

Article

Multiple Network Effects: “Individual-Organization Social Interaction” Model on China’s Sustainable Voluntary Service Supply Mechanism

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Abstract: Despite strong policy support for volunteerism, Chinese social service organizations require assistance in volunteer management, particularly concerning retaining volunteers and sustaining the supply of volunteer services. By interviewing volunteers from a successful volunteer organization and analyzing the collected data using the constructive grounded theories and methods, this study found that, contrary to the conclusions of previous studies, (1) sustainable volunteerism involves volunteers’ ability, motivation, and resources; (2) the ideal framework for the sustainability of volunteer service provision is based on a triangular support model of “individual-organization social interaction”; and (3) social interaction manifests itself in three network effects (emotional, family, and social). In particular, our analysis found that interpersonal relationships, intergenerational relationships, and parent–child education are essential to sustaining the supply of volunteer services.

Keywords: social organization; volunteer management; supply of volunteer services; sustainability



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1. Introduction

Volunteering has a positive impact on social cohesion, civic engagement, and the sustainable social development of nations and regions [1]. Accordingly, the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015 proposed that volunteer organizations should participate in promoting Sustainable Development Goals. Although the Americas and Oceania have volunteer rates of 22% and 40%, respectively [2], several studies show that these rates are declining in all countries and regions. Asia currently has one of the lowest volunteer rates, comprising only 20% of the population [1]. In this time of declining volunteer numbers, volunteer groups face the challenge of recruiting and retaining volunteers over the long term.

China is also suffering from this volunteer shortage. Although public data from China’s Volunteer Service Platform indicates that the total number of volunteers in China is substantial—the number of actual volunteers is 221 million, and the total number of hours served exceeds 3.7 billion as of December 2021—China’s volunteer service still faces practical problems related to short service cycles, lack of service continuity, and rapid turnover. According to the survey data of Charity Blue Book: China Charity Development Report (2020), 41.72% of volunteer service organizations face difficulties in finding qualified volunteers, 22.22% struggle with volunteer service dropout, and 20.63% deal with personal injury and property damage among volunteers. The sustainability of volunteer service provision, an important human resource in volunteer organizations, influences the effectiveness and quality of volunteering, overall social governance, and the long-term growth of social organizations.

In this regard, although much research has been conducted in academia on what motivates people to volunteer [3,4], motivation does not necessarily lead to long-term

engagement [5]. In addition, few studies address what motivates people to sustain their volunteer engagement. Similarly, research on the processes and mechanisms for building sustainable volunteering is lacking.

This study adopts a rooted research approach to provide an analytical framework for the sustainability of volunteering in China from the perspective of individual–organization interaction. Compared with other methods, it is more conducive to the discussion of process and mechanism. Ultimately, the study aims to provide insights into improving volunteerism and the sustainable participation of social organizations in grassroots social policy and serve as a reference.

2. Background

2.1. Definition of Sustainable Volunteer Service

In the “Measures for the Administration of Registered Volunteers in China”, volunteers are defined as organizations or individuals who provide services to a society based on their conscience and beliefs without material remuneration (2006). In academia, volunteers are defined as people who take the initiative to contribute to the public good and society and are willing to help others without expecting anything in return [6,7]. Accordingly, this study defines volunteers as people who voluntarily contribute their time, ability, abilities, and energy to help society and others without receiving anything in return.

Sustained volunteering is an enduring and uninterrupted voluntary behavior. Accordingly, “Management of Non-profit Organizations” defines sustainable volunteering as “volunteers who continuously fulfill their commitment to volunteering over a long period of time” [8]. Tang associates continuous volunteering with long-term volunteering behavior and idealizes this state of volunteering [9].

The definition and operationalization indicators of sustained volunteer behavior itself are not uniform. Some researchers believe that volunteering is sustainable as long as volunteers do not reduce the frequency of their involvement or stop participating. Some researchers also measure sustainability by volunteers’ subjective willingness and attitudes, asking them about their willingness to continue volunteering regardless of major life changes. Therefore, in addition to engagement, frequency and duration of volunteering can also be used as criteria to assess whether volunteering behaviors are sustainable [10].

2.2. Variables Affecting Sustainable Volunteerism

Most studies on the sustainability of volunteer service opportunities analyze unidimensional influencing factors, while less research is focused on multidimensional factors. Although individual, organizational, and social dimensions have been studied, they are generally treated as static lists of influencing factors, lacking a dynamic perspective to examine the interaction between different levels of factors. Accordingly, this study focuses on multidimensional determinants of volunteer sustainability. Previous studies have included the individual–social, individual–organizational, and individual–organizational–social dimensions, as well as the stage model of volunteering.

