

Nonprofit Communication and Fundraising in China: Exploring the Theory of Situational Support in an International Context

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Using a survey of 586 college students from Beijing, China, this study tested the theory of situational support by exploring Chinese students' motivations to participate in nonprofit fundraising events. This study also compared theory variables between Chinese and U.S. college students by looking at similar data from a survey previously conducted with 514 U.S. students. There were differences between the two groups regarding constraint recognition, subjective norms, attitudes toward fundraising, and other variables, perhaps because of Confucianism, collectivism, and other differences between China and the United States. The findings generate a range of theoretical and practical implications including how nonprofit practitioners in China might develop better communication and messaging strategies to segment publics, motivate potential donors, and advance future fundraising efforts.

Keywords: fundraising, nonprofit, situational theory of publics, theory of reasoned action, theory of situational support, China

For decades, public relations scholars have employed the situational theory of publics to segment audiences and to predict information seeking and processing activities (Aldoory & Sha, 2007; Grunig, 1997). At the same time, consumer behavior and health communication scholars have used the theory of reasoned action to explore various behavioral intentions (Sheppard, Hartwick, & Warshaw, 1988). Because the situational theory of publics and the theory of reasoned action both examine the motivational antecedents that lead to information activities and other behavioral intentions, recent research has proposed a new theory of situational support that combines variables from both theories (McKeever, 2013; McKeever, Pressgrove, McKeever, & Zheng, 2016).

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Specifically, the theory of situational support uses problem recognition, constraint recognition, involvement recognition, attitudes, and subjective norms as independent variables to predict situational support, which is a combination of information activities and other behavior intentions. The theory of situational support has been supported by quantitative data gathered from U.S. college students and from other U.S. residents and has been confirmed to be predictive of stakeholder support in the context of nonprofit fundraising (McKeever, 2013; McKeever et al., 2016). The newly developed theory of situational support has also provided practical implications for nonprofit communication practitioners to improve participation in fundraising events.

However, "a theory is not complete until it has been replicated" (Muma, 1993, p. 927). While the initial theory of situational support research (McKeever, 2013) has been replicated and extended by researchers using nationwide survey data from diverse U.S.-based participants (i.e., non-student participants) (McKeever et al., 2016), the study has not been replicated nor has the theory been tested in international contexts. As an evolving theoretical model, it is unknown whether the theory of situational support can predict communication and behavioral patterns across different cultures, such as Chinese culture, where Confucianism and collectivism dominate. In brief, under Confucianism most people believe that providing financial support to family, lineage members, or the people they know is more important than making donations to help someone they have never met. That is very different from Western culture, which encourages donations to people one does not know through nonprofit organizations (Hsu, 2008; Yan, Huang, Foster, & Tester, 2007).

Background on Nonprofits and Fundraising in China

In China, inequality of wealth is a serious social problem that the Chinese government aims to address by establishing and developing a nonprofit sector and philanthropic enterprises (Hassid & Jeffreys, 2015). By 2010, there were 435,000 nonprofit organizations in China (Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2010). Nevertheless, these nonprofits have failed to motivate many Chinese publics. According to a report on donor behavior in China, 32.8% of Chinese people did not participate in any kind of fundraising event or make any kind of charitable donation in a given year ("Attitudes and Perceptions," 2013). Another Chinese donation behavior report found that only 50.3% of Shanghai residents agreed that "everyone should participate in charitable fundraising events" (Statistics Bureau of Shanghai, 2012, para. 2).

While many scholars have examined approaches to promote Chinese philanthropy, they have either focused on corporate philanthropy (Ma & Parish, 2006; Qiu, 2013; Tan & Tang, 2014; Wang, Gao, Hodgkinson, Rousseau, & Flood, 2014; Zhang, Rezaee, & Zhu, 2010) or focused on a few key variables such as altruistic motivation, shared vision, perceived pressure, or perceived accessibility (Du, Qian, & Feng, 2014; Du, Zhao, & Zhang, 2014). Thus, those scholars have called for more comprehensive and systematic approaches to explore what motivates Chinese publics to make donations and how to improve their donating behaviors. Some researchers have also called for the use of nonprofit models and social science theories used in Western academic studies to help improve Chinese indigenous nonprofits and localize the work of international nonprofits (Fitzgerald, 2012; Wang, 2014).

To refine an emerging theoretical framework and to learn more about the current context of nonprofit fundraising in China, this study replicated the existing theory of situational support research by conducting a survey in August 2014 in Beijing, China ($N = 586$). Briefly, the model works, but only to a certain extent, as constraint recognition does not seem to apply to fundraising in China. Additionally, variables such as subjective norms are even more important in a Chinese context. Besides enhancing scholarly research by testing a newly emerging communication model in an international context, this research also contributes practical guidance for Chinese nonprofit practitioners to develop better communication strategies to segment publics, motivate potential donors, and advance future fundraising efforts.

Literature Review

Situational Theory of Publics

The situational theory of publics has been called the first “deep theory” in public relations because of its contributions to understanding why and how publics communicate in certain patterns (Aldoory & Sha, 2007). For instance, the theory has been used to study investor relations (Cameron, 1992), voting behaviors (Hamilton, 1992), and mobile-giving campaigns (Weberling, Waters, & Tindall, 2012), among other issues. The situational theory of publics is constructed on the premise that when confronted with an issue, individuals will seek and process information based on their level of awareness, recognition of related constraints, and personal involvement with the issue (Grunig, 1997).

