CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST

DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT

THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN SHAPING VOLUNTEER BEHAVIOR: THE INFLUENCE OF WORD-OF-MOUTH, MOTIVATIONS AND INHIBITING FACTORS

Thesis Booklet

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I. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Communication plays an important role in impacting individual attitudes and behaviors, as behavioral intentions are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). It is considered even more essential in contexts where decisions are shaped by interpersonal relations (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955, Hughes et al., 2025; Maxmudova, 2026). Among the different forms of communication, word-of-mouth (WOM) has gained increasing importance as a promotional and informational mechanism (Roy et al., 2024). This consists of encouraging consumers to communicate about a product or service to their friends and acquaintances, resulting in a chain of information exchange (Mason, 2008) that can be considered effective (López & Sicilia, 2014).

Traditional WOM has transformed into electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) due to the rise of digital technologies (Sun et al., 2006). These emerging digital platforms enable the rapid flow of information to a larger audience (Adila et al., 2020; Fan et al., 2020; Hendrickx & Vázquez-Herrero, 2024). Digital platforms help communication among strong-tied individuals and make it easier for strangers to talk to each other, which broadens the opportunities for interpersonal communication (Sen & Lerman, 2007). As a result, WOM and eWOM have become important sources of information influencing modern decision-making in various contexts (e.g., Nilashi et al., 2022; Al-Dmour et al., 2024; Perez-Aranda et al., 2026).

Communication has become increasingly important for nonprofit organizations and activities as well, where volunteers are crucial for ensuring the smooth operation (Alfes et al., 2017; Windon et al., 2024) in many areas such as in relation to refugees (Sengupta et al., 2023). Volunteering is defined as an activity performed voluntarily, without monetary remuneration, and intended to serve the public good (Güntert et al., 2022). Contemporary social changes and recurring crises have further intensified the need for civic engagement and community support (Fényes & Kiss, 2011), as pandemics, armed conflicts, and economic instability have further increased reliance on volunteer-driven organizations (e.g., United Nations Volunteers, 2022; Sengupta et al., 2023). Due to the Russian-Ukrainian war, the number of Ukrainian refugees worldwide rose to above 5 million, with 65 450 residing in Hungary (UNHCR, 2025), highlighting the need to investigate volunteer behavior, including the role of communication processes in a crisis situation.

There are over 2.1 billion people worldwide who engage in volunteering over the course of a year (United Nations Volunteers, 2026), and nearly 2.2 million people took part in volunteer activities in Hungary (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 2023). This underlines the magnitude of societal impact that volunteering can have when effectively managed and supported. Investigating volunteering in Hungary is relevant as patterns of civic engagement may differ from other countries due to differences in cultural norms and institutional environments (Grönlund et al., 2011; Grönlund, 2013). Previous research (Plagnol & Huppert, 2010) has concentrated on the major gaps in volunteering throughout Europe, revealing a positive correlation between formal and informal volunteering. It has also been shown that previously identified influencing factors of volunteering (e.g., cultural characteristics) fail to account for these differences, underscoring the necessity to explore potential variances related to historical context, institutional frameworks, and national circumstances (Plagnol & Huppert, 2010). The research by Bocsi and Fényes (2012) indicated that socio-demographic characteristics exhibit a weak influence, whereas value preferences significantly impact volunteering, suggesting that differences in volunteering are likely rooted in cultural value systems. It was also found that religiosity positively influences volunteering, whereas individuals' core values affect their participation in modern, traditional, or hybrid types of volunteerism (Bocsi & Fényes, 2012).

Despite the increasing importance of volunteering, one of the main challenges faced by nonprofit organizations is the recruitment and retention of volunteers (Warburton et al., 2018). Previous research indicates that the content and source of communication, along with motivational aspects, are critical for increasing participation in volunteer activities (Clary et al., 1994; Bennett & Kottasz, 2001; Jablin, 2001). Communication is an essential element of the volunteering process, involving recruiting, experience, and post-participation advocacy, which includes peer recommendations and word-of-mouth interactions (Bifkovics & Malota, 2024). While WOM is not motivation, it can act as an external influence on shaping motivations and behavioral intentions (e.g., Pourjahanshahi et al., 2023). These findings emphasize that communication is not a supporting function, but a fundamental aspect of volunteering.