The individual–social dimension shows that sustainable volunteer behavior is influenced by both personal and social factors. Volunteers’ personality traits, emotional needs, and aspirations for values generate the internal motivation for sustained volunteering, while the atmosphere of the social environment and altruistic cultural traditions create the external conditions for sustained volunteering [11]. In addition, empirical studies have examined the relationship between individuals’ sustainable volunteering behavior and prosocial motivation.

The individual–organizational dimension highlights the combined role of individual volunteer characteristics and organizational support. Organizational system design [12], project management practices [13], and the provision of knowledge to volunteers [12] are cited as key factors in a healthy volunteer ecosystem, as are recognition of individual values [14], emotional needs [15], and organizational relationships [16].

With this in mind, some scholars have attempted to integrate the factors that affect continuous volunteer participation at the individual, organizational, and social levels for a comprehensive and multilevel analysis, dividing them into three main categories: personal, organizational, and external factors. Personal factors include personality, quality improvement, values, and emotional dependence; organizational factors include organizational standards, human resource management, and project management; and social factors include system coordination, publicity, resource investment, and opportunity availability. Through empirical analysis, the 20 factors influencing youth volunteering in Shandong Province were classified into four categories: Volunteer Organization, Policy and Regulations, Social Environment, and Volunteers themselves [17].

In addition, some researchers have taken a novel approach, arguing that sustainable volunteering does not happen overnight but is a long-term process in which different needs are met at different stages. For example, one researcher conducted in-depth interviews with more than 50 British college students continuously involved in conservation projects [15]. Based on the data, Wilson and Carroccio [15] proposed a three-stage model of sustainable volunteering, namely a progressive process of “participation”, “sustaining involvement”, and “harvesting”. Omoto and Snyder [18] proposed a three-stage process of antecedents, experiences, and outcomes by analyzing the relevant factors at the individual, national, organizational, and social levels.

3. Research Methods and Data Sources

3.1. Research Methods

This study is based on constructive grounded theory, which incorporates interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices [19]. It uses a systematic methodological strategy for data-based research [20] through four coding types: initial code, focused code, axial code, and theoretical code, which can gradually refine concepts and the relationship between concepts until the theoretical system is constructed. The four coding types are used to qualitatively analyze the primary data, construct the rules for the sustainability of volunteer service provision (regarding organizational and individual factors and interactions between organizations and individuals), and ensure the study’s validity through theoretical saturation testing. To collect data, this study conducted two separate codings of interview transcripts. First, the study researchers independently examined and analyzed the interview transcripts, selected sentences closely related to the research content for conceptualization and categorized the concepts for further categorization. They then compared the respective codes to identify similar and different coding content in the two separate codes, assumed the same, and read the different codes for in-depth review and comparison. The final overlap of similar codes was 68.9% (112 similar codes). The analysis eliminated concepts that occurred less than three times and could not be categorized.

3.2. Data Selection and Sources

3.2.1. Description of Sample Selection and Performance Differences

Ai You Xi Community Social Organization (hereinafter referred to as “Ai You Xi”)—a level 5A social organization established in 2010 in Chengdu—was selected as a target. Its main organization, Chengdu Ai You Xi Community Development Center, established in 2009, was rated as one of the “Top 100 Social Work Organizations in China” by the Ministry of Civil Affairs. Ai You Xi has achieved remarkable success in cultivating volunteers compared to similar social organizations, offering a helpful example of sustainable volunteerism. Since 2009, Ai You Xi has successfully built 106 volunteer teams and recruited more than 1450 volunteers and social workers. Volunteer services have included mapping community resources, planning and implementing events, and conducting a training program for community leaders and volunteers. Over time, the training program developed 23 courses and conducted over 2000 training sessions for nearly 10,000 participants in over 30 communities in Chengdu. These training sessions have resulted in over 50 community self-organizations, with 2719 volunteers and 739 community volunteer organizations established.

There are three reasons for the selection of the organization. First, community social organizations are an important component of social organizations, and volunteer management in social organizations is essential [21]. Second, in the Chinese context, the Ministry of Civil Affairs requires community collaboration, and social organizations, social workers, and community volunteers gather to build communities jointly. Third, the volunteer service of community social organizations is a typical type of volunteer service supply [22]; the organization's selection will not influence the obtained results and main conclusions.

3.2.2. Description of Data Sources and Type Typicality

Respondents in this study included two main groups: student volunteers and older adult volunteers (Table 1). The in-depth interviews allowed for an examination of the current characteristics of the distribution of volunteers among different groups in China. Each of the 12 interviewees was a typical representative of a volunteer offering a sustainable volunteer service for more than one year, indicated by at least two volunteer assignments per year, and showed a willingness to continue volunteering in the future, as the definition of sustainable volunteer service [10]. Interview questions explored what might inhibit willingness to continue volunteering to identify key factors for volunteer sustainability; where appropriate, respondents were asked to discuss why they had left or would leave their organizations.

Table 1. Basic information of interviewees.