The original situational theory research defined two dimensions of information activity: information seeking—“the planned scanning of the environment for messages about a specific topic”—and information processing—“the unplanned discovery of a message followed by continued processing of it” (Grunig, 1997, p. 9). The former is the active process of searching for information, whereas the latter is passive exposure to the information. The primary goal of many communication campaigns is to motivate information activities by targeting the publics that are most active on a certain topic or issue. For example, communication campaigns often encourage additional information seeking and information sharing with one’s peers; this is especially true in today’s highly digital and social-mediated society. The way people engage with information now is much different than before the age of the Internet and social media, when the situational theory of publics was first proposed (Grunig, 1989, 1997). Current active publics not only actively acquire information but also share information via email and/or by reposting information on their social media pages (Zheng, 2014). Some online users even provide news ideas to TV journalists by using social media (Tanner, Friedman, & Zheng, 2015). Additionally, because of advancements in digital and mobile technologies, many people perform multiple information activities almost simultaneously. As a result, this study explores information activity, including three different dimensions: seeking information, sharing information, and posting information on social media. Other situational theory scholars have combined information activities together and studied them as one variable in a similar fashion (Aldoory, Kim, & Tindall, 2010; McKeever, 2013; McKeever et al., 2016).

According to the situational theory, an individual’s information activities can be predicted by three core independent variables: problem recognition, constraint recognition, and involvement recognition. Briefly, problem recognition refers to the extent to which people are aware of an issue and stop to think

about how to address it; constraint recognition is the extent to which people perceive barriers that prevent them from addressing the issue; and involvement recognition indicates the degree of personal connectedness to the issue or the issue's relevance (Grunig, 1997; Kim & Grunig, 2011). Historically, problem recognition and involvement recognition have been found to have a positive relationship with information activities, while constraint recognition has been found to have a negative relationship with information activities as well as with the other theory variables.

While for decades this theory has worked successfully to explain diverse communication contexts (Aldoory & Sha, 2007), many researchers have argued for its continued development by substituting or adding variables. For example, deference to authority and collectivism were added to the theory to explain people's satisfaction with customer service in Singapore (Sriramesh, Moghan, & Kwok, 2007), cultural identity was added to explore a racially and ethnically diverse population (Sha, 2006), and health consciousness was considered to examine health-related contexts (Zheng & McKeever, forthcoming). More recently, Kim and Grunig (2011) focused on differences in information-related behaviors as the outcome variable and came up with six types of behaviors that fall under the umbrella of communicative action; they called this evolved version of the theory, which also includes the variables of referent criterion and situational motivation, the situational theory of problem solving (STOPS). STOPS has been employed to explore social issues related to health, politics, and environment (Kim & Grunig, 2011; Kim, Ni, Kim, & Kim, 2012; Kim, Shen, & Morgan, 2011). And some scholars have combined the situational theory of publics with the theory of reasoned action to develop a theory of situational support, which explains more variance in the dependent variables of interest in the context of nonprofit communication and fundraising (McKeever, 2013; McKeever et al., 2016). This study follows those recent studies on nonprofit fundraising in the United States to explore a new international context, nonprofit fundraising in China.

Theory of Reasoned Action

The theory of reasoned action has been used widely in social psychology, consumer behavior, and health communication research to explain and predict behavioral intentions and subsequent behaviors. One of the major premises of the theory of reasoned action is that a behavior (what a person actually does) is determined by a behavioral intention (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). And behavioral intentions are positively influenced by two key factors: attitudes and subjective norms. Specifically, an attitude refers to a favorable or unfavorable predisposition about an issue, object, or behavior. Subjective norms refer to perceived normative expectations from relevant individuals or groups in one's social environment, and whether these significant others approve or disapprove of the issues, objects, or behaviors (Sheppard et al., 1988).

The theory of reasoned action has been used in countless studies to predict behaviors and behavioral intentions, including young adults' use of condoms (Sutton, McVey, & Glanz, 1999), blood donation (Holdershaw, Gendall, & Wright, 2003), organ donation (Jeffres, Carroll, Rubenking, & Amschlinger, 2008; Weber, Martin, & Corrigan, 2007), and bone marrow donation (Bagozzi, Lee, & Van Loo, 2001). The theory of reasoned action has been extended by adding an additional variable—perceived behavior control, which refers to the perceived ability to perform a given behavior—to develop the theory of planned behavior (Madden, Ellen, & Ajzen, 1992). Perceived behavioral control is somewhat antithetical

to constraint recognition (in the situational theory of publics) in that perceived behavior control refers to one's perceived ability to control behavior (which means one may not recognize constraints). This study employs the original theory of reasoned action variables in an attempt to be parsimonious in explaining nonprofit support and, specifically, to avoid redundancy and the overlap of perceived behavioral control and constraint recognition.

An Emerging Theory of Situational Support

In recent years, a few scholars have begun investigating the intersection between the situational theory of publics and the theory of reasoned action and have acknowledged those two theories as parallel frameworks (McKeever, 2013; McKeever et al., 2016). They combined the two theories and proposed an emerging theory of situational support. Situational support, which refers to the extent to which an individual might support an organization or initiative by participating in an event or situation, was originally proposed as a continuum that includes information activities and behavioral intentions (McKeever, 2013). However, a revised study tested and found evidence for the idea that information activity serves as a mediator between the five independent variables (problem recognition, constraint recognition, involvement recognition, attitudes, and subjective norms) and the dependent variable of behavioral intentions (McKeever et al., 2016). Figure 1 shows the revised model representing the theory of situational support. All the relationships in this model are positive with the exception of constraint recognition, which is negative (consistent with previous situational theory research).

