

School of Professional Education
and Executive Development
專業進修學院

SPEED



Working Paper Series

Title	Fundraising-related market orientation among non-profit organisations in Hong Kong: a literature review and research agenda
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Issue Date	2015
Issue Number	3
Paper Number	7
Citation	Lee, D. & Markham, P. A. (2015). <i>Fundraising-related market orientation among non-profit organisations in Hong Kong: a literature review and research agenda</i> (Working Paper Series No. 7, Issue 3, 2015). Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, College of Professional and Continuing Education, School of Professional Education and Executive Development. Retrieved Jan 5, 2016 from http://weblib.cpce-polyu.edu.hk/apps/wps/assets/pdf/w20150307.pdf
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Fundraising-Related Market Orientation among Non-Profit Organisations in Hong Kong: A Literature Review and Research Agenda

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ABSTRACT

Non-profit organisations and their financial viability to execute their missions are of growing importance and focus in a global context. In addition, the drastic increase in the number of non-profit organisations also poses increasing challenges for non-profits to compete for funding and resources, which has forced them to find ways to improve their fundraising effectiveness. Although research illustrates that the implementation of market orientation contributes to better organisational and fundraising performance of non-profit organisations in different countries, non-profit organisations find the transition to market orientation to be difficult. The greatest challenge is the lack of knowledge in using marketing techniques that are prevalent in the non-profit arena. The deficiency of non-profit marketing research in the Chinese context and the low generalizability of western studies in other cultural contexts deter non-profit organisations from elevating fundraising effectiveness through market orientation and relationship marketing with donors. The purpose of this paper is to provide a critical analysis of the extant literature in the field of fundraising-related market orientation for non-profit organisations and suggest agenda for future research. The paper highlights a research field that is becoming vitally important yet immature particularly for the Chinese context in Hong Kong.

KEYWORDS: Market Orientation, Relationship Marketing, Non-Profit Organisations, Fundraising

1 INTRODUCTION

Non-profit organisations are becoming vitally important to the development of the world economy and to global societal changes (West and Sargeant, 2004; Leete, 2006; Andreasen and Kotler, 2008; Pope *et al.*, 2009; Mitchell, 2014). However, due to the rising demand to execute their missions, compounded with the increasing competition for funding, non-profits face an on-going challenge to attain financial viability (Bennett, 2005; Hodge and Piccolo, 2005; Andreasen and Kotler, 2008; Carroll and Stater, 2009; Pope *et al.*, 2009; Levine and Zahradnik, 2012). Accordingly, scholars from multiple disciplines have postulated theoretical models for non-profits to be able to avert financial resource dependence through effective fundraising (Weinstein, 2009). There is a vast body of research into non-profit fundraising effectiveness, which has affirmed that the implementation of marketing concept is pivotal in the competition for donations and in the overall fiscal performance of non-profits (Bower, 2002; Ellis, 2006; Andreasen and Kotler, 2008; Dolnicar and Lazarevski, 2009; Pandelica *et al.*, 2009; Levine and Zahradnik, 2012; Chad, 2013; Rey García *et al.*, 2013). Despite research supporting the notion that non-profit market orientation contributes to better fundraising performance (Balabanis *et al.*, 1997; Bennett, 1998; Shoham *et al.*, 2006; Dolnicar and Lazarevski, 2009), non-profit organisations find the transition to market orientation difficult. This is because they have limited understanding, knowledge and resources with which to adopt market orientation and thereby increase their fundraising effectiveness (Pope *et al.*, 2009; Chad *et al.*, 2013; Rey García *et al.*, 2013). Due to the deficiency in non-profit marketing research (Chad *et al.*, 2013) and the low degree of generalizability of western studies in other cultural contexts (Kirca *et al.*, 2005; Ellis, 2006; Cacija, 2013), local research to facilitate non-profit market orientation adoption in order to effectively enhance fundraising performance is essential. Moreover, only minimal research into the marketing behaviour pertinent to fundraising effectiveness in the Chinese context is evident, within this specific body of research. Since any prior study of fundraising performance as a consequence of non-profit market orientation across all non-profit sub-sectors in Hong Kong is absent, local non-profit market orientation studies are indispensable. This paper addresses the geographical research gap in understanding the efficacy of market orientation strategies within the Chinese context. Based on a critical review of the seminal literature on non-profit marketing and fundraising effectiveness, this paper attempts to suggest future research agenda for non-profit marketing strategies in relation to fundraising effectiveness for the Chinese context in Hong Kong. Future research will fill the lacuna of fundraising efficacy studies in relation to the adoption of marketing among non-profit organisations in the Chinese context and provide a valuable addition to the theoretical understanding of fundraising-related market orientation and practical applications to non-profit practitioners in the Chinese context.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Rising Importance of Non-Profit Organisations and Their Fundraising Challenges