Number	Gender	Age (Years)	Valid Information (Words)	Length of Service (Years)	Volunteer Roles	Frequency of Service Provision	Continued Willingness to Volunteer
A01	Female	42	1483	8	Event participant, planner	once or less than once per month	Relatively strong
A02	Male	23	2888	6	University volunteer team leader, Western program volunteer	4 or more times per month	Relatively strong
A03	Male	21	5420	4	Participant, organizer, planner	once or less than once per month	Strong
A04	Male	26	2831	5	Head of a Youth Volunteers' Association during university	2 or 3 times per month	Strong
A05	Male	20	1625	1	Participant, event planner	once or less than once per month	Relatively strong
A06	Female	20	3215	8	Event participant, organizer	4 or more times per month	Strong
A07	Female	69	4824	10	Head of a community volunteer team, head of a community association for older adults	4 or more times per month	Strong
A08	Male	75	568	4	Volunteer Team Member	4 or more times per month	Strong
A09	Male	68	2800	7	Deputy Head of Community Volunteer Service Team	4 or more times per month	Strong
A10	Male	71	673	18	Community Volunteer Service Team Member	2 or 3 times per month	Strong
A11	Female	22	2937	3	Event participant	2 or 3 times per month	Relatively strong
A12	Female	25	1913	6	Participant, organizer	once or less than once per month	Relatively strong

Constructing a grounded research method is already very mature as a qualitative method to get profound information to reach theoretical saturation. In this study, primary data were collected through secondary data from individual interviews. Data were analyzed using the common qualitative data analysis tool Nvivo 12.0. First, we read the literature on volunteering and reviewed information on volunteer management, daily work, and volunteer activities of Ai You Xi. Then, we located the 12 volunteers from the social organizations and interviewed them online and offline (each interview was at least 60 min). We then obtained the original transcripts of the interviews and analyzed each sentence. We inductively constructed a theoretical model by extracting and forming a multidimensional conceptual category of key influencing factors through multilevel coding and analysis. Finally, we developed relevant propositions to improve the sustainability of volunteer services in China based on motivation, resources, and ability.

4. Category Refinement and Model Construction

4.1. Initial Coding

Initial coding is breaking down a large amount of data to assign labels to phenomena, extracting keywords for repeated comparison to form concepts, and reorganizing them in a new way to operationalize them [23]. Using the manual coding function of Nvivo 12.0, the collected interview data were coded by each sentence and paragraph; duplicate and similar items were merged from the original data; and the corresponding concepts were simplified and refined until the coding produced no new concepts. The initial coding results, totaling 112 findings, are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Initial coding of interview data (excerpts).

Original Data Statements	Initial Coding (Concept)
As a souvenir, the event organizer gave each of us a book bearing the event's emblem. When I look at this book and read each sentence, I vividly recall the faces of every leprosy patient and volunteer, as well as what they said. (A06)	Event souvenirs
I have previously participated in a number of volunteer activities organized by Ai You Xi, and I believe that the organization will consider volunteers in a variety of situations, including transportation and meal subsidies. For each activity, insurance will be obtained in advance for all volunteers. Even if they are meagre, I believe it is a good idea to provide subsidies. (A02)	Basic expense allowance; life insurance
As a social identity, the volunteer certificate will provide me with a sense of my own identity as a volunteer, and it will also serve as a sort of memento of the activity, as I can see on the certificate "This certificate is issued in your honor to express our deepest gratitude, to encourage more comrades to join us, and to promote this invaluable spirit of voluntary contribution. Thank you!" So inventive! I was the only student in the entire school to earn this award, which I believe is a recognition of my contribution. (A02)	Volunteer certification; sense of honor
Unfortunately, some volunteer activities, such as some help activities in nursing homes for the elderly, are not constant, and the willingness of some old individuals is not very strong. Occasionally, the elderly feel that the activities are bothering them, resulting in a poor level of fitness that will impact the volunteer experience. Thus, the sensation of gain from the activity and whether the action itself can truly help others and is meaningful, are what will encourage me to join for an extended period of time. (A02) Not being trusted, not being encouraged, or even being reprimanded makes it challenging to continue in this circumstance. (A03) The school Youth League committee teachers provided no assistance, only a few restrictions, but in the end we also provided genuine service to people's activities; at the same time, the provincial Youth League committee teachers also joined in our endeavors. (A02) Volunteering has significantly increased my positivity and happiness. (A02)	Sense of activity experience; stress resistance; interpersonal ability; character enrichment

Table 2. Cont.