It is important to note, however, that both these studies were conducted with U.S.-based populations. Testing this model in international contexts was an important next step in theory development. Thus, our first research question asked:

RQ1: Does the existing model for the theory of situational support (see Figure 1) apply in the cultural context of China?

That was the purpose of the current study, which explored the emerging theory of situational support in an international context to determine if the theory applied to fundraising and nonprofit communication in China. First, however, it is important to consider differences in fundraising across the two cultures, as these differences may impact the study results.

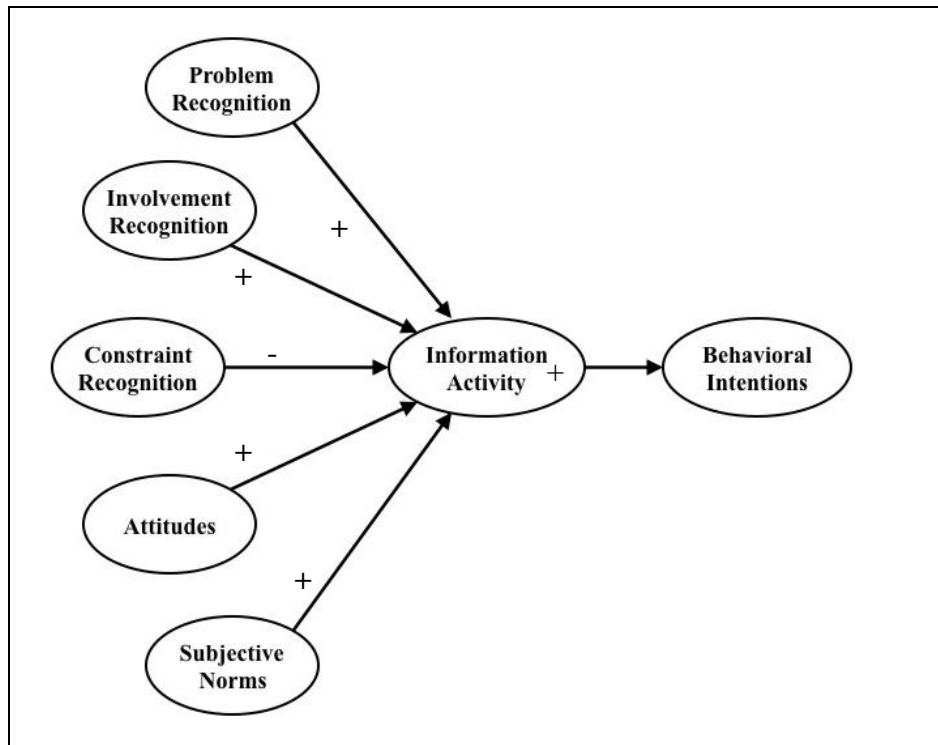


Figure 1. Conceptual model for the theory of situational support.

Nonprofit Organizations and Fundraising in the United States

As of 2015, there were more than 1.5 million registered tax-exempt nonprofit organizations in the United States (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2015). From 1998 to 2008, the number of registered nonprofits increased by about 31%, and nonprofit revenues grew around 40% (Wing, Roeger, & Pollak, 2010). In 2014, individuals and households contributed approximately 72% of all donations to nonprofit organizations (Giving Institute, 2015). Thus, it is important for nonprofit practitioners to understand the motivations behind these contributions, including information-related activities and donation behaviors.

Despite much research being conducted related to nonprofits and fundraising in the United States (see, e.g., Abrahams & Bell, 1994; Das, Kerkhof, & Kuiper, 2008; Hoeken & Hustinx, 2007; Kelly, 1995; Stabile, 2011; Waters, 2008, 2010; Waters, Kelly, & Walker, 2012; Weberling, 2012; Weberling & Waters, 2012), scholars and practitioners lack a clear model to help explain communication, behavioral intent, and related antecedents to participating in fundraising events, advocacy, and other forms of organizational support. The theory of situational support attempts to fill that gap and was first employed to explore U.S. students' motivations to participate in Relay for Life, which benefits the American Cancer Society. By conducting a survey of college students ($N = 514$), previous research determined the viability of merging

variables from the situational theory and the theory of reasoned action in a new model and emerging theory of situational support. More specifically, the results indicated that constraint recognition and subjective norms were the most powerful predictors of the situational support continuum (McKeever, 2013). This study was replicated and extended using a nationally based respondent pool related to three fundraising events benefiting three nonprofit organizations: Relay for Life, benefiting the American Cancer Society; Race for the Cure, benefiting Susan G. Komen for the Cure; and March for Babies, benefiting the March of Dimes (McKeever et al., 2016). The findings confirmed the impact of the motivational antecedents on the behavioral responses, this time with information activities serving as a mediator connecting the motivational antecedents and intentions to participate in fundraising events. However, the nonprofit and fundraising landscape is vastly different in China; thus, it is worth continuing to explore these ideas in a new international context.

Nonprofit Organizations and Fundraising in China

Chinese philanthropy originated from clan-based lineage organizations in the premodern era that raised funds from lineage members to take care of the widows and orphans and to build clan-based schools for boys (Hsu, 2008; Yan et al., 2007). According to Confucian ideology, people have a responsibility to care for family or lineage members within the clans, and people could also ask for help from lineage members. In contrast to Western beliefs related to nonprofit giving, under Confucian ideology, people have very little responsibility to provide resources to strangers or to people without lineage, because this wastes resources that might be needed by lineage members. In addition, Chinese Confucianism posits that personal relationships should be built on reciprocity and be strengthened by the exchange of useful resources (Hsu, 2008; Yan et al., 2007).

