

VOLUNTEERING AMONG ISLAMIC RELIEF MALAYSIA (IR MALAYSIA) DONORS DURING PANDEMIC

Azhana Othman^{1,2}
Muhammad Haris Sharim³

¹Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Cawangan Melaka, Malaysia,
(E-mail: azhana395@uitm.edu.my)

²Centre for Islamic Philanthropy and Social Finance (CIPSF), UiTM Cawangan Melaka, Malaysia.

³Islamic Relief Malaysia (IRM), (E-mail: muharisharim@gmail.com)

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Abstract: *Through the spirit of volunteerism, the pandemic has brought individuals from all walks of life together. Volunteers assisting vulnerable individuals, groups, and communities, independent organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), businesses, and individuals have formed networks to assist the underprivileged in surviving the pandemic. This study uses the case study of IRM donors who contributed to the COVID 19 Appeal Fund. The substantive study is based on a sample of sixty seven donors who participated in online survey in January-December 2021. The main goal of this study was to provide a description on the frequency and motivation among volunteers, and also the expectation of the volunteers to participate in digital volunteering during pandemic.*

Keywords: *Volunteering, Digital Volunteering, NGOs, Donors, Pandemic*

Introduction

Volunteering is the act of giving one's time and services to assist others or promote a cause without expecting monetary return. It might include a variety of activities, such as working with community initiatives, attending charity events, or providing assistance to those in need. Volunteering is frequently motivated by a desire to make a positive difference, develop skills, or cultivate connections within a community. Volunteer work (volunteering) is generally viewed as a helping activity in which people engage willingly, without any form of coercion or mandate from a government. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020) notes volunteer work includes activities performed willingly and without pay to produce goods or provide services for others outside the volunteer's household or family. The ILO identifies two kinds of volunteer, either, direct volunteer work, which is done to help other people directly (e.g. a neighbour, a friend, a stranger, nature) or organization-based volunteer work, which is done through or for an organization, community or group.

With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the concept of "virtual volunteering" has gained popularity. This type of virtual volunteering, also known as "digital volunteering," "online volunteering," or "cyber volunteering," has been there since the 1990s with the emergence of the Internet but hasn't truly taken off until recently. Prior to the COVID-19 epidemic completely upending our lives, the majority of people thought of volunteering in the more conventional sense, which involves donating their time to a particular cause or place, such as a school, food bank, soup kitchen, crisis centre, youth service, library, or retirement home. Many of these volunteer activities have been suspended because of the widespread quarantines imposed by the epidemic. However, this hasn't made individuals any less eager to lend a hand to their neighbour.

The pandemic had a profound impact on NGOs and volunteering, resulting in both challenges and adaptations. NGOs face challenges such as: 1) increased demand, whereby many NGOs experienced an increase in demand for their services owing to heightened socioeconomic challenges, such as food insecurity, mental health struggles, and healthcare demands, 2) resource constraints where many NGOs had financial challenges as fundraising events were canceled and donations declined, 3) operational limitations due to lock down and health laws limited in-person operations, making it harder to carry out programs and services.

Background of Islamic Relief Malaysia (IRM)

Islamic Relief Malaysia (IRM) was officially established in Malaysia in 2005 with the primary purpose of extending IRM's humanitarian assistance throughout the Asia-Pacific area. IRM began as a fundraising office and currently acts as both a fundraising office (for local and international initiatives) and a field office (for the implementation of local projects). Islamic Relief Malaysia is also responsible for increasing awareness and providing accurate and up-to-date information on Islamic Relief to Malaysians and people in neighbouring countries.

The Covid-19 epidemic has had a wide-ranging impact on Malaysians' daily life. The pandemic has had an indirect impact on a variety of sectors, including health, safety, the economy, and society. In response to the economic impact of the COVID-19 outbreak in Malaysia, the Malaysian government, in collaboration with various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), businesses, and foreign governments, has implemented a variety of support and financial assistance initiatives.

IRM, one of the active NGOs, has formed the COVID-19 Appeal Fund by donating food and sanitary items such as face masks, sanitizers, and detergents as aid support. IRM also carried out food distribution in Malaysia in partnership with government agencies that have direct access to the recipients and quarantine centers; however, distribution outside of the country would be carried out through the Islamic Relief field offices.

Thus, this study aims to find out how willing donators are as volunteers during the pandemic, what motivates them to participate in volunteering programs and their acceptance of virtual volunteering.

Literature Review

Volunteering in Islam perspective

Volunteerism serves as a tool for instilling morals in oneself, and social responsibility to the country is a noble activity that is accepted and valued by people from all walks of life. Its good effects on the individual, community, and nation are undeniable. Personal development, altruism, personal happiness, job motivation, and religious values have all been identified as motivators for teenage volunteers, according to research. Volunteering is heavily encouraged in Islam, thus it is not a foreign concept.

