rate a monotonous and boring task as enjoyable than those getting a twenty-dollars payment due to experienced cognitive dissonance. That is, task enjoyment was used as a justification for putting one's substantial time and effort into a tedious task for payment that was clearly "unworthy", so that participants could reduce the discomfort as a result of cognitive dissonance (also see Harmon-Jones, 2002).

Finally, organizations evaluate their efforts and strategies that by measuring individuals' organizational commitment, contribution level, and intent to participate with an organization again. Organizational commitment refers to the degree to which an individual identify with and attach to an organization (Lines, 2004; Mayer & Schoorman, 1998). Individual contribution level gets at the degree of individuals involvement in a certain initiative or campaign held by organizations (Batson et al., 1997; Cialdini et al., 1997). Intent to participate again with an organization, on the other hand, measures individual intention to be part of the organizational initiative or campaign in the future (Wise, Hamman, & Thorson, 2006). Organizations rely on these key outcomes to determine whether they plan to seek consumer participation using components from the social norm or market norm principles. As it is difficult to determine a single, one-size-fits-all best practice in this regard, relying on behavioral-based measures is a common practice that has benefitted organizations in the long run.

Though limited empirical evidence can be found to support the argument that people may participate as much (and as effectively) for reasons other than monetary incentives, some scholars have suggested that the social norm could be a driving force for public participation (Rafaeli & Ariel, 2008). Although money has always been a powerful incentive in driving participation (Rafaeli et al., 2007; Rafaeli, Raban et al., 2005), it is important to note that individuals in the market norm are highly sensitive to compensation amount as they are constantly doing cost-benefit analysis (Clark & Mills, 1993; Fehr & Falk, 2002; Rabin, 1993). If individuals receive a payment that is significantly lower than expected, monetary incentives could not only fail to encourage participation, they could even backfire and discourage people more than offering no payment would impact a decision to participate (Fehr & Falk, 2002). In this case, the social norm might even motivate people more than a low payment would in terms of participation and contribution to organizations. Therefore, when considering what motivates individuals to contribute, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1-6: There are significant differences between individuals motivated by the social norm, the market norm with low payment, or the market norm with high payment in terms of (H1) recognition perceived, (H2) task enjoyment, (H3) satisfaction with performance appraisal, (H4) organizational commitment, (H5) contribution level, and (H6) intent to participate again, such that the social norm works as effectively as the market norm with high payment, while the market norm with low payment yields significant lower effects on the above outcome variables.

1.3. Psychological mediators in participation

Psychological outcomes like recognition and satisfaction might not be invoked all at once during participation. Instead, there might be a chain reaction where certain psychological outcomes could serve as mediators for others (Douthitt & Aiello, 2001; Kollock, 1999; Mason & Griffin, 2005). For example, gratification from feeling recognized in an organization, if met, could enhance an individual's level of organizational commitment (Salancik, 1977). Alternatively, organizational commitment could rely on how much individuals are satisfied with the performance appraisal, reflected in the amount of monetary compensation in the market norm (Judge et al., 2001).

Besides feeling recognized and satisfied at the time of appraisal, another factor that could impact users' behavioral intentions is task enjoyment (Curry, Wakefield, Price, & Mueller, 1986; Rego & Cunha, 2008; Rego et al., 2008). As research has suggested, enjoyment could lead to positive feelings toward an organization (Kim, 2011). Organizational commitment, in this case, can be reasonably elicited through task enjoyment. Finally, once individuals display commitment toward an organization, they may be more inclined to participate and contribute to such an organization again in the future.

As there is a lack of research on differentiating motivating power of the social norm vs. the market norm, there is even less research that examines the psychological mechanisms through which individuals might become motivated by the two norms. Therefore, due to the dearth of literature to inform specific hypotheses, we ask the following research questions:

RQ1-3: Do perceived recognition, satisfaction with performance appraisal, and task enjoyment mediate the influence of (RQ1) the social norm, (RQ2) the market norm with low payment, and (RQ3) the market norm with high payment on organizational commitment and, finally, individuals' intent to participate again?