Existing literature primarily focused on volunteer motivations (e.g., Dunn et al., 2016; Molnar et al., 2025) while less attention has been paid to the factors that hinder volunteer participation. However, understanding these inhibiting factors is equally important, as the presence of these

constraints (e.g., lack of opportunities) can limit individuals' engagement in volunteer activities (Bifkovics & Béla-Csovcsics, 2025). In particular, the lack of awareness about volunteering opportunities suggests that communication-related factors may play a decisive role not only in encouraging but in hindering participation.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) shows the influence of communication on behaviors by demonstrating the impact of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on behavioral intentions. Communication, including word-of-mouth (WOM), can influence all three components, making it a relevant concept for understanding volunteer engagement. Extending the application of the framework to another context provides insights into how communication shapes behavioral intentions.

Despite extensive study on communication, volunteering, and motivation, there is limited research that integrates these aspects to examine both communication—particularly word-of-mouth—and motivating and inhibiting factors across different contexts. Investigating this gap helps in developing more effective communication strategies to support volunteer recruitment and retention.

An overview of the research questions of the dissertation, including their relation to the publications and the associated article that addresses each issue, is presented in Table 1.

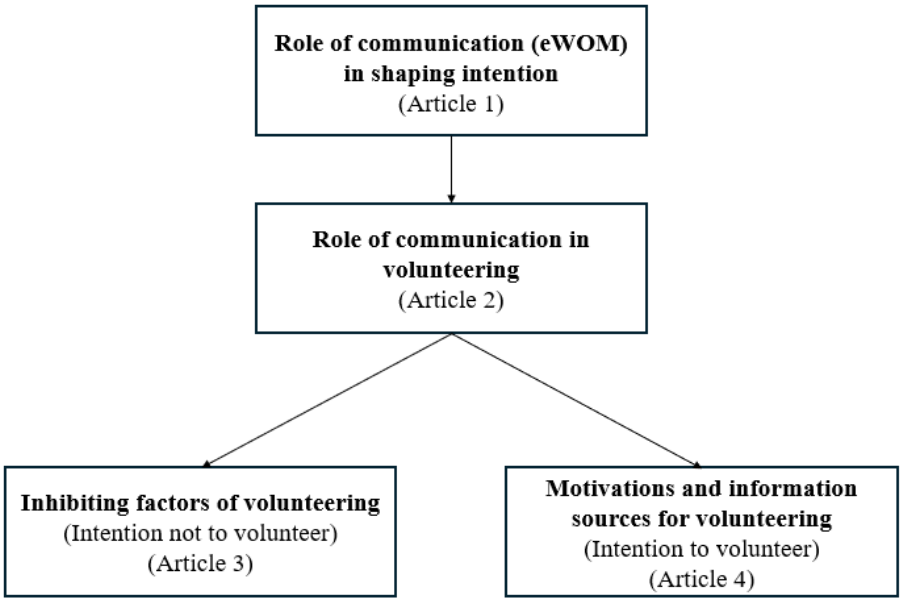
Table 1. Summary of research questions of the dissertation and related articles

Research question	**Related article**
What is the role of communication in influencing individuals?	Article 1
What are the main research areas related to volunteering?	Article 2
How can the importance of communication be described in the context of volunteering?	Article 2
What factors inhibit individuals from participating in voluntary activities?	Article 3
What are the primary motivations for individuals to engage in volunteer opportunities?	Article 4
From what information sources do individuals access information about volunteer opportunities?	Article 4

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Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the dissertation, highlighting the relationships between the four included articles.