This perspective is very different from Western culture, which encourages charitable donations or providing resources to strangers without any expectations in return (Hsu, 2008; Yan et al., 2007). Additionally, Western culture was based on Christianity and the principle of tithing, donating one-tenth (or some other proportion) of one's income to the church. This principle has evolved over time, and as nonprofit organizations have become more prominent in the United States, many U.S. citizens have become familiar with the concept of contributing to churches, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, or to other individuals who are less fortunate than they are (Robbins, 2006).

However, most Chinese citizens have not had the same experiences or do not have the same beliefs about making donations as U.S. citizens. While many in China reported that they would love to contribute to family or friends who have difficulty in their lives, they were not as willing to donate money to organizations or individuals they do not know ("Attitudes and Perceptions," 2013). These passive attitudes toward fundraising events were made worse by the insufficient transparency of Chinese nonprofits (Fitzgerald, 2012; Zheng, 2009). According to a report produced by the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs in 2010, 42% of Chinese nonprofit organizations did not publish or otherwise make available their financial reports, and more than two thirds of Chinese nonprofits did not even have websites at that time. Thus, it is not surprising that 70% of the Chinese people surveyed said they felt uncomfortable about the financial information released by nonprofits and 79% said they would prefer more transparency in terms of nonprofit information related to general mission, organization structure, leadership, and

especially how the organizations spend money (Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2010; Statistics Bureau of Shanghai, 2012; Wang, 2014).

On top of these issues, Chinese nonprofit organizations have suffered from a range of scandals, including donations not reaching needy people and some nonprofit managers misusing funds to buy luxury goods for celebrities (Jeffreys, 2010; Qian, 2014). As a result of some of these issues, donations to the Chinese Red Cross shrunk from ¥3 billion in 2010 to ¥558 million in 2011; the total amount of charitable donations in China decreased from ¥84.5 billion in 2011 to ¥70 billion in 2012 (Huang, 2013).

Based on differences between China and the United States in terms of ideology and the status of the nonprofit sector in each country, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

H1a: Chinese college students will report lower levels of positive attitudes toward nonprofit fundraising events than U.S. college students.

Due to limited enthusiasm about charitable donations in Chinese culture, most Chinese nonprofit practitioners organize fundraising events in workplaces, classrooms, or communities using staff or class meeting time (Du, Zhao, et al., 2014). Moreover, the fundraising process in China is more focused on general donations or just dropping cash in a box at a workplace without receiving anything in return (such as t-shirts, food and beverages, or souvenirs, which are common at U.S.-based fundraising events). This is very different from some fundraising events in Western countries, in which people, not only make donations, but also participate in running, walking, or other types of activities that require more effort than simply making a donation. Thus, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

H1b: Chinese college students will report lower levels of constraint recognition toward nonprofit fundraising events than U.S. college students.

Because Eastern culture is dominated by collectivism, which emphasizes the interdependence among human beings, prior scholars have found that, compared to people in Western countries, when making donation-related decisions, Chinese people are more likely to care about the benefits for significant others and their decisions are more likely to be influenced by significant others (Ye, Teng, Yu, & Wang, 2015). Under Confusion ideology, in addition to taking responsibility to care for lineage members, individuals often follow the advice of significant others or lineage members. Hence, it is reasonable to suspect that, although Chinese publics may have negative attitudes toward charitable donations and nonprofits, they might still participate in fundraising events with their family members' or significant others' encouragement. This study thus proposed the following final hypothesis:

H1c: Chinese college students will report higher levels of subjective norms regarding nonprofit fundraising events than U.S. college students.

Finally, prior scholars have not explored the differences between China and the United States regarding other theory variables of interest in the current study. Thus, this study proposes the following final research question:

RQ2: What are the differences between Chinese and U.S. college students in terms of problem recognition, involvement recognition, information activity, and behavioral intentions to support nonprofit fundraising events?

Methods

To answer the research questions and test our hypotheses, this study distributed a survey in China to replicate previous research and to test the theory of situational support in China and relied on data previously collected in the United States from prior research ($N = 514$; McKeever, 2013) for the purpose of comparison. In the original study, which was conducted in 2011 at a large southeastern university in the United States, an online survey was distributed to 5,000 students randomly selected by the university registrar and eventually obtained 514 responses, a response rate of over 10%. Specifically, college students were asked a series of questions related to their intentions to support Relay for Life, a national fundraising event benefiting the American Cancer Society. Relay for Life is a community fundraising event, which takes place over up to 24 hours on college campuses and in cities and towns across America. Individuals and teams may walk a track, camp out overnight, and typically plan activities to celebrate cancer survivors, educate participants about cancer, and raise funds for cancer research and treatment (American Cancer Society, 2015). The survey questions were adapted from previous research on the situational theory and the theory of reasoned action. The current study used survey measures very similar to the items used in the original survey, which will be outlined next. The current study used a student sample, not only because the original study was conducted with students at an U.S. university, but also because many Chinese fundraising events take place on college campuses and, thus, Chinese students have become popular target groups for nonprofit organizations.

