

## MASTER'S THESIS

# Chinese Corporate Volunteerism: Characteristics, Recruitment Communication, and Employee Outcomes

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## ABSTRACT

Corporate volunteerism (CV) refers to initiatives established by companies that encourage their employees to volunteer their time in an organized activity for an external non-profit organization (Henning & Jones, 2013; Rodell et al., 2016). It has been a popular important firm-level means for shouldering corporate social responsibility (CSR) among non-state-owned companies in China. Yet, it remains a challenge to recruit employees. Despite the increasing scholarly attention on CV, only a few studies have explored the status of CV in China, and investigated the role of communication and potential risks of participation in the different cultural contexts. Thus, this study aimed to examine (a) the characteristics of CV (i.e., program variations and length, CV contributions, and incentives), and the relationships (b) between CV communication and recruitment effectiveness and (c) CV participation and employee outcomes (i.e., positive psychological outcomes, employee engagement, and role stress and burnout) in the Chinese context. Specifically, recognizing the importance of sources and themes in the communication model (Kramer & Bisel, 2017; Shannon & Weaver, 1949), this study identified CV recruitment communication as source-based communication and appeals. Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) and self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985) were adopted respectively to examine each type of recruitment communication.

This study conducted online surveys and collected 466 valid completed questionnaires from full-time employees from non-state-owned companies in mainland, China. Results demonstrated that non-state-owned companies in China have actively initiated firm-level volunteer programs of different lengths to provide solutions for heated social issues (Jones, 2010; Wang, 2021; Wang,

2023). They encourage their employees to donate items and/or volunteer activities in the programs with/without incentives. Different companies also showed different preferences in organizing different programs. Influenced by high power distance and social referents, employees in China perceived top managers and ordinary employees as powerful sources in CV; they tended to show a higher level of intended and actual participation especially when receiving communication from ordinary employees. On the other hand, addressing the Confucian value of loving others for harmony (Guo et al., 2021; Monkhouse et al., 2013), employees are more likely to intend to participate when reading humanitarian appeals. Upon participation, employees tend to experience a higher level of psychological outcomes (i.e., organizational pride and identification, and job satisfaction) and employee engagement, and a lower level of role stress and burnout.

This study can enrich the understanding of CV communication in recruitment effectiveness as well as benefits of CV participation. By focusing on Chinese CV, it demonstrates CV in cross-cultural settings. It sheds light on how employees in China, who are influenced specific cultural factors (i.e., high power distance, social referents, and the cultural belief of loving others for harmony), may perceive and behave in corporate practices. In terms of practices, it can also provide valuable insights into improving the planning of CV and formulating effective internal communication strategies for recruitment and positive employee outcomes.