Sahri, Sirajuddin, Murad, & Alias (2017) in their study indicated that religious factor is an important factor for youth volunteers as the respondents strongly agree on its influential factor for their participation in volunteerism. Ani (2019) emphasized that philanthropy, volunteerism, and charity are seen as the foundation of the Islamic commitment to personal and social responsibility, leading most Muslims believe that generosity is a form of worship to Allah.

Referring to Alzaareer & Abdalla (2023), in their study among high school students in Australian Islamic Schools found that students were driven to volunteer for intrinsic religious reasons, self-satisfaction and development, benevolence, knowledge and skill-based enhancement, social motives, employment-based motives, and inspiring parental motivations. Individual and societal development, increased participation and belonging in mainstream society, and combating Islamophobia are among the benefits.

Volunteering is more than just spending time on activities that benefit others. Volunteering has a broader social influence. University students who actively participate in volunteer activities benefit the community because they have a better chance of learning about new opportunities and networking with industry professionals. The concept of religiosity is introduced as part of the motivating tactics because it has been shown to be one of the motivators for students to volunteer (Ali & Abd Hamid, 2020).

Ali & Abd Hamid (2020) also mentioned the Qur'anic terms for two perspectives on volunteerism, that are *al-mujahadah fi sabil Allah bi al-Amwal* (striving to help others in the service of Allah with goods, money, and wealth) and *al-mujahadah fi sabil Allah bi alAnfus* (striving to serve others physically). Volunteers can help others by leveraging their financial resources or by providing physical support. *Infaq* can take many forms, including paying *zakah* or *sadaqah*. Aside from donating money and wealth to help others, this type of volunteerism is all about performing physical labour. Volunteers, for example, can help the sick, the destitute,

and stateless persons, as well as volunteer at orphanages and other non-governmental organizations.

Volunteering during pandemic

The study done by Kulik (2021) in Israeli, involved 657 individuals who participated in the first wave of the COVID-19 epidemic. Four components of the volunteering experience were evaluated: motivation, affect, cognitive, and behavioural. According to Kulik (2021), the hybrid volunteers' experience was more favourable in certain ways than the others: hybrid volunteers are motivated by social solidarity, believe they make a better contribution to the community, and are more committed to volunteering. However, they are less satisfied than others with the professional accompaniment provided during their volunteering and have higher levels of negative affect. Virtual volunteers have a poor commitment to volunteering and are dissatisfied with the feedback they receive from consumers. The content of great occasions in the traditional and hybrid.

According to Biddle, N., and Grey, M. (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic has had a wide-ranging impact on Australian society. While Australia has fared better than many other nations, and there may be some benefits in terms of social cohesion and trust in government (Biddle and Grey 2021), there is no denying that there have been some negative consequences. One negative result has been a huge decrease in volunteering over time. Estimates indicate that the percentage of persons who volunteered has decreased from 36.0 percent previous to the pandemic to 24.2% in the year leading up to April 2021.

The study by Lai & Wang (2023), which is anchored in grounded theory, identifies the attributions of community emergency volunteering in China during the COVID-19 pandemic by summarizing the transcripts of 32 in-depth interviews with Chinese volunteers. In China, there are four primary variables that impact community emergency volunteering: national policy, publicity and lobbying, the external environment, and internal awareness. Among these are the social psychological attributions of emergency volunteering on the one hand, and inner awareness on the other. Along with national legislation, public relations and advocacy also contribute to knowledge of oneself and the outside world and influence community emergency volunteering. Lastly, a fundamental motivator for some volunteers' volunteering is their strong sense of trust in their government and ruling party.

A study on Participants in the School of Medicine of University of Sao Paulo (FMUSP) Volunteering Program, Brazil expressed a sense of obligation and motivation to serve society as future health professionals, as well as to help others for altruistic motives (Siqueira, Torsani, Gameiro, Chinelatto, Mikahil, Tempski & Martins (2022). Leadership or soft skills were not as important as knowledge and work-related competences, highlighting the significance of incorporating such activities within the curriculum. Engaging in management-related tasks may foster the growth of a more resilient mindset regarding medical education. Participating in volunteer programs gives students the chance to acquire skills necessary for their future careers as health professionals.

Despite impediments to volunteering, more young people remained or became volunteers throughout the pandemic. To understand why some youth chose to emerge or remain as volunteers while others choose to stop volunteering, the current study illustrated how kids

justified their volunteering decisions using personal, social, moral, and prudential considerations (Grant, French, Bolic & Hammond, 2024).