Pretest

Before adapting the survey instrument used by prior research (McKeever, 2013), the authors conducted a pretest to ensure the current study would make sense in Chinese culture by interviewing 23 college students from one of the author's health communication classes in a well-known university in Beijing, China. The interviews focused on the following research questions: "Have you ever participated in any nonprofit fundraising event?" and either "What motivated you to participate in that event?" or "Why were you not willing to participate in any fundraising event?" Each interview lasted 15 to 30 minutes. This study then transcribed the interview audio and employed grounded theory to analyze the transcripts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

The pretest results indicated that students' motivations to participate in fundraising events were influenced by a range of factors including problem recognition (e.g., "I donated to the earthquake survivors because I heard that the earthquake had destroyed the entire city and killed a lot people"); involvement recognition (e.g., "I donated to a nonprofit organization benefiting leukemia patients since one of the recipients was my classmate"); constraint recognition (e.g., "the event location was too far away from my dorm"); attitudes (e.g., "I did not think I had the responsibility to financially support others, because I am a student, I am not working, and I am a poor person that needs help as well"); and

subjective norms (e.g., "most of my classmates had already donated, thus I thought I should follow them").

To conclude, by interviewing 23 Chinese students, this pretest confirmed that problem recognition, constraint recognition, involvement recognition, attitudes, and subjective norms had at least some impacts on the situational support of fundraising events. Thus, it seemed viable to adapt previous research into a questionnaire that could be administered among students in China.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

In order to distribute the survey link, one of the authors first used her contacts to access 10 student leaders from three well-known universities in Beijing, China. Those 10 students led different student organizations in their own universities, such as the student union, campus newspaper, the international student association, and so on. Those student leaders were required to distribute the survey link to other students in their universities. Also, at the end of the survey, all student respondents were asked to identify the student leader who had referred them to the study. Each student leader received a ¥ 100 mobile-phone gift card once they obtained 50 completed responses. The authors also drew 10 respondents randomly and rewarded each of them a ¥ 50 mobile-phone gift card.

Survey Measures

The findings from the interviews suggested that in China, large-scale fundraising events are not as popular as in the United States and there are no nationwide fundraising events such as Relay for Life. Instead, fundraising events on campuses are hosted by different departments or student organizations for diverse missions. Thus at the very beginning of the survey, respondents were asked a couple of multiple-choice questions to explore the most memorable fundraising events that respondents had experienced. Specifically, respondents were asked to "think about the most memorable fundraising event that you have ever participated in," and then answered the following question. Regarding the focus or mission of the event, respondents were asked to complete the following statement: "The mission of that fundraising event was to address the issue of . . ." Respondents were provided with a long list of choices, including natural disasters, such as an earthquake or flood; health issues, such as cancer, leukemia, or HIV/AIDS; and other common fundraising causes in China, such as "education in rural areas." There was also an, "other, please specify" option. Participants could select only one response. They were then directed to questions tailored to the mission of each organization and event. Other than tailoring items based on the mission, the survey questions were identical.

The measures in this survey were adapted from previous research on the theory of situational support (McKeever, 2013). All items were measured using 7-point Likert scales and tailored based on respondents' initial selection of event missions. Taking the example of the questions tailored for the fundraising event benefiting the earthquake relief, items measuring problem recognition included the questions, "How often do you stop and think about the earthquake?"; "How often do you stop and think about what you can do to help with the earthquake?"; and "Generally, I am very aware of the issue of the earthquake."

Constraint recognition was measured by asking respondents the extent to which they agreed with the following items: "Fundraising events like earthquake aid are too time-consuming"; "There are many constraints to participating in fundraising events like earthquake aid"; and "It is not convenient to get involved with fundraising events like earthquake aid."

Involvement recognition was assessed with three items: "To what extent do you feel personally connected to problems related to the earthquake?"; "To what extent has your life been affected by problems related to the earthquake?"; and "Do you know many people who have been affected by problems related to the earthquake?"

Attitude was measured with three items that asked the extent to which students agreed or disagreed with the following statements: "Generally, I am in favor of fundraising events like earthquake aid"; "I would feel good about participating in a fundraising event like earthquake aid"; and "Generally, I believe fundraising events like earthquake aid have a positive impact."

Subjective norms were measured with three items that asked the extent to which students agreed or disagreed with the following statements: "People who are important to me are participating in fundraising events like earthquake aid"; "People who are important to me think I should participate in fundraising events like earthquake aid"; and "People who are important to me think my participation in fundraising events like earthquake aid is good."

Situational support was measured through three questions measuring information activities that asked how likely respondents were to "seek information," "share information with others," and "communicate information through a social media site" related to earthquake aid. Because situational support has been conceived as a continuum including information activities that lead to behavioral intentions, participants were also asked, "How likely is it that you will participate in fundraising events related to earthquake aid in the near future?" as well as the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "I intend to participate in fundraising events related to earthquake aid in the future."

Typical demographics items, including age, gender, and class year/status were also included in the survey questions.

Data Collection and Analysis

The survey was translated to Mandarin, typed into Qualtrics, an online survey platform, and then distributed in August and September 2014 in Beijing, China. The student leaders initially passed the Qualtrics URL link to 884 students using snowball sampling, and 586 of them eventually completed the questionnaire.

After collecting enough data, we employed SPSS for data cleaning and preliminary analysis. The items measuring the situational theory of publics and the theory of reasoned action reported acceptable to high internal consistency and were summed and averaged to create scales. Means, standard deviations,

and Cronbach's alphas for each variable are reported here: problem recognition ($M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.23$, $\alpha = .82$); constraint recognition ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.26$, $\alpha = .84$); involvement recognition ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.48$, $\alpha = .84$); information activities ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 1.15$, $\alpha = .77$); attitudes ($M = 5.19$, $SD = 1.06$, $\alpha = .80$); subjective norms ($M = 5.36$, $SD = .96$, $\alpha = .73$); and behavioral intentions ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.13$, $\alpha = .86$). Following previous research in this area (McKeever, et al., 2016), the authors used Preacher and Hayes's (2004, 2008) bootstrapping procedure and the PROCESS macro for SPSS to test the mediation model proposed in Figure 1 (as implemented in Hayes, 2013).