2. Method

This study employed a between-subjects experiment in which a total of 186 participants were randomly assigned into control, social norm, market norm with low payment, and market norm with high payment conditions. Operationalization of type of norms was based on previous studies, which usually adopted small gifts to activate the social norm. They were usually chosen by prior researchers as the key to the social norm is to effectively express one's appreciation to participants in a short period of time without initiating their feelings or thoughts associated with monetary payment. Therefore, small gifts such as candy are ideal stimuli in lab experiments due to their abilities to convey one's gratitude and ignorable prices (Ariely, 2009). The market norm, on the other hand, emphasizes the benefits one gets for his/her contributions in the form of payment. Therefore, cash payment is usually employed as the most effective experimental stimulus for activating the market norm (Heyman & Ariely, 2004). Hence, this study operationalized the social norm using greeting cards and the market norm using cash payment.

2.1. Participants

Participants were recruited from eight undergraduate courses in a mass communications program at an accredited university in Central Pennsylvania. Students earned extra credit for their participation. A power analysis was conducted to determine the appropriate sample size for the study using G*power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009), indicating that 180 participants were needed to achieve the power of 0.80 (Cohen, 1992). One hundred eighty-six participants successfully completed the study. The sample included 146 females (78.5%), with the average age of 20.2 ($SD = 1.30$, $N = 186$). 59.1% of participants self-identified as White, and 5.4% as Hispanic/Latino, 10.8% as African-American, and 21% as Asian-American. Compared to the overall population at the university, the sample has a similar average age and ethnicity percentages. But it has a higher percentage of female participants than the population (around 50% female undergraduates overall) due to the nature of communication (liberal arts) majors. A series of independent-samples t -tests indicated that males and females didn't differ from each other in responding to the experiment stimuli (perceived recognition, $t(184) = 0.12$, $p = 0.90$; task enjoyment, $t(184) = 0.89$, $p = 0.37$; satisfaction with performance appraisal, $t(184) = 1.54$, $p = 0.13$; organizational commitment, $t(184) = 0.04$, $p = 0.97$; time spent on editing wiki pages, $t(184) = 1.23$, $p = 0.22$; and intent to participate again, $t(184) = 0.30$, $p = 0.76$), suggesting that gender played an insignificant role under study.

2.2. Pretest

A pretest was conducted to define conditions based on a convenience sample of 68 undergraduate students in a mass communications program at an accredited university in South Central Pennsylvania. Participants from the pretest sample were not included in the final sample. However, the pretest sample was chosen based on the similarity of demographics with the final sample of participants.

In a Qualtrics survey, four monetary comparisons were presented for determining an appropriate monetary amount for the market norm with "low payment" and "high payment" conditions. Participants were asked to rate their perceived differences (1 = "not different at all"; 7 = "significantly different") on \$1.00 vs. \$2.00, \$1.00 vs. \$3.00, \$1.00 vs. \$4.00, and \$1.00 vs. \$5.00. A repeated measures ANOVA employing a multivariate approach was conducted to examine perceived differences on each comparison. Such analysis revealed that participants perceived the four comparisons significantly different from each other, Wilks $\lambda = 0.29$, $F(3, 65) = 52.54$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.71$. Perceived difference was highest on \$1.00 vs. \$5.00 ($M = 5.52$, $SE = 0.16$) using Bonferroni post-hoc procedure. Therefore, the low payment condition was assigned with a \$1.00 cash reward and high payment condition with \$5.00.

2.3. Stimulus material

This study used manipulated websites of a fictitious online crowdsourcing company called eWiki as the stimulus. Participants were asked to ask to edit an eWiki page by contributing content to a specific topic appeared on the page (same as how people edit a Wikipedia page online). To account for the topic effect and obtain ecological validity, two topics of three types: Facebook and Meetup for technology, Beyoncé and Peggy Lee for public figures, and spring water and lagers for food are used. Six eWiki pages were constructed to include the six topics. Each stimulus included a cover story about eWiki that was the same across all conditions.

2.4. Procedures

Based on the information from the pretest, the main study took the form of a lab experiment over the period of one week. Upon arriving at the lab, participants were seated in front of computers and provided with an instruction sheet with the step-

by-step procedures for completing the experiment. Once participants implied consent on Qualtrics, they received the “eWiki reward,” which varied by condition randomly. They either received no reward (control condition), \$1.00 (market norm with low payment), \$5.00 (market norm with high payment), or a greeting card (social norm) prior to their contributions to eWiki. Afterwards, users proceeded and clicked on a link on Qualtrics to be directed to an eWiki page.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of six eWiki pages. They were asked to write about the topic provided within 30 min. To acquire the ecological validity, participants were able to search and quote relevant sources online with proper citations. After submitting the content on eWiki, participants were directed back to Qualtrics to complete a questionnaire that measured their perceived recognition, task enjoyment, satisfaction with performance appraisal, organizational commitment, and intent to participate with eWiki again. Upon completion of the study, participants were thanked for their participation.