Figure 1. The positioning of the 4 included articles



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In the first article, the investigation of the role of communication, in particular the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) on the behavioral intention was the focus. This importance of communication in shaping intention was the driver to examine its role in a different context, which led to our integrative literature review on volunteering. Based on the literature review, motivation was found to be a key concept in volunteering which was later analyzed along with communicational aspects highlighting the research directions of Articles 3 and 4. These studies identified key barriers to participation, particularly lack of opportunities which relate to ineffective communication, and incorporated empirical insights into what motivates individuals and how they access information about volunteering opportunities in a specific context.

The citation and the journal rankings of the articles included in the dissertation can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Overview of the included papers and the journals' rankings.

Article	Details of the articles	Rank
Article 1	**Bifkovics, B.,** Malota, E., Faria, L. N., & Martinez, L. F. (2024). Customer-to-customer communication: Referral of high and low involvement products through stimulated word-of-mouth. *Journal of Promotion Management*, *30*(2), 204–226.	SJR Q2

Article 2	**Bifkovics, B.,** & Malota, E. (2024). Volunteering through word-of-mouth and organizational communication: Integrative literature review and proposed research directions. *Vezetéstudomány Budapest Management Review*, *55*(4), 63–76.	MTA A
Article 3	**Bifkovics, B.,** & Béla-Csovcsics, A. (2025). Why do we refrain from volunteering? A test of inhibiting factors. *Vezetéstudomány Budapest Management Review*, *56*(11), 28–40.	MTA A
Article 4 (Under review)	**Bifkovics, B.** & Malota, E. Understanding volunteer motivations and information sources during emergency crisis situations: Volunteering with Ukrainian refugees. *Voluntas.* [Under review]	SJR Q1

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II. METHODOLOGY

The theoretical frameworks employed across the four articles provide a broader understanding of the motivations behind volunteerism. WOM and tie strength are two concepts that indicate the mechanisms of information dissemination and its effect on individuals. The Theory of Planned Behavior is a structured framework that helps in understanding behavioral intention, while motivational frameworks and inhibiting factors explain the reasons behind individuals' decisions to volunteer or refrain from volunteering. These approaches provide a stable theoretical foundation for examining the impact of communication on volunteering. Based on the identified research gaps, each article formulated research objectives and research questions, which are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary table of research aims and questions.

	Research aims	**Research questions**
Article 1	The aim of the research is to add to the existing knowledge of referral marketing by analyzing the impact of an RRP on customer behavior, and the consumer journey for high and low-involvement products.	**RQ1:** Can the Theory of Planned Behavior model be used to indicate a person's behavior intention to participate in referral reward programs? **RQ2:** What are the effects of using a referral reward program on the Consumer Decision-Making Journey in case of high- and low-involvement products?
Article 2	The aim of this paper is to review the complex and diverse literature on volunteering and volunteer communication, to summarize the results of international research, and to provide a basis for future research on the topic.	**RQ1:** What are the main themes of research on volunteering? **RQ2:** How has the relationship between volunteering and communication been defined in the literature?
Article 3	The aim of the research is to examine how volunteering is perceived among the subjects studied and what factors inhibit their participation in voluntary work.	**RQ1:** What factors inhibit the Hungarians from participating in voluntary activities?

Article 4	The aim is to identify the information sources for volunteering to help Ukrainian refugees, and to understand the motivations of volunteers.	**RQ1:** What are the primary motivations for individuals to engage in immediate crisis response volunteering during war-related emergencies regarding Ukrainian refugees in Hungary? **RQ2:** What were the main sources of recruitment information for immediate crisis response volunteering in support of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary?

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Table 4 provides a summary of the research methodologies, data collection methods, sampling techniques, and data analyses applied in the four articles.

Table 4. Summary table of research aims and questions.