Results

Of the final 586 survey respondents, 60.3% were female and 39.7% were male. The average age was 21.16 years old ($SD = 1.76$). Regarding class year/status, there were 7.8% freshmen, 28.8% sophomore, 28.2% junior, 21.9% senior, 12.1% master, and 1.2% doctoral students.

RQ1 aimed to test the theory of situational support in the context of Chinese nonprofits. The theory proposes information activity as a mediator between behavioral intentions and the other theory variables: problem recognition, constraint recognition, involvement recognition, attitudes, and subjective norms (see Figure 1). To test this model, the PROCESS macro was used to generate bias-corrected confidence intervals for estimates of the indirect effects. Using this method, indirect effects are considered statistically significant if their corresponding bias-corrected confidence interval does not contain zero (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007). The independent variables were tested individually for their indirect effect on behavioral intentions through information activity, while controlling for the remaining variables in the model. As shown in Table 1, results from the analyses revealed a significant indirect effect of predictor variables on behavioral intentions through information activity because the corresponding bias-corrected confidence intervals did not contain zero. The sole exception was constraint recognition, which was negatively related (as the theory posits); however, this relationship was not statistically significant (see Table 1). Figure 2 shows the mediation model with unstandardized path coefficients.¹ The mediation model also indicated that subjective norms reported the strongest impact on information activity ($b = .317$, $p < .001$), compared with the other four independent variables.

¹ See Table A in the appendix for direct effects, standard errors, and t tests of direct effects of predictor variables on behavioral intentions.

Table 1. Results Related to Indirect Effects of Predictor Variables on Behavioral Intentions Through Information Activity.

Predictor Variables	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	LLCI	ULCI	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>
Problem Recognition	.066	.018	.035	.108	4.44	< .001
Involvement Recognition	.023	.011	.004	.046	2.22	< .05
Constraint Recognition	-.016	.011	-.038	.005	-1.39	<i>n.s.</i>
Attitudes	.036	.018	.004	.074	2.24	< .05
Subjective Norms	.098	.022	.059	.147	4.88	< .001

Note: There were 5,000 bootstrap samples with 95% CI. Bootstrapping reveals that information activity mediates the relationship between any independent measure and behavioral intentions if the 95% CI for the coefficient does not overlap zero. The models for mediation used here correspond to Model 4 in PROCESS. In each model, the significant indirect effects based on bias-corrected confidence intervals were also corroborated by statistically significant Sobel *z* tests.

H1(a-c) and RQ2 aimed to compare the theory variables between Chinese and U.S. students, based on some perceived differences between the nonprofit and fundraising landscapes of the two countries. Therefore, the authors reexamined the data collected by the prior study from a U.S. university (McKeever, 2013). In the U.S. sample, there were 71.6% women and 28.4% men; the average age was 20 years old ($SD = 2.25$); and there were 25.3% freshmen, 25.5% sophomores, 23.5% juniors, 24.5% seniors, 1% other, and .2% graduate student. Table 2 showed the mean (M), standard deviation (SD), and reliability coefficient (α) for all of the variables for each dataset, side by side. A group of independent-sampled t tests showed that Chinese students reported higher levels of subjective norms ($t = 7.99, p < .001$), problem recognition ($t = 15.18, p < .001$), information activity ($t = 14.52, p < .001$), and behavioral intentions ($t = 11.43, p < .001$), but lower levels of attitudes ($t = -12.49, p < .001$), constraint recognition ($t = -3.56, p < .001$), and involvement recognition ($t = -15.88, p < .001$), than U.S. students. Thus, H1a, H1b, and H1c were supported, and Table 2 shows the comparison results related to the remaining theory variables, which were the focus of RQ2.