2.5. Independent variables

2.5.1. Type of norms

There were four types of norms: control, social norm, market norm with low payment, and market norm with high payment. Participants in the social norm condition received a greeting card for their contribution to eWiki. The greeting cards were ordered online (28 cents per card) and featured standard styles with a picture with either a fox, owl, raccoon, deer, rabbit, or a squirrel on the front. The same message was addressed to each participant on the inside cover of the card to thank the participant for contribution to eWiki. Based on pretest results, participants assigned to the market norm with low payment received \$1.00 for their eWiki contribution, while those in the high payment condition received \$5.00. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions (50 for control, 45 for social norm, 46 for market norm with \$1.00 payment, and 45 for \$5.00 payment).

2.6. Mediating variables

2.6.1. Perceived recognition

Four items based on Fisher and Ackerman’s (1998) and Fisher’s (2000) measures of perceived recognition were employed. Participants were asked to rate their responses on a Likert scale of 1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree” on items such as “eWiki shows its appreciation to me” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.93$, $M = 4.63$, $SD = 1.78$).

2.6.2. Task enjoyment

A total of three items on a 7-point semantic-differential scale adapted from Park et al. (2000) were used to measure task enjoyment. A sample item included asking participants whether editing the wiki page on eWiki is “not enjoyable at all – very enjoyable” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.93$, $M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.34$).

2.6.3. Satisfaction with performance appraisal

This variable was measured by three items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree”; 7 = “strongly agree”) adapted from Keeping and Levy (2000). A sample item included “I am satisfied with the reward I received from eWiki” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.82$, $M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.45$).

2.6.4. Organizational commitment

Six items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree”; 7 = “strongly agree”) adapted from Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) were used to measure organizational commitment. Items like “I really care about the fate of eWiki” were included (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.95$, $M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.49$).

2.7. Dependent variables

2.7.1. Contribution level

Two objective measures were recorded for contribution level of each participant in a log file. The first measure was the time spent on editing a wiki page. The second measure was the number of characters of the content each participant contributed. Since participants were permitted to use direct quotations from online sources, the length of content contributed became less accurate in that participants tended to quote more for unfamiliar topics. Time spent on editing the wiki page, therefore, was used as the measure for contribution level.

2.7.2. Intent to participate again

Seven items on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = “strongly disagree”; 7 = “strongly agree”) adapted from Kim and Biocca (1997) and Coyle and Thorson (2001) were used to measure participation intention. Sample item is included “I would like to contribute to eWiki again” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.93$, $M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.60$).

Table 1
 Psychological Outcomes as A Function of Type of Norms.

	Control	Social Norm	Market Norm with low payment (\$1)	Market Norm with high payment (\$5)
Perceived Recognition	2.77(1.37) _c	5.55(1.20) _a	4.85(1.63) _b	5.56(1.18) _a
Task Enjoyment	3.77(1.48) _c	4.13(1.17) _{bc}	4.62(1.36) _a	4.18(1.19) _b
Satisfaction with Performance Appraisal	3.92(1.32) _c	4.53(1.39) _b	4.91(1.51) _b	5.44(1.16) _a
Organizational Commitment	3.28(1.48) _b	4.14(1.22) _a	3.92(1.61) _a	4.17(1.49) _a
Contribution Level	680.24(397.70) _c	953.38(474.53) _a	819.75(377.24) _b	899.43(488.65) _{ab}
Intent to Participate again	3.65(1.74) _b	4.41(1.28) _a	4.38(1.74) _a	4.58(1.43) _a

Note: Cell entries are means. Standard deviations are reported in the parentheses. Means with different subscripts differ at $p < 0.05$.