Original Data Statements	Initial Coding (Concept)
We are very motivated to continue providing these volunteer services because the majority of the residents and recipients of our services appreciate our commitment, and we are greeted with a polite smile or a heartfelt “thank you” nearly every time. There are even a few individuals who eagerly hand us home-prepared fruit and snacks. (A03)	Positive feedback from others; influence of others
Now, our crew has volunteered to produce tens of thousands of short films and videos documenting community events. No matter which team or community, or what information they require, we will supply it for free. This is volunteering, and we all view it as a seniors’ activity, the purpose of which is to find meaning in our lives via playing. (A07) Met numerous great and wonderful volunteers who were quite devoted. (A03)	Realization of personal values; positive outlook on life
I believe that resources are relatively more important because the more activities I engage in, the more people I can meet, and the more platforms I can connect with, the more opportunities I will have to volunteer in the future, as well as the more horizons I can broaden and the more information I can acquire. (A03)	Resource accessibility
I enjoy the social organization for which I currently work. The attitude of solidarity, trust, and caring in the organization makes me feel really warm, and the team feels like home to me. Though all of us do not have equal capabilities, we cooperate when we work together, encourage and support one another when we face challenges, and care for one another in everyday life. (A12)	Trust and care
During my volunteer activity, I have also met volunteers and organization leaders who provide me with information regarding volunteer or cooperative activities via phone or WeChat. Comparatively, I am less reliant on the official volunteer service platform, and I mostly obtain pertinent volunteer service information through communication with individuals and organization leaders. (A03)	Communication and sharing
At that time, they departed because they wanted to devote more time to their studies, and volunteering inside the group was occasionally time-consuming. I believe that the prerequisite for volunteering is possessing some skill. For instance, it is unrealistic to volunteer if you cannot manage your personal affairs and maintain a healthy life balance. (A04)	Time management ability
Almost fifty percent of the events I have participated in, or managed, have included training for volunteers. I believe that all training is vital, because if you let your guard down and then run into an emergency, you would not know how to manage it. Volunteering has also helped me enhance my emergency management abilities. (A02)	Skills training; emergency handling capability

4.2. Focused Coding

Since the initial codes had relatively low conceptuality, and the number of codes was relatively large, there was a certain amount of overlap; therefore, it was necessary to organize the most significant and/or frequently occurring initial codes around the research topic, refine a directional and selective category to “cluster” the related concepts, and realize conceptual scoping through repeated comparisons between different concepts [19]. In this study, the “tree node” function of Nvivo software, which can summarize and aggregate subsets, was used to compare and summarize the 112 initial concepts continuously; finally, 16 focus codes were identified, as shown in Table 3.

4.3. Axis Coding

In the focused coding phase, important and high-frequency categories emerged with some degree of abstraction, but no correlation between concepts was established. Therefore, in the axial coding phase, it was necessary to cluster these categories, establish logical relationships between them, and reorganize them by defining the main categories of higher dimensions [23]. In this study, the existing focus coding was coded axially, and the sixteen subcategories were further compared and summarized to derive the six main categories of material motivation, spiritual motivation, information resources, relationship resources, skill improvement, and self-growth, as shown in Table 4.

Table 3. Focused coding.

Focused Coding (Subcategory)	Initial Coding (Concept)	Focused Coding (Subcategory)	Initial Coding (Concept)
Incentive material rewards	Redeem points for household goods	Interpersonal network	Influencing others
	Event souvenirs		Making friends
Basic material security	Provision of meals		Stable relationship structure
	Personal insurance		Communication and sharing
	Basic fee subsidy	Other people's influence	
Social identity	The need for merit evaluation for further education and employment	Professional competence and related ability	Copywriting ability
	Volunteer certification		Planning ability
Personal perception of the activity	Sense of activity experience		Collaboration ability
	Perception of the value of the activity		Time management ability
Self-perception	Sense of belonging	Psychological quality	Skills training
	Identity		Stress resistance
	Sense of access		Empathy
	Sense of honor		Emergency handling capability
	Realize personal value		Leadership
	Achievement and satisfaction		Interpersonal ability
Platform information	Resource accessibility	Interpersonal communication ability	Organizational ability
	WeChat public accounts of social organizations and communities		Communication and presentation ability
	Local volunteer service platform	Self-awareness	A positive outlook on life
	Volunteer exchange groups		Level of ideology
Community information	Community and neighborhood bulletin boards	Sound personality	Rich character
	Support from others		Strong will
Emotional dependence	Trust and care	Rich experience	Broaden your horizons and enrich your experience
	Group building activities	Perception of others' feedback	Positive feedback from others
	Helping each other		Be respected and recognized

4.4. Theoretical Coding

After integrating the axial coding, we compared and analyzed all concepts and categories to reveal the core categories, systematically reviewed the connection between categories [24], and summarized all categories into a "storyline" [23,25] to represent the differential relationship between the core and general categories in a concrete form and generate new theoretical expressions [19]. As shown in Table 5, the research topic of this study was "the sustainability mechanism of voluntary service provision in China". After repeated comparison and reanalysis of the original data, we found that the factors of motivation, resources, and capabilities could be refined in a more theoretical and systematic way for the six axial codes and the sixteen focus codes summarized above. In addition, we discovered that a complete "storyline" could be formed around the theoretical codes

at a higher level of abstraction of the social interaction between the individual and the organization to provide a theoretical framework for the influence mechanism of voluntary service provision. In this way, we were able to establish that an organization’s incentive to the individual is reflected in both material and mental stimulation, that the individual’s access to organizational resources includes both informational and relational resources, and that the improvement of the individual’s ability in the organization includes both self-improvement and the evaluation of one’s growth. Ultimately, the data show that social interaction between the “individual” and the organization has shaped the sustainability of volunteer service in China.