	Data collection	**Sampling**	**Data analysis**
Article 1	**Quantitative methodology:** online survey	218 respondents from convenience, voluntary, and planned snowball sampling techniques	SPSS program was used for data analysis (e.g., correlation, regression)
Article 2	**Qualitative methodology:** integrative literature review. Google Scholar and ScienceDirect were used	English-language journal articles focusing on volunteering and communication (complemented with Hungarian articles)	Literature review analysis by identifying the main themes after categorization
Article 3	**Quantitative methodology**: online survey	264 respondents, convenience sampling	Confirmatory factor analysis was performed in ADANCO, further data analysis in SPSS
Article 4	**Qualitative methodology:** semi-structured in-depth interviews	Purposive sampling: 25 individuals who were taking part in any volunteering activity in Hungary in the context of Ukrainian refugees	Thematic analysis to investigate the main patterns of information sources and motivations

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III. RESULTS

The results of empirical studies and the integrative literature review contributed to gaining insight into how communication influences behavior, with a particular focus on volunteering. Beginning with the impact of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in consumer contexts, the dissertation progressively explored the role of communication and motivation in volunteering and extended the analysis to a specific crisis context.

Summary of the findings

Based on the research findings presented in Article 1, the Theory of Planned Behavior was found to be an appropriate framework for analyzing participation intentions in referral reward programs

(RRPs), which can be considered a form of word-of-mouth communication. This is consistent with previous findings in other domains (e.g., Sanne & Wiese, 2018; Raza et al., 2019). Among the TPB components, perceived behavioral control was found to have the strongest effect on behavioral intention to participate in a referral reward program. The difference between high- and low-involvement products was identified based on the results, and in both cases, the referral code, as a form of eWOM, was found to have a significant impact. Decision journey conformity was found to be high in the case of high-involvement products, and low for low-involvement products, indicating a need for differentiation when designing and implementing a referral reward program. Overall, Article 1 emphasized the importance of word-of-mouth as a source of information from social ties that can influence behavioral intention.

Article 2 provides an integrative literature review that explores dominant research themes of volunteering and communication. The categorization of existing research and the defined potential research directions add to the existing literature with a summary of previous research. The categories identified in the literature review related to volunteering were individual characteristics that influence volunteering (motivations, age, gender, cultural background), the impact of volunteering (subjective well-being, satisfaction) and the organizational aspects of volunteering (psychological contract, employee volunteering, contribution, reliability). The literature connecting volunteering and communication can be divided into two categories: communication related to recruiting new volunteers and communicating about volunteering experiences. After reviewing existing research, four possible research directions have been identified which lay the foundations for further research in the area of volunteering and communication. Overall, Article 2 provides a foundation for conducting future research in communication and volunteering with the summary of previous research and theories.

Article 3 is an empirical investigation into the factors that inhibit volunteering, filling a gap in literature that has previously focused on motives rather than hindering aspects. The findings indicate that one of the reasons individuals refrain from volunteering is lack of opportunities. This suggests that either there were no volunteer opportunities, or the communication about them did not reach the individuals, providing useful insight to practitioners while highlighting the need for more effective communication. Another dominant reason was found to be lack of time, which proposes the need to provide more short-term opportunities to avoid high consumption of the

individuals' time. Lack of skills were also found to be relevant, highlighting the need for clear communication about the volunteer opportunities to help individuals lower the perceived entry barriers for volunteering. These findings confirm that barriers are not merely individual limitations but are substantially linked to structural and communication-related obstacles. Based on the empirical testing of the Hungarian version of the 44-item scale of Willems and Dury (2017) that measures the inhibiting factors to volunteering, 3 dimensions were found to be significant: lack of skills, lack of accountability and lack of opportunities. Three dimensions were found to be partially utilizable (after omitting items), and the other three were found to be unusable in the Hungarian context.