3. Results

3.1. Manipulation check

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to rule out any potential confounding influence from the six photos (fox, owl, raccoon, deer, rabbit, or squirrel) of the greeting cards. Such analysis revealed no different impacts between the six photos on perceived recognition, $F(5, 40) = 1.03, p = 0.42$; task enjoyment, $F(5, 40) = 0.89, p = 0.50$; satisfaction with performance appraisal, $F(5, 40) = 1.54, p = 0.20$; organizational commitment, $F(5, 40) = 0.84, p = 0.53$; time spent on editing wiki pages, $F(5, 40) = 1.39, p = 0.25$; and intent to participate again, $F(5, 40) = 1.10, p = 0.38$.

A series of one-way ANOVA analyses were performed to investigate the possible confounding of the three types of topics (i.e., technology, public figure, and food). No significant differences were found between the six topics on perceived recognition, $F(5, 185) = 0.94, p = 0.46$; task enjoyment, $F(5, 185) = 0.97, p = 0.44$; satisfaction with performance appraisal, $F(5, 185) = 0.63, p = 0.68$; organizational commitment, $F(5, 185) = 1.03, p = 0.40$; time spent on editing the eWiki pages, $F(5, 185) = 0.77, p = 0.58$; and intent to participate again, $F(5, 185) = 1.28, p = 0.27$.

3.2. Effects of types of norms

A series of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to examine perceived recognition, task enjoyment, satisfaction with performance appraisal, organizational commitment, contribution level, and intent to participate again as a result of the type of norms, respectively. Such analyses offered support to all hypotheses proposed in the paper.

Consistent with H1, it was revealed that type of norms had a significant effect on perceived recognition, $F(3, 185) = 45.51, p < 0.001$. Participants in the social norm and the market norm with high payment perceived significantly higher recognition compared to those in the market norm with low payment and control condition. Interestingly, contrary to what H2 expected, although significant differences on task enjoyment merged as a function of type of norms, $F(3, 185) = 3.38, p < 0.05$, participants receiving the low payment in the market norm reported the highest level of task enjoyment. H3 was partially supported, as type of norms had a significant effect on satisfaction of performance appraisal, $F(3, 185) = 10.66, p < 0.001$. Participants received high payment reported the highest satisfaction level of performance appraisal and those in the condition reported the lowest.

No significant difference was obtained between the social norm condition and the market norm with low payment condition. Partial support was also found for H4 as participants displayed the lowest commitment to eWiki in the control condition and no significantly different levels of commitment in the other three conditions, $F(3, 185) = 3.95, p < 0.01$. Type of norms also had a significant impact on the contribution level as partially hypothesized by H5, reflected in the time spent on editing wiki pages (in seconds), $F(3, 185) = 3.56, p < 0.05$. Participants in the social norm spent longest time editing the pages compared to those receiving low payment and the control conditions, while no significant difference was obtained between the market norm with high payment and low payment conditions. Finally, significant differences emerged for individuals' intent to participate again as a consequence of type of norms as well, $F(3, 185) = 3.33, p < 0.05$. Participants in the control condition displayed the lowest intent to participate again to eWiki, and no significantly different intent was found for those in the other three conditions. Thus, H6 received partial support as well (see Table 1).

3.3. The underlying mechanisms for the social norm and the market norm

Path analyses with 5000 bootstrapped samples and 95% bias adjusted confidence intervals were run (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) to examine RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3, which asked what factors mediated the relationship between the different types of norms (social norm, market norm with low payment, and market norm with high payment) and intent to participate again. Three serial mediation models were constructed to test the indirect effect of type of norms on intent to participate again, via perceived recognition, task enjoyment, satisfaction with performance appraisal, and organizational commitment.

Results from the serial mediation models constructed for the social norm indicated that among perceived recognition, task enjoyment, and satisfaction with performance appraisal, the social norm had a significant positive indirect effect on intent to participate again, fully mediated by perceived recognition ($b = 0.22, SE = 0.08, LLCI = 0.09, ULCI = 0.41, p < 0.0001$).

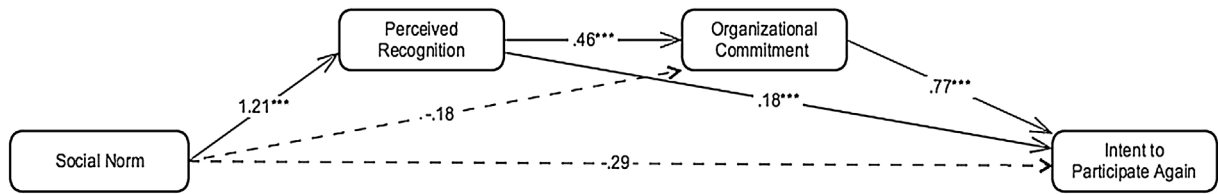


Fig. 1. Path analysis showing serial mediation (perceived recognition and organizational commitment) between the social norm and intent to participate again.