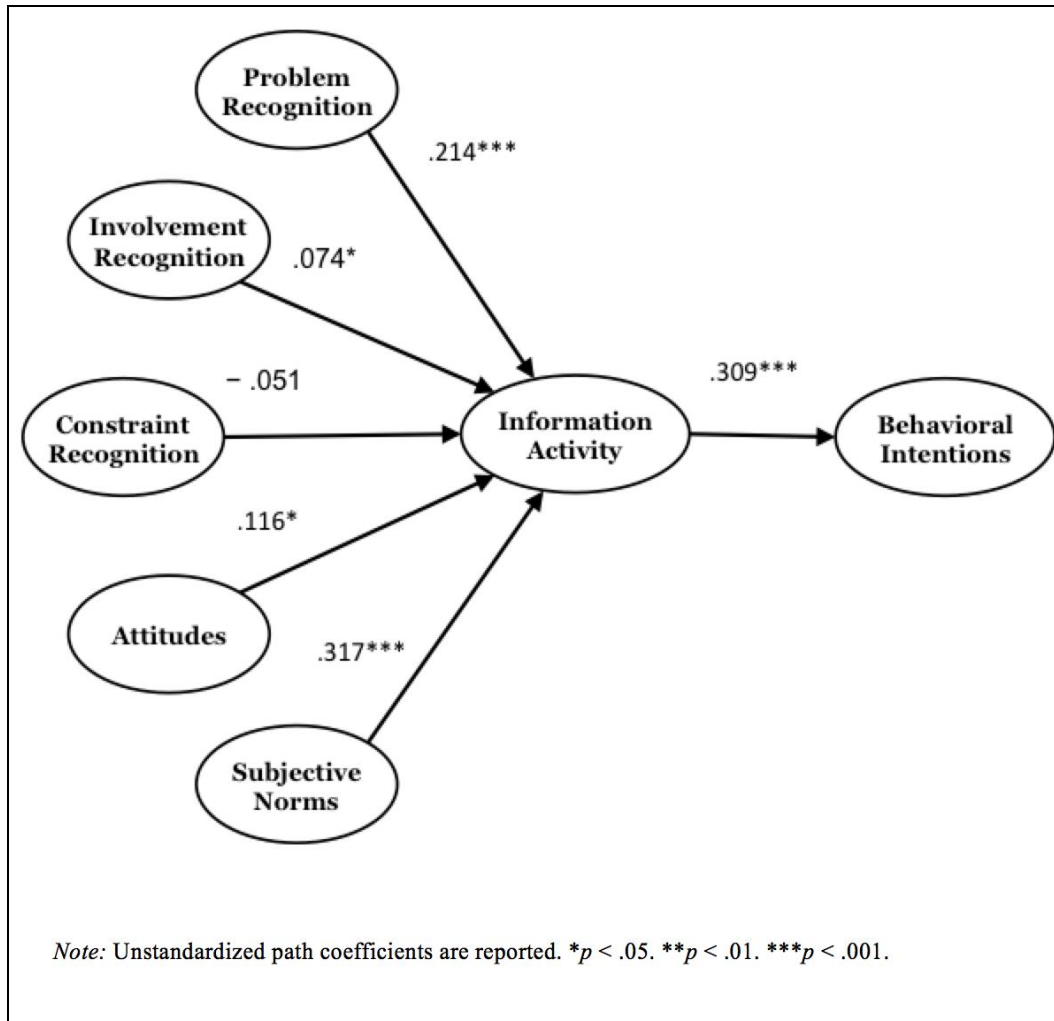


Figure 2. Mediation model with path coefficients for the theory of situational support.

Table 2. Theory of Situational Support Variable Comparisons Between China and the United States.

Theory Variables	China (<i>n</i> = 586) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i> , α)	U.S. (<i>n</i> = 514) <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i> , α)	<i>t</i>
Attitudes	5.19 (1.06, .80)	5.94 (.92, .87)	-12.49*
Subject Norms	5.36 (.96, .73)	4.85 (1.11, .70)	7.99*
Problem Recognition	4.99 (1.23, .82)	3.89 (1.16, .77)	15.18*
Constraint Recognition	3.41 (1.26, .84)	3.68 (1.21, .84)	-3.56*
Involvement Recognition	3.49 (1.48, .84)	4.90 (1.46, .88)	-15.88*
Information Activity	5.06 (1.15, .77)	3.88 (1.48, .86)	14.52*
Behavior Intention	5.26 (1.13, .86)	4.23 (1.74, .97)	11.43*

Note: * $p < .001$.

□

Discussion

Using a survey with 586 college students from Beijing, China, and comparing the results with a survey previously conducted with 514 U.S. students, this study examined Chinese students' motivations to participate in nonprofit fundraising events by testing the theory of situational support in an international context. The contribution of this research may be assessed in three ways: (1) this study replicated an exploratory theoretical framework in a different culture and improved its generalizability; (2) this study identified many differences between the United States and China in terms of fundraising motivations; and (3) the findings contribute a range of practical implications to help Chinese nonprofit practitioners develop communication campaigns to better motivate key stakeholders and to improve future fundraising events.

Theoretical Implications

This study explored the theory of situational support in a Chinese cultural context by applying a model that has been used with multiple U.S. populations to a new population, college students in China, to refine the conceptual understanding of the motivational antecedents that might lead to behaviors supporting nonprofit fundraising events. All the variable relationships that were supported by previous research (McKeever, 2013; McKeever et al., 2016) were also supported in the current study, with the exception of constraint recognition. Thus, we can summarize that the theory of situational support applies in this particular international context, but only to a certain extent.

Taking a closer look at Table 1 and Figure 2, we see that the indirect effect of constraint recognition on behavioral intentions through information activity was not statistically significant. This is interesting when one considers the nature of fundraising events in China versus the United States. As discussed in the literature review, fundraising in China is quite different than it is in the United States, perhaps making perceived constraints less salient in the minds of Chinese students when it comes to

participating in such events. This is good news for Chinese nonprofit practitioners. Relevant practical implications related to this and other findings are discussed next.

Practical Implications

Beyond theoretical advancement, these findings generate numerous insights for nonprofit practitioners to improve messaging strategies and tactics to motivate charitable donations in China. One of the most important lessons that Chinese nonprofit practitioners can learn from this study is regarding the differences between motivations of people in the United States and China in terms of supporting nonprofit fundraising.

For example, in the initial U.S.-based study (McKeever, 2013), constraint recognition had a significant negative relationship with situational support. However, in China, constraint recognition had little impact on situational support. This may be because of some of the cultural differences in fundraising and nonprofit communication practices. Chinese fundraising is quite simple, often involving simply dropping cash in a box, which contrasts from some of the elaborate fundraising events nonprofit organizations host in the United States. Thus, fundraising in China does not generate many constraints for students and did not significantly affect their participation intentions. The low levels of constraint recognition in China might help explain why Chinese students reported even higher levels of intentions to participate as well as to seek and share information (compared to U.S. students), because participation in fundraising in China is more convenient in some cases than it is in the United States.