Non-profit organisations have become an important focus throughout the world because of their increase in economic and social importance (West and Sargeant, 2004; Leete, 2006; Pope *et al.*, 2009). Pope *et al.* (2009) report that the growth in both the scale and charity income of non-profit organisations enables them to exert influence beyond national boundaries. Globalization has driven multilateral agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and many charitable foundations to increase their presence and influence all over the world (Andreasen and Kotler, 2008, p. 18; Mitchell, 2014). The number of non-profit organisations has significantly increased and this sector now creates jobs more rapidly than the for-profit sector in most developed countries (Leete, 2006; Pope *et al.*, 2009).

Fundraising performance, that is, “the effectiveness of fundraising activities in the context of resources spent versus the amount of funds raised” (Sargeant and Shang, 2010, p. 201), is central to non-profit organisations’ financial viability and mission attainment (Weisbrod, 1998; Carroll and Stater, 2009; Mitchell, 2014). However, non-profit organisations are facing fierce competition for funding to maintain their operation and services owing to the increase in the number of non-profit organisations compounded with global economic recessions (Froelich, 1999; Alexander, 2000; Levine and Zahradnik, 2012). In addition, some non-profit sub-sectors, such as healthcare services and education, are also competing with for-profit companies for revenue income and resources (Andreasen and Kotler, 2008, p. 25). In the US, about 15% of non-profit organisations have not survived through economic downturns (Levine and Zahradnik, 2012). The fierce competition for charitable donations in Hong Kong is illustrated by the gap in the growth rate of charities and donations. The total number of charities in Hong Kong grew by 53% from 2005 to 2010, but the total amount of charitable donations increased by only 12% (iDonate, 2011). Henceforth, new non-profit organisations need to make extra efforts to drive public awareness in order to attract donations (Vásquez *et al.*, 2002). Likewise, while new non-profit organisations attempt to entice donors to switch, existing charities manifestly need to secure the donation preference of their donors and to solicit their continuous support (Bennett, 2006). Therefore, the ever-increasing importance of non-profit organisations and their challenges to be financially viable has drawn the attention of researchers in the quest to identify effective fundraising strategies to sustain financial resources and organisational survival (Weisbrod, 1998; Mitchell, 2014).

2.2 Market Orientation, Relationship Marketing and Fundraising Performance

“Market orientation” was first denominated in the early 1990s by two teams of researchers, Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990). The use of marketing concepts in a company or organisation is usually termed as “market orientation” in marketing research (Cervera *et al.*, 2001). Scholars from multiple disciplines have developed theoretical tools to use for effective fundraising performance and resource dependence management (Macedo and Pinho, 2006; Birdi *et al.*, 2007; Bishop and Green, 2010; Caciija, 2013; Verschuere and De Corte, 2014). Along with research initiatives that investigate methods to address financial viability of non-profit organisations, the use of marketing strategies to improve non-profit fundraising performance is becoming more prevalent (Vásquez *et al.*, 2002; Kotler, 2005; Chad, 2013). Various non-profit marketing empirical research studies that have been conducted in different countries endorse the positive relationship between market orientation and fundraising performance (Ellis, 2006; Dolnicar and Lazarevski, 2009; Pope *et al.*, 2009; Levine and Zahradnik, 2012; Chad *et al.*, 2013; Rey García *et al.*, 2013).