In Article 4, we have analyzed sources of information and motivations in a very specific context, in the case of volunteering with Ukrainian refugees. When analyzing the information sources of volunteers, five key patterns have been identified: self-organized Facebook groups, friends and relatives, aiding organizations, workplace, and other sources. The most dominant source of information was eWOM, which was more common among weak ties and strangers. Among volunteer motivations, the two dominant ones, based on Clary and Snyder's (1999) framework, were value and protective motivations, where 3-3 subcategories were identified. In the case of values, these were (1) helping as a core value, (2) urge to reduce others' trauma, and (3) feeling social responsibility, while in the protective motivations it was (1) desire to see the results of helping, (2) coping with strong negative emotions (anxiety, sadness), and (3) identification with refugees. Motivations relating to self-development were not prominent in the context, which may be due to the crisis-specific behavior or prioritizing helping those in need over self-interests. As effective communication is crucial in an emergency crisis situation (e.g., Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017; Simsa et al., 2019; Maestri & Monforte, 2020), this research could provide insights for nonprofit organizations on how to spread the important information about volunteering, and on how to target volunteers better, based on their motivation. In conclusion, the findings of Article 4 indicate that in a crisis situation such as volunteering with Ukrainian refugees, word-of-mouth from weak ties was the most dominant, along with values and protective motivations. Being aware of these factors helps in tailoring communication about the opportunities in a similar situation.

The findings must be evaluated with regard to their contextual restrictions, as cultural (Dang & Raska, 2022) and digital (Ireland & Lestari, 2025) aspects might impact the role of eWOM communication, limiting its general applicability.

Answers to the research questions

The article-based dissertation intended to investigate multiple research questions and based on the analysis, the following remarks can be concluded with paying attention to their limited generalizability.

- What is the role of communication in influencing individuals?

Based on Article 1, communication plays a key role in shaping attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and overall behavioral intention (Ajzen, 1991). Word-of-mouth was found to be relevant as it may enable the rapid flow of information, even in digital environments via eWOM. Based on the findings, communication is not only a tool for dissemination of information but also shapes behavioral intention and influences decision-making.

- What are the main research areas related to volunteering?

According to Article 2, the main areas of volunteering research include personal (e.g., motivations), impact-based (e.g., well-being) and organizational (e.g., recruitment) aspects, where the role of communication was highlighted. The most research focused on motivations, while inhibiting factors were less investigated.

- How can the importance of communication be described in the context of volunteering?

Article 2 highlights that the role of communication can be described not as a supporting function but as a fundamental mechanism through the entire volunteering process (recruitment, volunteering, post-participation). Communication may influence motivation, behavioral intention and how the information reaches individuals.

- What factors inhibit individuals from participating in voluntary activities?

As there is limited research on the subject, it is important to investigate what inhibits volunteering. The findings of Article 3 indicate that volunteering can be inhibited by multiple causes: individuals can’t engage in activities, they don’t want to or no one asks them to join (Brady et al., 1995). Based on empirical evidence, lack of opportunities, which may relate to lack of or insufficient

communication, was found to be one of the critical barriers of volunteering, along with lack of time and lack of skills.

- What are the primary motivations for individuals to engage in volunteer opportunities?

Besides inhibiting factors, it is important to examine motivations for volunteering as well. Based on Article 4, in a specific context, while volunteering with Ukrainian refugees, values and protective motivations (Clary & Snyder, 1999) were found dominant while self-focused motivations were less present. This may indicate that in crises, individuals are more motivated by aiding and emotional identification rather than focusing on personal benefits.

- From what information sources do individuals access information about volunteer opportunities?

The sources of volunteering opportunities were also investigated in Article 4. Based on research, individuals gathered information from various sources, but the dominance of weak-tie eWOM indicated that in crisis situations, weak ties and rapid online communication may facilitate volunteering and immediate mobilization.

Based on the integrated findings of the article-based dissertation, volunteer participation is shaped by the interaction of communication processes, motivations, and inhibiting factors, where communication plays a central role in facilitating and constraining volunteer engagement through information gaps.

Theoretical contributions

The insights of the four publications present varied additions to the existing literature of research, which are summarized in Table 5. This outlines how each study expands, clarifies, or contests existing literature, so demonstrating the theoretical advancement of the dissertation.