Table 4. Axis coding.

Axis Coding (Main Category)	Focused Coding (Subcategory)	Axis Coding (Main Category)	Focused Coding (Subcategory)
Material incentives	Incentive material rewards	Relationship resources	Emotional dependence
	Basic material security		Interpersonal network
	Social identity		Professional competence and related ability
Spiritual inspiration	Personal perception of the activity	Capability enhancement	Psychological quality
	Perception of others’ feedback		Interpersonal communication ability
	Self-perception		Self-awareness
Information resources	Platform information	Self-growth	Sound personality
	Community information		Rich experience

Table 5. Theoretical coding.

Theoretical Coding (Core Scope)	Axis Coding (Main Category)	Relationship Connotations
Motivating factors	Material incentives	Monetary incentives provide volunteers with material security and prizes to alleviate their “worries”.
	Spiritual inspiration	Spiritual inspiration motivates volunteers to continue providing volunteer services.
Resource factors	Information resources	The information resource describes how volunteers can get information about voluntary work and facilitates the two-way selection process between volunteers and social organizations.
	Relationship resources	Relational resources are the interdependent, interpersonal interaction networks that volunteers develop with other volunteers, service users, and organization staff. Since then, the stability of volunteers in the volunteer social network has been enhanced, and the predictability of the sustainability of voluntary service supply behavior is made easier by stability.
Ability factors	Capability enhancement	On the one hand, capability enhancement serves the motivational needs of individuals to better themselves, and on the other, it increases the quality of volunteerism.
	Self-growth	Self-development is the ongoing enrichment of personal experience, self-awareness, and personality. Individuals’ spiritual growth increases their comprehension of the meaning of volunteerism and is the ongoing absorption of volunteer drive.

4.5. Theoretical Saturation Test

To test theoretical saturation, we took the following two approaches. First, we contacted three new respondents for interviews, obtained interview data, and coded and

compared these data. Since the new data could not provide new properties for the existing analogies, no further new analogies were found. Second, we shared our ideas and research process with the interviewees and the leader of Ai You Xi and asked them to evaluate whether these ideas matched their actual experiences. This shows that no more data was needed for the continuous collection of the analogies generated in this study. Therefore, the analogies in this study were found to have reached theoretical saturation.

5. Model Explanation: “Individual-Organizational” Social Interaction Mechanism for the Sustainability of the Voluntary Service Supply

5.1. Sustainability Metaphor: Triangular Support Model

The three factors of motivation, resources, and ability form a solid foundation for the sustainability of volunteer service provision in China. These three factors are not only dynamically and independently balanced but also have a complementary relationship with each other. As the two-factor theory explains, motivational factors promote the sustainability of volunteer service provision. The organization motivates volunteers by providing incentives. Monetary incentives satisfy volunteers' financial needs, offset their dissatisfaction with volunteering, and reduce their “worries”. This positively affects volunteers' first impressions of the organization while providing them with a tangible sense of gain, which creates an underlying motivation to volunteer. Spiritual motivation also increases motivation and creates a positive attitude that motivates volunteers to continue their service. Such motivation highlights the personal contribution of volunteers by giving them a sense of honor and self-actualization. The resulting honors are then reflected not only in the individual's motivation but also in the organization and society. Honoring volunteers can inspire others in their organization and encourage more people to volunteer. Consequently, both material and spiritual motivation are important and can motivate different groups to varying degrees.

As outlined in social capital theory, resource factors can also promote the sustainability of volunteer service provision. Norms, trust, and networks of relationships are key conceptual categories of social capital that influence the sustainability of volunteer service provision [26–29]. Information resources include direct information resources that volunteers receive in their interactions with organizations and the horizontal information exchange that results from interactions between volunteers. Relationship resources refer to the special relationships that volunteers develop in their networks of relationships during their volunteering activities, which are primarily expressed as relationship-based social capital. All volunteers live in a network of intertwined relationships with relatives, neighbors, friends, and others. Sometimes, volunteers come to volunteer through the influence of networks of relationships based on trust in and emotional dependence on relatives and friends. This diverse network of relationships leads to the decision to engage in different volunteer activities. In other cases, volunteers build shared content while participating in volunteer services, achieve convergence of altruistic values, and create new social networks of relationships. Through this process, the interaction between social relationships and volunteer service networks is realized, improving the stability of volunteers' sense of belonging in social volunteer networks and facilitating the maintenance of volunteer service.