In order to secure funding for survival and mission achievement, non-profit organisations must rely on and be able to solicit external funders’ support (Froelich, 1999). Many non-profit organisations regard effective fundraising as the ability to motivate individuals to make a charitable donation through marketing or fundraising activities (Weinstein, 2009). Traditionally, non-profit practitioners have concentrated on short-term immediate fundraising results that utilize the transactional approach to collecting funds. Therefore, Sargeant (2001) argues that non-profit organisations should embrace strategic fundraising that concentrates on influencing donors’ choice of charities to enhance their loyalty to the organisation. Tschirhart (2006) affirms that long term donors and members are crucial to providing non-profit organisations with stability in income and stronger advocacy for social and environmental causes. Thus, strategic fundraising research aims to study how to transform episodic and irregular donors into long-term regular members of and donors to the charities (Paswan and Troy, 2004; Bennett and Barkensjo, 2005; Knox and Gruar, 2007; Waters, 2008; Gardner, 2013). Since the strategic fundraising approach focuses on enhancing donors’ longevity to organisations through the maintenance of a relationship with donors (Sargeant, 2001), it resembles relationship marketing very closely (Helfert *et al.*, 2002; Bennett, 2005).

Relationship marketing (or relational marketing) is the concept of meeting organisational objectives through establishing, maintaining, and enhancing a relationship with stakeholders (Gronroos, 1994). Waters (2008) emphasizes that “the best predictor of future charitable giving is an individual’s previous history of giving” (p. 78) and recommends that non-profit fundraising department should invest in donor relations. Specifically, non-profit organisations that have a proactive relationship marketing program with their donors evidence more loyal, generous and frequent donors (Bennett and Barkensjo, 2005; Waters, 2009). Brennan and Brady (1999) recognise that relationship marketing is highly relevant to the non-profit sector because long-term connections with donors and beneficiaries provide steady funding support to organisations. As well as long-term donors, Gronroos (1990) indicated that beneficiaries may become donors or supporters of organisations through the cultivation of long-term connections. Although most non-profit organisations use basic relationship marketing tactics such as targeted direct mail for fundraising (Voss and Voss, 1997; Bennett and Gabriel, 1998; Brennan and Brady, 1999), Bennett (2006) has revealed that non-profits are not aware of the importance of relationship marketing for fundraising effectiveness. In light of this, Rey García *et al.* (2013) propose that relationship marketing strategies are indispensable to any fundraising-related marketing studies.

2.3 Deficiency in the Body of Knowledge in Non-Profit Market Orientation

Although market orientation is shown to enhance fundraising performance and, therefore, financial viability, non-profit organisations find the adoption of marketing in the non-profit context difficult (Andreasen, 2012). Consequently, the implementation of non-profit marketing is poor. Kotler (2005) concludes that the poor adoption of non-profit market orientation is the inevitable corollary of insufficient understanding and knowledge of marketing. Non-profit practitioners have demonized the implementation of business or commercial practices, such as marketing, and allege that these practices contaminate their societal role (Shoham *et al.*, 2006). With inadequate understanding of non-profit marketing, stakeholders and management of non-profit organisations assume that marketing is a misuse of funding rather than a fundraising strategy (Helmig *et al.*, 2004). Nonetheless, Andreasen and Kotler (2008) aver that numerous empirical studies have rebuked the misconception of the frivolousness of non-profit marketing. Additionally, non-profit practitioners who affirm the importance of marketing for effective fundraising, usually find the application of for-profit marketing strategies in the non-profit arena to be difficult (Sanders, 2012). Consequently, the lack of a comprehensive understanding of marketing knowledge and the capabilities to use marketing techniques further cultivates the belief in the irrelevance of marketing in non-profit organisations (Kotler, 2005; Pope *et al.*, 2009).