Note: Dummy coding was utilized (market norm with low payment = 1, social norm = 0, market norm with high payment = 0, control = 0). Coefficients reported are unstandardized. ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

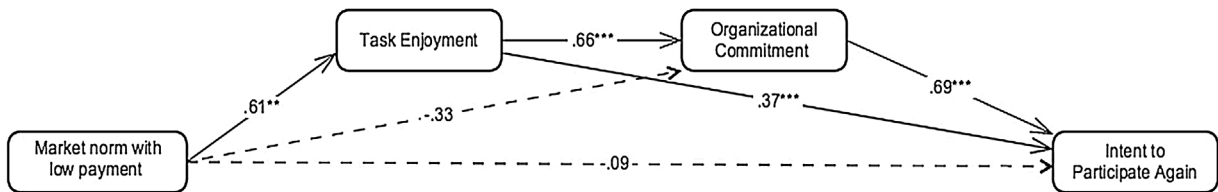


Fig. 2. Path analysis showing serial mediation (task enjoyment and organizational commitment) between the market norm with low payment and intent to participate again.

Note: Dummy coding was utilized (market norm with high payment = 1, social norm = 0, market norm with low payment = 0, control = 0). a = coefficient for path including perceived recognition, b = coefficient for path including satisfaction with performance appraisal. Coefficients reported are unstandardized. ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

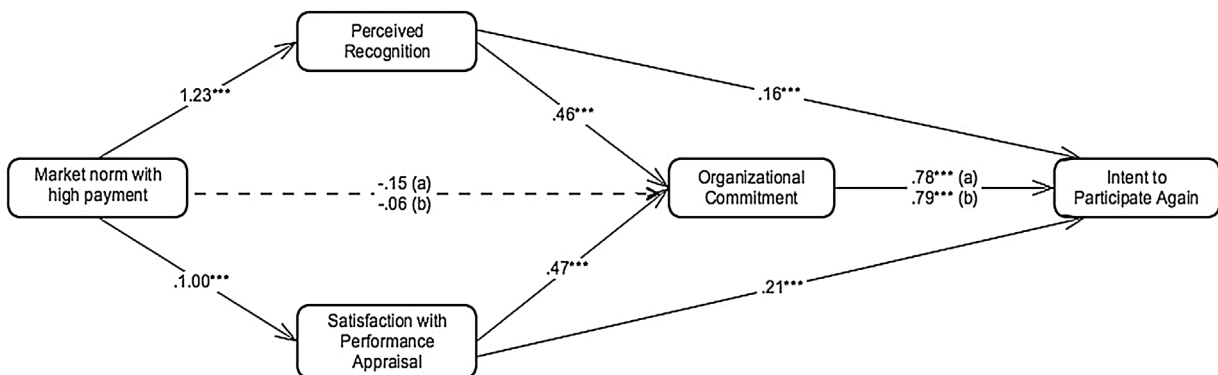


Fig. 3. Path analysis showing serial mediations (perceived recognition and organizational commitment; satisfaction with performance appraisal and organizational commitment) between the market norm with high payment and intent to participate again.

Note: Dummy coding was utilized (market norm with high payment = 1, social norm = 0, market norm with low payment = 0, control = 0). a = coefficient for path including perceived recognition, b = coefficient for path including satisfaction with performance appraisal. Coefficients reported are unstandardized. ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

There was also a significant positive indirect effect via perceived recognition and organizational commitment to intent to participate again ($b = 0.43$, $SE = 0.10$, $LLCI = 0.24$, $ULCI = 0.66$, $p < 0.0001$) (see Fig. 1).

For the market norm with low payment (\$1.00), task enjoyment emerged as the significant mediator, fully mediating the relationship between market norm with low payment and intent to participate again ($b = 0.22$, $SE = 0.09$, $LLCI = 0.06$, $ULCI = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$). There was also a significant positive indirect effect via enjoyment and organizational commitment to intent to participate again ($b = 0.28$, $SE = 0.11$, $LLCI = 0.07$, $ULCI = 0.51$, $p < 0.01$) (see Fig. 2).