Table 5. Summary of the articles' main theoretical contributions

Article	**Area**	**Contributions to existing literature**
Article 1	Theory of Planned Behavior	Prior research suggests that perceived behavioral control is not the strongest predictor within the TPB (Pelling & White, 2009; Sanne & Wiese, 2018), while our study demonstrates that PBC has the biggest effect on intention on the context of referral reward programs. As eWOM influenced all three components of TPB, the central role of communication was identified.
	Consumer Journey conformity	The consumer journey was researched before but not extensively. We have expanded the literature by introducing the consumer journey conformity's low and high classifications.

	Product involvement	Product involvement and the consumer journey were previously treated separately. This study shows that consumer journeys differ between high- and low-involvement products in the presence of RRPs.
Article 2	Literature synthesis	Volunteering research has examined individual, organizational, and communication aspects separately (e.g., Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Kramer, 2011), we provide a synthesis of volunteering and communication research across local and international contexts.
	Identifying research gaps	Previous research has not offered an overview of volunteering and communication together, we identified four key research directions, thereby defining previously unexplored research gaps.
Article 3	Motivational focus	Existing research has primarily focused on motivations for volunteering (e.g., Newton et al., 2014; Thoits, 2021; Chen et al., 2022), our research shifts the focus to barriers for the better understanding of volunteering behavior.
	Testing the framework	Existing frameworks (e.g., Willems & Dury, 2017) have been widely used, but rarely tested across contexts, this study empirically validates the framework in Hungary and shows that the measurements of the barriers included are context dependent.
Article 4	Domination of motivations	Prior research on volunteer motivations (Clary et al., 1998; Clary & Snyder, 1999; Meijeren et al., 2024) identified multiple functional motives, based on our findings, self-oriented motivations become less salient, while protective and values motivations become prominent in crisis situations, highlighting the motivational framework's context-dependency.
	Relevance of weak ties	Earlier research on word-of-mouth emphasizes the importance of social ties (Frenzen & Nakamoto, 1993), often assuming stronger ties are more influential, whereas our research demonstrates that weak-tie eWOM (e.g., from Facebook groups) can become a key, credible, and mobilizing information source in crisis situations.

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By using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Article 1 contributes to existing literature by demonstrating that perceived behavioral control is the strongest indicator of intention to participate in referral reward programs. Previous studies argue that the attitudes component is the strongest predictor of behavioral intention (e.g., Pelling & White, 2009), while others emphasized the joint importance of attitudes and perceived behavioral control (Sanne & Wiese, 2018). The results of Article 1 suggest that perceived behavioral control may play a dominant role in certain contexts. In order to investigate the consumer journey conformity, a classification (for low and high conformity) was created, adding to the existing literature. The results of our research imply that the consumer journey is not identical in the case of high- and low-involvement products, which represents a previously unexplored connection between product involvement, eWOM (as referral reward programs), and the consumer journey. Investigating the effect of two variables on the consumer journey provided a complex view of the consumer's decision-making process and the willingness to participate in a referral reward program. The effect of the variables on the consumer

journey adds to the literature and provides insights for marketers on how to design a referral reward program to have a greater impact on consumer journey.

In Article 2, the integrative literature review conducted on volunteering and communication synthesized the local and international research performed in the fields which never provided this detailed view on the phenomenon. Based on the findings, four possible research directions have been identified: getting to know the volunteers in a cultural context, investigating the impact of word-of-mouth recommendations, examining recruitment communication with focusing on its content, and the analysis of volunteer organizations' communication, which extemds prior research with defining unexploited research gaps. Based on the proposed research ideas, scholars can investigate the phenomenon of volunteering and communications more thoroughly.

Article 3 enriches literature by shifting the focus from motives (e.g., Newton et al., 2014; Thoits, 2021; Chen et al., 2022) to the barriers to volunteering, and with this, offering a more detailed understanding of volunteering behavior. This study examines the reasons individuals choose not to volunteer with empirically assessing the framework by Willems and Dury (2017) in the Hungarian context. The findings enhance existing theoretical models by identifying that inhibiting variables are somewhat situation-dependent. Identifying the lack of opportunities as a fundamental barrier suggests that communication aspects should be more explicitly integrated into theoretical models of volunteering behavior.