Similarly, the ability factor can promote the sustainability of volunteering, as explained by the theory of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to a person's confidence that they can accomplish something independently. The higher the level of self-efficacy, the more confident a person is in his or her ability to accomplish a task successfully. In the process of volunteering, not only are volunteers' ability and abilities trained and improved to varying degrees, but they themselves also grow through their experiences and continuous enrichment. Bandura [30] suggested three approaches to increasing self-efficacy: first-hand experiences of success or failure, alternative experiences, and verbal persuasion. Volunteering is an activity based on experience and practice. Experiences of success and failure, encouragement and feedback from others, and alternative experiences (observing the behavior and

outcomes of others) can all be experienced by volunteers, making continued volunteering a direct way to improve one's self-efficacy. In this way, volunteers can be motivated to improve their ability through a continuous process of participation [31]. The resulting sense of accomplishment and recognition for their applied ability creates a positive feedback loop for continued volunteer participation [32].

5.2. A New Story Line: The Practical Logic of Social Interaction for a Sustainable Supply of Volunteerism

The perspective of "individual-organizational" social interaction for the sustainability of the offer of voluntary services has a threefold logic of practice (Figure 1).

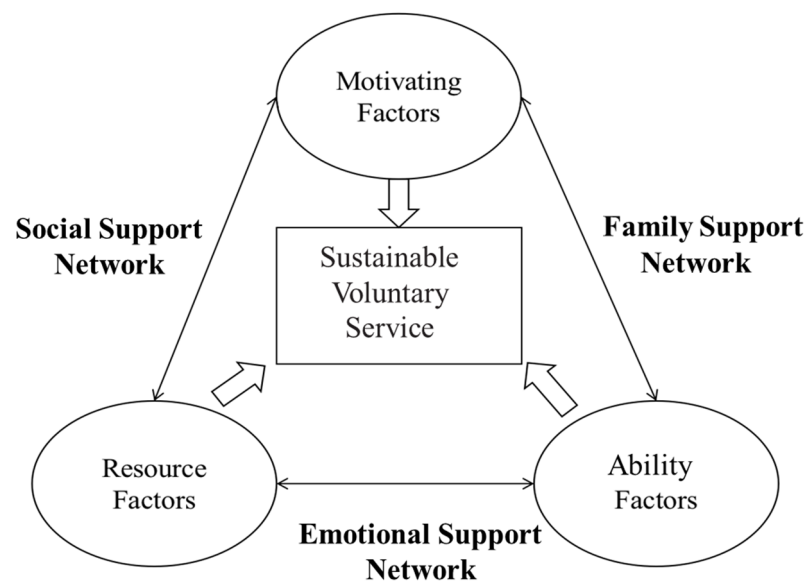


Figure 1. Practical logic of social interaction for sustainable supply of volunteer services.

First, organizational–individual incentive factors to promote the sustainability of volunteer service opportunities consist primarily of dual material and spiritual incentives to satisfy volunteers' basic security needs and improve their subjective motivation. The specific content of material incentives needs to be flexibly determined by organizations depending on the area of activity and the main type of volunteer (e.g., the distinction between students and senior volunteers). Basic material coverage includes purchasing insurance prior to the activity, subsidizing basic expenses (e.g., commuting costs), and providing equipment, meals, and/or prizes during the volunteer activity. After the volunteer service, hours worked should be recorded, medals awarded, and mementos presented. Positive feedback, constant encouragement, and recognition from others are important for mental motivation. Training conferences that promote the spirit of volunteerism and oath-taking ceremonies should be held to increase this motivation. After volunteering, timely recognition of service hours and points, awarding of volunteer certificates and titles, promoting social role models, and evaluating advanced individuals are critical steps in promoting a sustainable supply of volunteers.

Second, individual access to organizational resources (including those contributed by organizations and volunteer interactions) promotes the sustainability of volunteer service provision by opening information channels, building mutual aid and trust, facilitating the sharing of experiences and information, building social capital, and cultivating a sense of belonging to the organization. Information resources influencing the path to continued volunteerism include shared knowledge about school credit requirements and credit hours for volunteering as a social activity, information about how retirees can continue to contribute, common interest groups, and news about volunteer service awards at the state and local levels. Relational resources that influence the path to continued volunteerism

include a good network of contacts in the older adult community; enriching life experiences; a network of like-minded friends; secure and trusting relationships; a collection of non-physical capital rooted in the quality, quantity, and willingness of volunteers; and a collection of resources and materials from government, corporations, foundations, and foreign institutions that support volunteer participation within a network of relationships among diverse participants.

