

A MODEL OF THE INFLUENCES THAT LEAD TO CONSUMERS' HELPING BEHAVIOR

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Consumers' contributions to the betterment of their society can be viewed as helping behavior. Yet the process that motivates consumers to engage in helping behavior has been little studied within the framework of consumer behavior. This paper presents a model of this system of influences on helping. This model, which reflects recent findings from both behavioral science research and research involving marketing systems, provides a foundation for consumer research into the helping behavior that occurs in a wide variety of consumption-related areas where assistance is desirable or necessary. The model assumes the necessary conditions for helping are (1) a helping situation that involves (2) a victim or recipient of help, and (3) a potential helper.

The model proposes numerous hypothesized links among eight constructs posited to precede Helping, as well as links to Helping itself. In the model, Situation Characteristics is the perception of the set of circumstances that stimulates arousal within the potential helper. Helper Characteristics subsumes a variety of commonly-used individual characteristics, including demographics, personality, ability, competence, knowledge, other-orientation, self-esteem, personal norms, empathic concern, egoism, and altruism. Recipient Characteristics is the helper's perception of the recipient, including the recipient's ability, effort provided, deservingness, role in creating the problem, and demographics. Group Characteristics reflect whether the helper and recipient belong to the same (membership or reference) group, and if so, the nature of their interdependence. Equity State reflects the extent to which an objective observer of the situation would conclude all pertinent parties are receiving gains that are proportionate to their contributions. The helper's Psychological State subsumes cognitive, self-directed affective, and other-directed affective components. Responsibility is the acceptance or rejection of an obligation to help; responsibility may be internalized or externalized. Benefits/Costs represents the helper's trade-off of the gains and losses for the parties involved from both helping and not helping. Helping finds a wide range of manifestations, ranging from ascriptions of deservingness of help to actual physical assistance.

To help interpret the conceptual model, the paper refers the abstract constructs of the model to concrete issues in consumer research. For example: Thoughtful disposal to

protect and improve the human environment. Why do some individuals assist their society with such programs as recycling paper and metals, reducing the volume of trash produced, using biodegradable products, and avoiding harmful chemicals? Why do others ignore these programs? What can be done to encourage a greater number of individuals to participate?

Cooperation with pleas from the textile industry to "Buy American" clothing products. Which consumers internalize responsibility and buy American products to help American workers? Which consumers externalize responsibility to other parties such as retailers, manufacturers, and government? How do equity considerations and benefit/cost trade-offs influence their helping decisions? How do similarity, we-ness, and common fate affect helping?

Helpfulness in salesclerks. What are the characteristics of salesclerks who are perceived by consumers as particularly helpful? Does this perception depend on the characteristics of the consumer as well as the salesclerk? How do consumers' psychological states affect their acceptance of salesclerks as noticeably helpful? Does it depend on the sales situation?

Cooperation with marketing research studies. Which consumers assist marketing researchers by cooperating with their studies? Which constructs in the model explain helping? What characteristics of the appeal for cooperation (the situation) elicit greater helping? Is responsibility an operant construct? Does similarity between researcher and consumer affect cooperation? Does the mood of the consumer affect cooperation? What benefits and costs emerge as determinants of cooperation?

Consumers' participation in distribution tasks. Which individuals and households are more likely to assume a part in the functions of distribution, thus assisting the commercial channels? What do consumers consider "their" tasks and which the tasks of the business logistics system? What inducements must be offered to motivate individuals and households to perform distribution tasks? Do the inducements depend on the circumstances?