Andreasen (2012) claims that the deficiency in non-profit marketing research is the major reason for the misunderstanding and insufficiency of knowledge for implementing market orientation in non-profits to enhance fundraising performance. Chad *et al.* (2013) reports that market orientation studies are predominantly focused on for-profit companies, and only 15% of market orientation literature covers non-profit organisations. This is considered “very low” in terms of research intensity and Chad *et al.* (2013) avers that non-profit market orientation has not been extensively researched by academia. Therefore, empirical research to facilitate non-profit market orientation adoption for various non-profit sub-sectors in different contexts is indispensable. Kirca *et al.* (2005) concede that market orientation studies predominantly conducted in western countries are non-transferable across cultures. Meta-analyses of research on the relationship between market orientation and organisational performance from over twenty nations conclude that national culture dimensions (power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, masculinity, and long-term orientation) and national economic characteristics moderate the relationship between market orientation and performance (Kirca *et al.*, 2005; Ellis, 2006). National cultural values manifestly shape personal values (a key driver of charitable donations) and significantly influence philanthropy promotion and fundraising (Bekkers and Wiepking, 2011; McDonald

& Scaife, 2011). Wang (2014) studied cultural and societal influences on charitable giving and demonstrates that determinants of donations in the collectivistic culture that exists among the Chinese are different from those in the western world with its individualistic culture. Therefore, the direct application of market orientation model, that has been validated in the western countries, into other cultural contexts is not feasible (Kirca *et al.*, 2005). Subsequently, researchers conducted studies in local contexts to operationalize the implementation of market orientation among non-profits in their countries (Balabanis *et al.*, 1997; Bulla and Starr-Glass, 2006; Modi and Mishra, 2010; Brady *et al.*, 2011; Mahmoud and Yusif, 2012). The deficiency of non-profit marketing research prevails in the Chinese context. Based on comprehensive literature search, there is no prior research that studies the effect of market orientation and relationship marketing on fundraising performance across all non-profit sectors in the Chinese context in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. As marketing strategies developed in western contexts are non-transferable across cultures (Kirca *et al.*, 2005), local non-profit market orientation studies are necessary in order to effectually enhance fundraising performance.

3 FUTURE RESEARCH IN THE CHINESE CONTEXT

Owing to the absence of prior market orientation and fundraising studies across all non-profit sub-sectors in Hong Kong, further studies to explore fundraising-related marketing behaviour in a local Chinese context will address the clear research gap in the area of non-profit market orientation and its implication for fundraising performance in Hong Kong. Firstly, to identify a valid and reliable model to measure fundraising-related market orientation in Hong Kong is a pre-requisite for any future studies. Secondly, with a market orientation model, it is necessary to examine to what extent market orientation is relevant to fundraising across all non-profits sub-sectors. Thirdly, it is important to understand the interplay of market orientation and relationship marketing among non-profits in the Chinese context and the associated effect to rejuvenate fundraising performance. Fourthly, to combat resource constraints, non-profits need to investigate the relevancy of organisational size on market orientation adoption.

3.1 Identification of a Fundraising-Related Market Orientation Model Relevant to the Chinese Context in Hong Kong

Among all models for the measurement of market orientation, MARKOR and MKTOR scales remain the most commonly adopted measurements of market orientation since their development (Pandelica *et al.*, 2009). Cervera *et al.* (2001) appraise the MARKOR scale “as the most comprehensive conceptualisation of the market orientation construct” for non-profit organisations (p. 1263). The MARKOR scale was tailored-made for measuring fundraising related marketing behaviour by Bennett (1998) and remains more applicable to non-profits research in terms of validity & reliability (Bennett, 1998; Sargeant *et al.*, 2002; Shoham *et al.*, 2006). Brady *et al.* (2011) chose to replicate the study of Bennett (1998) using the revised fundraising MARKOR scale that was validated by Bennett (1998), because “the Australian third sector has drawn from the UK for some of its legal definitions” (Brady *et al.*, 2011, p. 87). As a former British colony, Hong Kong has a similar non-profit foundation to those in the UK and other former British colonies such as Australia (Lee, 2005; HKSAR Government, 2011). Since the organisational structure and functions of the non-profit organisations in Hong Kong largely originated from non-profit organisations in the UK (Lam and Perry, 2000), the relevancy of fundraising MARKOR scale and its associated effect on fundraising performance should be accessed.