Third, from the perspective of the interaction between organizations and individuals, promoting sustainable volunteerism in the context of individual capabilities involves both skill enhancement and a sense of self-development to improve the quality of volunteer service and increase self-efficacy. Improving professional ability is a primary goal of many volunteers and an added benefit of volunteering. The abilities that volunteers should possess are diverse and include professional abilities such as planning, copywriting, organizational leadership, and time management; work abilities such as charity marketing ability, first aid ability, and office software ability; personal abilities such as stress tolerance and emotional management; interpersonal abilities such as collaboration, communication, and empathy; and specific abilities such as senior volunteers' cognitive abilities, ability to contribute appropriately to society, and practical application of expertise. The above abilities are achieved through pre-training, first-hand experience, and post-training, leading to self-efficacy.

Fourth, further analyzing the theoretical coding, it is found that this social interaction manifests itself in three network effects. We can summarize the code analysis as "multiple network effects" to explain the relationship among volunteers' ability, motivation, and resource factors. These include (1) emotional support network effects, mainly in work scenarios; for example, including positive emotional feedback such as encouragement and praise; (2) social support network effects, mainly in social scenarios, including support through social resource integration and material incentives; (3) family support network effects, mainly in family scenarios, including support brought by intergenerational transmission and parent-child relationships. Emotional support networks can explain the relationship between motivation and ability factors; good feedback improves ability [33]. Social support networks can explain the relationship between resource and motivation factors, resource integration, and material incentives [34]. Family support networks can explain the relationship between the resource and ability factors; the family and friendship relationship can improve ability factor [35]. The multiple network effects can examine the interactions between factors at different levels from a dynamic perspective.

6. Study Contributions and Discussion

6.1. Theoretical Innovation

This study makes two important theoretical contributions. First, the study developed the Abilities, Motivation, and Resources (AMR) model, a new analytical framework for the sustainability of volunteer service provision in China. In essence, the sustainability of volunteer service in China is closely related to three interrelated factors: the ability of individual volunteers, the motivation of the organization, and the resources that individuals receive from the organization. We used a sociological perspective of social interactions to analyze Chinese volunteers' and organizations' motivation for individuals. We found that these are reflected in the dual stimulation of material and spiritual motives, individuals' access to organizational resources, including informational and relational resources, and improvement of individual capabilities, including enhancement of ability and sense of self-development. The AMR model can improve both the sustainability and stability of volunteer service provision.

Most research on sustainability focuses on business management, energy, resources, and governance, and the area of volunteer services is less frequently considered. From a social interaction perspective, volunteers are the subjects, organizations are the objects, and the interactions between different subjects and between subjects and objects influence the behavior and willingness of individual volunteers. By using construct anchoring

as a method of analysis in the generalized AMR model, the two-factor theory explains both the stimulation provided by the organization to the individual and the individual's perception of the stimulation. The social capital theory explains how organizations provide resources and how volunteers interact to create resources. Although studies in recent years have noted the importance of interpersonal relationships in sustaining volunteerism, they have often treated interpersonal relationships as elements of the internal environment of organizations. In contrast, this study views interpersonal relationships as a resource and an important element in the interaction between organizations and individuals. Self-efficacy theory explains the ability of individuals to use social interactions to diversify and expand their capabilities, which in turn leads to a sense of self-efficacy. Therefore, this study considers social interactions, particularly the interaction between individual volunteers and organizations, as an integrated research perspective to analyze how motivation, resources, and ability influence the sustainability of voluntary behavior and form a three-factor support structure.

Secondly, the AMR model discovered the core features of the multiple links between the social network of relationships and volunteer service that promote sustainable volunteer service provision in a China context. In particular, our analysis found that interpersonal relationships, intergenerational relationships, and parent–child education are essential to sustaining the supply of volunteer services. By comparing our results with those of a similar ability, motivation, and opportunity (AMO) model, we found that in maintaining the supply of volunteer services in China, the “perception of volunteering” replaces the “perception of the enterprise”. The service has the function of the enterprise and becomes an important source of motivation for sustainable development. Based on the strategic HRM perspective, Appelbaum [36] proposed the famous AMO model for high-performance work systems, which views organizational performance as a function arising from a core organizational structure composed of three elements: employee capabilities, motivation, and opportunities for participation. HR practices in high-performance work systems are intended to improve these three elements [36]. If the sustainability of volunteer service is considered a performance goal for building a work system characterized by high performance and engagement or best HR practices, then the AMO model is clearly inadequate, especially since volunteers only have opportunities to participate. In examining the benefits and innovations of the AMO model, we found that the “opportunity factor” is less important than the “resource factor” in improving sustainability, primarily because new factors of volunteer service, such as interpersonal relationships, intergenerational relationships, and parent–child education, actually improve sustainability. In support of these conclusions, our participants indicated they started volunteering because of a child, family member, or friend (see interviews of A07, A01).