Considering this finding regarding constraint recognition related to Chinese fundraising events, nonprofit communication campaigns do not need to focus on minimizing perceived constraints in order to entice participation (as practitioners must often do in the United States). Instead, nonprofit practitioners in China may want to focus more on variables that mattered more according to the present study: subjective norms, problem recognition, attitudes, and involvement recognition. It was not surprising that subjective norms played such an important role in influencing both information activity and participation intention in China compared with other motivational antecedents ($b = .317, p < .001$). This finding might be because Chinese culture is dominated by Confucianism and collectivism, in which decision making is mostly based on the expectations of significant others. Thus, people working for Chinese nonprofits may have more success if they develop messages aimed at increasing perceived subjective norms, such as communicating how many family, friends, classmates, colleagues, or people living in the same community have already made donations or participated in past fundraising events, or emphasizing that donating behaviors would be encouraged or praised by significant others. Communication campaigns could also encourage donors to help share the fundraising information with their significant others or help educate others about the social issues that nonprofits aim to support.

Chinese students' participation intentions were also influenced by attitudes toward nonprofit fundraising. However, generally, Chinese people have reported negative attitudes toward fundraising, and students in this study reported lower levels of positive attitudes than U.S. students as well. This means that Chinese nonprofit practitioners should place targeting attitudes at the top of their agenda. Besides developing campaigns that help increase positive attitudes about fundraising, Chinese nonprofits should

make financial reports available online and specify how much money is raised by various initiatives as well as how the money is spent; this type of stewardship would help build organizational credibility and greater trust in the nonprofit sector as a whole. Nonprofit practitioners in China could also consider revising the types of fundraising events they host, such as adding athletic or entertainment activities or providing souvenirs in return for participation. These activities could help make fundraising more enticing in China and alleviate beliefs that fundraising is boring and somewhat mandatory.

Besides subjective norms and attitudes, problem recognition, and involvement recognition also influenced participation intentions (mediated by information activity). This study asked students to recall the most impressive fundraising events they had participated in at the beginning of the survey: 72.5% of respondents mentioned earthquake relief, which was followed by 6.83% of respondents mentioning helping leukemia patients, and 4.10% mentioning supporting education for rural children. While Chinese students reported higher levels of problem recognition than U.S. students, Chinese students seemed to pay attention to several nationwide disasters, but neglected other issues due to perceived limited social impact. This implies that Chinese nonprofit practitioners should aim to increase people's awareness of certain social issues before fundraising starts. Practitioners could also target communities where people have already been familiar with certain issues in order to be more successful in fundraising efforts.

After all, under Confucianism people may feel reluctant to give money to strangers. If nonprofit practitioners have sufficient resources, they should consider attempting to influence involvement recognition by emphasizing potential personal connections to beneficiaries of fundraising campaigns or by targeting audiences that have been most affected by the issue.

To conclude, applying the emerging theory of situational support and comparing theory variables between the United States and China helps illustrate the current status of nonprofit fundraising in China and provide a basis for comparison with U.S. fundraising. It is hoped that this research helps future academic researchers, as well as nonprofit practitioners in China by suggesting ways to better target stakeholders, develop message strategies, and improve and promote future nonprofit communication about fundraising events.

Limitations and Future Research

While offering some interesting findings, this study's limitations must be acknowledged and possibly addressed through future research. First, the U.S. data collection took place in 2011, while the data collection in China occurred in 2014. In addition, the U.S. study focused on one single national fundraising event (Relay for Life), while the Chinese study surveyed students about different fundraising events that were important or memorable to them. This difference of data collection timing and fundraising event focus might bias the results to a certain degree, especially when comparing two different cultures. Additionally, it is acknowledged that existing research has looked mainly at nonprofit fundraising events, and supporting a nonprofit could be done in many ways including contributing major gifts, volunteering, or participating in advocacy activities. Future research could explore the theory of situational support in some of these other contexts.

Second, this study used snowball sampling to collect data from students in China, which severely limits the generalizability of the results. Future research should replicate the theory model using nationwide Chinese data collected through random sampling. Interviews and focus groups could also yield interesting results in terms of allowing for more nuanced information related to motivations for participation (or lack thereof) in fundraising events.

Third, the theory of situational support combines variables from the theory of reasoned action and the original situational theory of publics to keep the proposed model parsimonious. Given that STOPS is an extended version of the situational theory of publics, future research should consider developing the theory of situational support by adding variables from STOPS, such as referent criterion and situational motivation. In addition, although the theory of situational support has effectively explained multiple situations related to nonprofit communication and support, both in the United States and abroad, future research should increase its generalizability by employing it to study other contexts, such as motivations to support for-profit or governmental organizations.

And finally, this study is limited to data collected in China and the United States. Future research should continue exploring these or other variables to better understand nonprofit communication and fundraising in diverse international contexts. Such research would help public relations practitioners better understand their audiences, while helping nonprofit communication scholars better understand the processes underlying important global phenomena such as nonprofit communication, fundraising, and situational support.

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Appendix

**Table A. Direct Effects, Standard Errors, and t tests
of Direct Effects of Predictor Variables on Behavioral Intentions**

Predictor Variables	Effect	SE	t	p
Problem Recognition	.070	.036	1.94	.053
Involvement Recognition	.025	.028	.883	.378
Constraint Recognition	-.064	.031	-2.04	.041
Attitudes	.238	.043	5.51	.000
Subjective Norms	.266	.047	5.71	.000

Note: The table contains the OLS regression coefficients for each independent variable while controlling for the other predictors in the mediation model.