3.2 Relationship of Market Orientation and Fundraising Performance across All Non-Profit Sub-Sectors

None of the previous research studies have comprehensively explored market orientation and its implication for fundraising performance among all non-profit sub-sectors for the Chinese context in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. If a valid and reliable scale to measure fundraising-related market orientation is identified, a comprehensive cross-sector study shall be conducted as no prior studies have attempted to explore how to operationalize market orientation across all non-profit sub-sectors. Since market orientation constructs vary among non-profit sub-sectors (Brady *et al.*, 2011) and national cultures (Harris, 2002; Kirca *et al.*, 2005), there is a clear need to ascertain the effectiveness of using market orientation techniques in fundraising across all non-profit sectors in Hong Kong.

3.3 The Role of Relationship Marketing and its effect on Fundraising Performance

To address non-profit market orientation in Hong Kong, as Ambler (1994) indicates that, relationship marketing should be an integral part of any marketing strategy in the Chinese context. Andreasen and Kotler (2008) claim that fundraising has reached a marketing orientation in its development and it is no longer about raising money based on the philanthropic motives, but rather as understanding and meeting the needs of donors and potential donors. Consequently, recent non-profit marketing research focuses on facilitating the adoption and operationalization of marketing strategies among non-profit organisations to enhance fundraising effectiveness (Pope *et al.*, 2009; Andreasen, 2012; Chad *et al.*, 2013). Rey García *et al.* (2013) propose that relationship marketing moderates the effect of market orientation on non-profit organisational performance. Prior research conducted in western countries stipulates that the “greater the extent to which an organisation practised relationship marketing the stronger the impact of market orientation on performance” (Bennett, 2005, p. 456), and posits that relationship marketing “operationalizes” marketing orientation (Helfert *et al.*, 2002). Since relationship marketing (or relational marketing) is central to stakeholder relationship management and funding resource solicitation in the Chinese context (Wong and Leung, 2001), exploring the moderating effect of relational marketing between the relationship of market orientation and non-profit fundraising performance will contribute to the theoretical understanding of fundraising market orientation.

3.4 The Effect of Organisational Size on Market Orientation

Chad *et al.* (2013) have concluded that there are no consistent findings that show whether there is any linkage between organisational size and market orientation for non-profit organisations. Two empirical studies that were completed in the UK present contradictory results. Balabanis *et al.* (1997) find that large non-profit organisations are more reluctant to become market oriented, whereas Seymour *et al.* (2006) find that small-sized non-profit organisations are less market oriented compared to large organisations. However, in the Australian study, Brady *et al.* (2011) show that organisational size relates positively to market orientation. An understanding of the relationship between organisational size and market orientation among non-profit organisations (Chad, 2013) will contribute to non-profit market orientation adoption in Hong Kong under limited resources.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Owing to the fierce competition in funding and donations among non-profit organisations, marketing scholars advocate the use of marketing techniques to improve fundraising performance. The adoption of market orientation and relationship marketing by non-profit organisations has been postulated to enhance fundraising performance in many western countries. The extendibility of western models to the Chinese context is uncertain and worth exploring. This research builds on and extends the understanding of the market orientation posited in the seminal literature on non-profit fundraising effectiveness in the western context and suggests future research for non-profit marketing strategies in relation to fundraising effectiveness for the Chinese context in Hong Kong. Future studies along the

suggested research agenda will contribute to market orientation theory by enriching its fundraising-related knowledge across culture. By reviewing the findings of future research, non-profit practitioners may be able to adopt a non-profit market orientation more effectively and translate their relationship strategy with donors into better fundraising performance and financial viability.

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