The findings of Article 4 not only extend the existing literature by investigating the specifics of crises but provide useful practices for volunteer organizations. The novelty of our article lies in its focus on the context of a crisis. Based on our findings we provide insight to the volunteer organizations on how to customize their communication channels in a similar situation. It is also important to note that no other research has been conducted in Hungary regarding the investigation of volunteering in the Ukrainian refugee crisis. Consequently, our research makes a valuable contribution to the local and international knowledge in this area. The results indicate that understanding of the underlying motivations for volunteering and an in-depth knowledge of information sources can assist charitable organizations in developing effective communication strategies. This finding supports the conclusions of Clary et al. (1998). Based on previous studies (Clary et al., 1998; Clary & Snyder, 1999; Meijeren et al., 2024), volunteers may possess diverse motivations and that volunteer motivations differ in a crisis situation (e.g., Grönlund, 2011;

Sengupta et al., 2023; Meijeren et al., 2024). Our results refine previous findings by implying that motivations are context-dependent, as self-oriented motivations are found to be less salient in a crisis situation. This supports that volunteer motivations may vary based on several factors, such as crisis contexts or individual and cultural characteristics (Chen et al., 2022). The findings of our research identified the relevance and impact of weak ties (e.g., Facebook group members) as sources of information, which contributes to the existing literature on weak ties with being the dominant source of information in a crisis situation. This importance may be due to perceived authenticity and trust in the information source. However, the key role of weak-tie eWOM must be interpreted with caution, as prior studies indicate that its influence may differ among various cultural segments (Dang & Raska, 2022).

In summary, the first article identified the importance of communication and word-of-mouth. The findings of Article 2 provided insights into prior research on volunteering and the dominant constructs in the field, along with identifying the connection between volunteering and communication, resulted in defining future research directions. Article 3 focused on why individuals are not engaging in volunteer activities, suggesting that lack of opportunities, lack of time and lack of skills are the most prominent barriers to volunteering. Building on the findings of Article 1 on eWOM and tie strength, Article 2 with the definition of the most important constructs, and Article 3 highlighting the importance of communication about volunteer opportunities, Article 4 demonstrated that the dominant source of information is eWOM, along with values and protective motivations being the most prominent while volunteering in a crisis situation.

This dissertation extends the literature with incorporating communication into the theoretical framework of volunteering behavior. Firstly, it expands the Theory of Planned Behavior by demonstrating the central role of communication, such as word-of-mouth and information accessibility, as it influences not only attitudes and subjective norms but also perceived behavioral control. This dissertation connects three previously separate research fields: volunteering, consumer behavior, and communication. It links them by emphasizing that the dynamics of social influence and information distribution differ based on the context. This interdisciplinary integration offers a novel approach for investigating the role of communication on consumer and voluntary actions. The studies enhance volunteering theory by including motivational and inhibiting frameworks. Previous research has mainly concentrated on motivational factors;

however, this dissertation suggests that barriers, particularly those related to communication, significantly impact behavior. Based on the findings, the importance of tie strength varies according to specific circumstances. While strong interpersonal relationships play an important role of influencing purchases, weak ties are vital during a crisis, particularly when rapid dissemination of information is required. As eWOM was a central phenomenon in the research, the findings are most likely to be applicable in contexts where digitalization enables digital communication and may be less transferable to countries with lower digital engagement (Ireland & Lestari, 2025). Besides digital divides, cultural and communicational differences may further determine the extent to which these findings can be implemented. The dissertation enhances theory by demonstrating that communication is not supporting, but a central mechanism through which individuals' behavioral intention is influenced.

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IV. LIST OF AUTHORS' RELATED PUBLICATIONS

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