6.2. Discussion

Regarding the ability factor in sustainable voluntary service, psychological studies suggest that volunteer satisfaction with organizational management or tasks is related to the sustainability and durability of emergency governance behaviors [37,38] and even is “the sole determinant of the continuous provision of emergency volunteering” [39]. The subjective satisfaction of volunteers is improved through value satisfaction in a “community of meaning” to achieve spiritual satisfaction [40,41]. In subsequent research, several influencing factors, such as volunteer mood [42], personal religious beliefs [43], personal achievement and self-realization [44], and sense of self-acceptance [44], the study of individual sustainable motivation turned to the study of individual ability improvement. In this study, the relationship between specific satisfaction and ability improvement is the improvement of “self-efficacy”.

Early research on the factors influencing the sustainable delivery of volunteer services is a relatively single and subjective level of motivation. Satisfaction and healthcare factors are considered the main factors affecting staff performance. The analysis of sustainable factors of volunteer service also involves material incentive factors, including material

compensation or welfare benefits such as the basic purchase of personal insurance, transportation expenses, working meals, volunteer clothing, commemorative medal, souvenirs, subsidies, bonuses, coupons, discounts, and free credit [45,46]. This study validated these material and spiritual incentives, refining the relationship between motivating and capacity factors and the interaction between motivating and resource factors.

Regarding the resources factor in sustainable voluntary service, funding and performance issues remain even with volunteering incentives established, with volunteers lacking the motivation to provide services and undermining service enthusiasm [47]. This involves resource factors at the organizational level, such as technical and monetary external support, which can increase the content, methods, and areas of voluntary services in community social organizations, enabling more innovative and continuous volunteer activities [48]. In addition, an inclusive organizational environment and positive interpersonal relationships are often considered important factors in attracting volunteers. This study emphasized the role of relationships in resource factors, embodied in interpersonal relationships, parent–child relationships, and companionship relationships, which constitute the resource network and simultaneously have multiple network effects, including emotional support network effects, social support network effects, and family support network effects.

6.3. Suggestions for Sustaining the Volunteer Service Supply

To know how the three core scopes in this study can contribute to sustainable volunteering and in what way, we should predict which part of the relationship is stronger in the future. In an environment of similar external factors, motivation, resources, and skill-related factors reflect the interactions between an organization and its volunteers. While the organization may be the initiator and the recipient the volunteer, or vice versa, it ultimately depends on the willingness and behavior of volunteers to engage on an ongoing basis.

First, researchers must look beyond the structural, organizational management to informal interactions and the cognitive psychology of individuals. To promote the sustainability of volunteering, the government, social organizations, and volunteers should link their interactions and focus on motivational, resource, and skill factors specific to volunteers in China, emphasizing the Multiple Network Effects between the three factors.

Second, social organizations must not turn volunteering into a “consumer good” but normalize it to promote a sustainable supply of volunteer services in the following ways. They must create targeted incentives and build the organization’s brand. Different incentives should be provided according to the diversity of volunteers in terms of gender, age, professional status, income, and other aspects. Next, they need to improve training and participation to increase the professional ability of the community volunteers, with training developed for people with various abilities. Additionally, they should create appropriate services for volunteers according to their strengths. Finally, they should focus on enhancing volunteers’ information technology ability—combining information technology with the Internet, 5G, and artificial intelligence—so that participants can play their professional roles, utilize each other’s strengths, and share resources to promote effectiveness, supporting the positive development of volunteer service activities [49].

Third, volunteers urgently need to utilize organizational resources and improve their professional ability and self-efficacy by doing the following: (1) harnessing volunteers’ initiative by encouraging their enthusiasm and creativity; (2) raising volunteers’ social awareness in the community by publicizing them in social media; (3) using existing organizational talent to initiate a competitive mechanism that forms a virtuous cycle of “improving individual ability and the quality of volunteer service”; and (4) advising employers to pay attention to volunteers’ experiences when they apply for jobs so that their volunteer status and years of service can serve as an advantage.

This study has two limitations. First, because the respondents were a limited number of long-term volunteers, the social interaction perspective was transferred from the indi-

vidual to the organization without considering the regular management activities of the interactions between the organization and the individual. Second, the external environment was used as a control variable in the field of volunteering, although the political environment is usually consistent and stable. In reality, political disruptions and fluctuations can occur, and the model in this study is applicable to regular government. In the future, we will expand our sample to include those who have stopped volunteering or have only participated in volunteer activities once a year and show no willingness to volunteer in the future. We could only address this category by indirectly asking current volunteers about this issue (e.g., respondents reported observations such as, “There are some people around me who are initially very motivated to volunteer but later rarely do so”). We suspect there are two main types of this type of volunteer: (1) those who volunteer with a sense of newness and get bored afterward and (2) those who love volunteering but do not have time after graduation, even though they would like to serve (A02). Future studies will conduct a comparative study while completing a follow-up study on the volunteer services offered by the subjects of this study.

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