Digital volunteering

Virtual volunteering is the act of providing time, talents, and experience remotely, usually via the internet, to benefit organizations, causes, or persons in need (Lachance, 2020). Unlike traditional volunteering, which needs physical presence, virtual volunteering may be done from anywhere, giving you greater flexibility in scheduling and involvement.

During pandemic, there were changes in volunteering, firstly it shift to virtual volunteering. Many organizations adapted by offering remote volunteering opportunities, allowing people to contribute from home. This included tasks like online tutoring, virtual fundraising, and social media campaigns. Secondly, it involves Health and Safety Protocols. Such as, for in-person volunteering, NGOs implemented strict health guidelines to protect volunteers and the communities they served. Thirdly, the focus on essential Services where the volunteers often focused on critical areas such as food distribution, healthcare support, and mental health initiatives.

A study by Kusnadi & Hikmawan (2020) in Indonesia can highlight three facets that serve as the cornerstone for the community's response to and resolution of the COVID-19 epidemic. The most crucial is a community-based approach to solidarity and growth in a variety of areas, particularly digital citizenship, digital literacy, and social media. Furthermore, a foundation that is equally important is the resurgence of volunteerism in a variety of contexts, from the active volunteer who acts as a direct actor to the secondary volunteer who emerges with various forms of donations and so forth.

Therefore, during the pandemic, digital volunteering gained significant momentum as in-person activities were restricted due to lock downs and social distancing measures. Many organizations revolve to online platforms, creating a surge in remote opportunities for volunteers. This period highlighted the adaptability of both volunteers and organizations, showing how technology could be harnessed to continue important work despite physical limitations.

Methodology

The preliminary study surveyed on IRM's donators during January-December 2021. The respondents were individual donators from the list of IRM contributing to the COVID 19 Appeal Fund. The study utilizes google form to collect primary data. The google form link was send through email of the and also in IRM media social.

Analysis and Findings

The preliminary study polled IRM donors between January and December 2021. The responses were individual donors from the list of IRM donors who contributed to the COVID 19 Emergency Appeal. The study collects primary data via a Google form. Google Form is a template or worksheet-based tool that can be used separately or in conjunction to collect user information (Nurmahmudah & Nuryuniarti, 2020). The language used is Bahasa Malaysia. The link to the Google form was sent via the ' email addresses as well as IRM media channels.

Descriptive Analysis

Hole (2000) describe that descriptive statistics summarize the data, making clear any trends, patterns etc. which may be lurking within them; they consist of visual displays such as graphs, and summary statistics such as means.

Table 1: Volunteers' Profile

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Age	Below 20 years	1	1.5
	21-30	6	9
	31-40	12	17.9
	41-50	18	26.9
	Above 51 years	30	44.8
Ethnicity	Malay	65	97
	Bidayuh	1	1.5
	Melanau	1	1.5
Employment	Not working	30	44.8
	Government servant	19	28.3
	Private worker	15	22.4
	Self employment	1	1.5
	Part-time worker	1	1.5
	Business	1	1.5
Not working	Pensioner	38	56.7
	Quit or laid off	11	16.7
	Studying	9	13.3
	Housewives	9	13.3

For the term age, 44.8% are over 51 years old, 26.9% are between 41 and 50 years old, 17.9% are between 31 and 40 years old, 9% are between 21 and 30 years old, and 1.5% are under the age of 20. Under ethnicity, majority of the respondents are Malay (97%) and the remaining are Bidayuh (1.5%) and Melanau (1.5%). Meanwhile, for their employment background, 44.8% are not working, 28.3% are government servant, 22.4% are private worker, 1.5% are part time worker and 1.5% are doing business. Under category of not working, mostly are pensioner (56.7%), quit or being laid (16.7%), and the rest are studying (13.3%) and housewives (13.3%).

Frequency Analysis

Table 2: Frequency of participating in volunteer activities/community activities throughout the pandemic

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	35	52.2
Once	9	13.4
1-4 times	10	14.9
More than 5 times	13	19.4

A majority (52.2%) of respondents have never experienced in any volunteer activities, meaning over half of the participants are unaffected by it. A smaller group (13.4%) experienced the event only one time. Some respondents (14.9%) have encountered the event more than once

but fewer than five times and a significant minority (19.4%) experienced the event frequently, more than five times.