As illustrated in Fig. 3, for the market norm with high payment (\$5.00), both satisfaction with performance appraisal and perceived recognition were found as significant mediators. First, there was a significant positive indirect effect from the market norm with high payment to intent to participate via satisfaction with the performance appraisal ($b = 0.21$, $SE = 0.07$, $LLCI = 0.09$, $ULCI = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$). There was also a significant positive indirect effect via the path through satisfaction with performance appraisal and organizational commitment to intent to participate again ($b = 0.37$, $SE = 0.11$, $LLCI = 0.19$, $ULCI = 0.63$, $p < 0.001$). Besides satisfaction, indirect effect on intent to participate was also significant through perceived recognition ($b = 0.21$, $SE = 0.08$, $LLCI = 0.07$, $ULCI = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$). The significant positive indirect effect from the market norm with high payment to intent to participate could go through perceived recognition and organizational commitment, as well ($b = 0.43$, $SE = 0.10$, $LLCI = 0.26$, $ULCI = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$).

4. Discussion

4.1. General discussion

This study showed that people were, indeed, able to be motivated to participate and contribute for reasons other than monetary rewards. The social norm, reflected in the form of a greeting card addressed to each participant generated strong motivations among people. More importantly, this study showed that not only could individuals be motivated by the social norm, but also that they were as motivated as those who received monetary compensation. The social norm generated as strong psychological outcomes as did the market norm including organizational commitment, satisfaction with performance appraisal, and intent to participate again. More importantly, participants in the social norm condition perceived recognition from eWiki and spent time to contributing content to eWiki pages even significantly more than those who got paid with \$1 dollar. The only exception, interestingly, is that task enjoyment levels in the social norm condition did not differ from those in the control condition. A possible explanation could be the different underlying psychological mechanisms at play for the social norm vs. the market norm that were detected in the serial mediation tests.

Results from the serial mediation analyses suggest that perceived recognition fully mediated the relationship between the social norm and intent to participate again. That is, unless people feel properly recognized and acknowledged, they will not take actions to participate purely on account of altruism or reciprocity. Therefore, it is not plausible to simply ask for a favor and to expect strong participation. Even though people are not participating for money, they are not participating for free, either. The reward to them, per the social norm, is being recognized and valued, which is essential to individual self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). When people feel appreciated and are inclined to participate, they are then accountable for reciprocating by making quality contributions (Hagin, 1990; Kraut, 1973). This may explain why task enjoyment levels in the social norm condition was low, as participants in this condition perceived obligations to contribute a certain amount of content than simply having fun. Therefore, task enjoyment as a psychological schema might be less likely to get activated for participants in the social norm throughout participation.

An interesting finding in this study is that task enjoyment reported was the highest in the market norm with low payment condition (\$1.00) and fully mediated the positive effect of this condition on intent to participate again, which is congruent with Festinger (1957)'s findings that participants receiving low monetary incentives rated the task as significantly more enjoyable in order to reduce cognitive dissonance. While Harmon-Jones (2002) argued that low payment did not necessarily lead to disliking, this finding highlighted the necessity of organizations making the task enjoyable for people to participate with a low level of payment so that they could be compensated for the cognitive dissonance experienced and reduce the discomfort as a result.

This study reinforces that high payment is attractive and effective in provoking organizational commitment and intent to participate again. As revealed from the mediation analyses, high payment could lead to satisfaction with performance appraisal, which is highly relevant to the market norm. Since people under the market norm are contributing for monetary rewards, if the payment received is considerably high, satisfaction with performance appraisal is gratified. This explains why it serves as a significant mediator only for the market norm with high payment condition instead of the social norm. The power of high payment, on the other hand, manifests itself in producing perceived recognition as shown in the mediation tests. That is, individuals could also transfer a good payment into recognition. In this case, high payment tells how much an individual is valued and appreciated by an organization.