Figure 1: What is the motivation or purpose of becoming a volunteer

Figure 1 shows the frequency and percentages of several motivational elements. Each factor is depicted on the horizontal axis, while the vertical axis displays frequency (blue bars) and percentage (orange bars). There are fourteen motivational variables are listed. To begin, 67.12% (39) stated that their motivation is due to "rewards or a practice". Second, 53.4% (31) wish to be a kind member of society. Third, 50% (29%) volunteer because empathy and sympathy are core values in their lives. Fourth, 51.7% (30) volunteered to show gratitude. Next, 63.8% (37) want to help others, whereas 6.9% (4) want to avoid feeling guilty. Furthermore, 15.5% (9) learnt more about other participants. 3.4% (2) as community service, 6.9% (4) encouragement from friends, 1.7% (1) to help NGOs, 1.7% (1) to sustain *sunnah* practices, and 1.7% (1) for *rahmat* and *redho*.

With 63.8%, the most prevalent motivation is "want to benefit others". "Rewards or a practice" has a high frequency and proportion (67.2%). Factors like "don't want to feel guilty" and "no reason" have extremely low motivation frequencies. Generally, this figure illustrates the diverse range of motivations, with altruistic reasons like benefiting others, societal roles, and personal values being the most significant.

Table 3: Have you ever heard of digital volunteering?

Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	44	65.8
No	17	25
Not sure	7	9.4

Digital volunteering refers to volunteer work done remotely via the internet. It enables people to donate their time, skills, and experience to causes, organization, or communities from anywhere with an internet connection. This type of volunteering has gained popularity, particularly with the emergence of digital platforms and tools that enable distant collaboration

more accessible. When the volunteers were asked whether they have heard of digital volunteering, 65.8% mentioned “Yes”, 25% said “No” and 9.4% were not sure about it.

Table 4: How do you feel after volunteering?

Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
So happy	25	78.1
Grateful	29	90.6
Relieved	14	43.8
Repent and sympathy	19	59.4
Normal (no feeling)	1	3.1
Angry	0	0
Miserable	0	0

The majority of them (78.1%) were overjoyed after volunteering, while 90.6% were grateful, 43.8% were relieved, and 59.4% expressed repentance and pity. Meanwhile, 3.1% feel normal, and none are angry or depressed.

Table 5: Opportunity in Participating in Digital Volunteerism

Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	23	34.3
No	8	12.5
Not sure	36	53.1

The volunteers were asked if they were given the opportunity, are they interested in participating in the digital volunteerism program to encourage people to give charity. Most of them, 53.1% were not sure, 12.5% said “No” and 34.4% said “Yes”.

Table 6: Frequency in promoting/encouraging people to donate through social media (whatsapp, sms, facebook etc)

Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
More than 4 times	10	14.9
4 times per month	1	1.5
2-3 times	26	38.8
1 time	14	20.9
Never	9	13.4
Once a while	2	3
Not sure	1	1.5
Frequent	1	1.5

Most of the volunteers, 2-3 times (38.8%) did promoting or encouraging people to donate through social media. Only 14.9% promoting or encouraging more than 4 times and 1.5% did 4 times per month. However, some of them never (13.4%) and not sure (1.5%).

Discussion and Conclusion

To summarize, the vast majority of volunteers were 50 years or older. The majority are Malay. In terms of employment, it's worth noting that the majority of volunteers are not working, with retirees, housewives, and those laid off being the most prevalent. All respondents expressed considerable interest in volunteering.

For older volunteers, the motivational drivers of volunteering to avoid thinking about personal problems and volunteering for social reasons are related to worsened health (the former) and a quality of life that has not worsened (the latter) (Socci, Principi, Di Rosa, Quattrini & Lucantoni, 2023). Volunteering may improve well-being, especially among people who have little social relationships. Volunteering allows people to feel more connected to their community, which boosts their social capital. Establishing social bonds increases trust, making people feel more secure (Alzaareer, & Abdalla, 2023).

Volunteering is not only beneficial for personal development and social good but also creates tangible economic benefits that ripple through individuals, communities, organizations, and economies. For example, through volunteering, the individual can gain skills development. Volunteering enables people to improve or acquire abilities that are immediately applicable to the workforce, such as problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and leadership. Their ability to compete for jobs may increase as a result.

Even if volunteering doesn't always result in money right away, it has many positive financial effects on people, businesses, and society as a whole. Enhancing skill development, minimizing government expenditures, raising productivity, and promoting more resilient and cooperative economies are all benefits of it.

This study has some limitations. The exploratory design of the study, as well as the convenience (not randomized sampling) strategy used to get the respondents, do not allow for the generalization of findings. Another limitation is related to the size of the sample. Due to this study only focusing on the Covid 19 Emergency Appeal's donors, it was not possible to involve a wider number of volunteers.

Deeper investigation can be made towards the variable of self-efficacy as it has provided relatively high predictive value towards motivation to volunteer as concluded in this study. Further research is necessary to fully understand the motivational variables, both extrinsic and intrinsic, that drive people to volunteer.

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