4.2. Theoretical implications

The theoretical implications of this study stem from findings pertaining to the power of social norms, which fills the intellectual gap as to whether or not public participation with organizations can be motivated by things other than monetary incentives. More importantly, the three different psychological mechanisms (perceived recognition, task enjoyment, and satisfaction with performance appraisal) identified by this study through which people were motivated under the social norm vs. the market norm untangled why organizations could get publics participating and contributing with and without monetary incentives. It expands previous research (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998; Kollock, 1999; Trivers, 1971; Unger, 1991) by identifying recognition as the key factor, driving the social norm over monetary compensation. Furthermore, task enjoyment serving as a mediating variable for the market norm with low payment condition further explores the experiential effect of reward amount. Finally, this paper further validates the effect of high payment on initiating public participation.

4.3. Practical implications

This study offers practical implications for public relations practitioners seeking to increase participation among publics. Findings from the study validate the effectiveness and the efficiency of using social norms to invite public participation. As the concept of stewardship suggests, organizations should customize their strategies to enhance organization-public relationships by focusing on recognizing and appreciating publics rather than emphasizing the monetary benefits that one could receive for a given initiative. While this study used a greeting card to generate short-term recognition to participants in the lab setting, companies and organizations can focus on recognizing publics in the long run by utilizing other approaches to express gratitude such as acknowledging publics in a company newsletter, social media site, or another medium. In addition,

based on the mechanisms through which low payment could motivate participation, companies and organizations would benefit from making an experience as enjoyable as possible to invite participation. Findings as such may be particularly useful to nonprofit organizations and/or small businesses that have limited monetary resources.

Based on the findings of this study, public relations practitioners could strategize their practices to engage publics and motivate participation for a given initiative or campaign of an organization. For big organizations/companies with enough budgets and resources like the Fortune 500 companies, paying a generous amount of money is always an effective incentive to involve more people to participate. However, with limited resources and less budgets, small organizations/companies, particularly non-profit organizations, would have to consider other alternatives to engage and motivate publics. If only small amount of payment can be offered, public relations practitioners need to add fun elements to the participating experience of publics. Gamifying an initiative or campaign, in this case, could help bringing enjoyment and fun to people, which helps individuals to get enough motivation despite of the low level of payment. On the other hand, the social norm principles could do favors to organizations/companies with different sizes and resources due to its efficiency and effectiveness. For big companies, although paying the public could motivate participation, it generates considerably additional cost aside from expenditure for the regular public relation practices. Instead, if these organizations could tailor their daily public relation strategies (e.g., letters to customers, contacting key publics on social media) by assuring individuals that they are valuable assets to the organization, people will not only participate, but they will participate as much as if they were paid. The advantage of the social norm is even more noteworthy to small businesses, considering most of their public relations depend on long-term strategies (e.g., monthly newsletters, word-of-mouth) on a regular basis. Expressing appreciation to publics through these channels could motivate public participation effectively with little additional financial cost.

4.4. Limitations and future directions

This study has two main limitations, on which future directions can be built. First, it can be argued that gifts also have a monetary value, and thus is it possible that some people in the social norm might be motivated by the converted money value of the gift (greeting card) in this study rather than the greeting card itself. However, if people were completely motivated by monetary value of the greeting card, the similar mediators should be found for the social norm as the ones in the low payment condition, as the monetary value of a small and regular greeting card (usually around one dollar) is easily discernable. However, the mediation tests yielded complete different mechanisms, which suggest individuals driven by the social norm were going by distinct psychological routes than those driven by monetary incentives.

This study did not find the negative effect of low payment in participation, which differs from previous research. A possible explanation is that \$1.00 (though significantly lower than \$5.00, per pretest results) might not be low enough to test this hypothesis. Prior research has suggested individuals' satisfaction levels heavily rely on perceived fairness of the payment (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). If people perceive the amount as unfair, a series of negative consequences will be generated to cause low payment to backfire and discourage participation more than offering no payment would altogether. Therefore, future investigations should explore the effect of perceived unfairness of payment amount on public participation.

5. Conclusions

This study recognizes the psychological motivations that impact public participation. As companies and organizations continue to search for best practices to build and maintain strong public relations with limited resources, it is particularly important to develop strategies for public recognition. When individuals have a high perceived level of recognition, they are likely to display a commitment to the organization and are thus more inclined to participate and contribute to such an organization again in the future even without monetary compensations. The strength of social norm in engaging key publics and obtaining participation over time will become increasingly indicative of effective communication and relationship management of an organization in engaging maintaining healthy public relations.

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