Social entrepreneurship: Understanding consumer motives for buying The Big Issue

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Abstract
This paper examines consumer response to a particular social entrepreneurship initiative, The Big Issue. Focusing on consumer motivation, the research explores the utilitarian value of the product as compared to the desire to help the homeless as the primary motivation for purchase. The research found that, although the utilitarian value partly motivated purchase, consumers widely perceived there to be a helping dimension to the exchange. Consumers valued the empowerment goals espoused by The Big Issue and found it rewarding to play a part in the empowerment process. The appearance and manner of The Big Issue vendors influenced consumer reactions to the initiative, indicating a need for careful management of 'beneficiary portrayal' in this context.

Keywords:
Social entrepreneurship, homelessness, donor behaviour, charitable giving, beneficiary portrayal

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INTRODUCTION

Social entrepreneurship can be loosely defined as the use of entrepreneurial behaviour for social ends rather than for profit objectives, or alternatively, that the profits generated are used for the benefit of a specific disadvantaged group (Leadbetter, 1997). As such the concept of 'social entrepreneurship' has attracted the recent interest of policy makers, with government departments and agencies declaring their support for this approach as a means of alleviating social disadvantage. Socially entrepreneurial behaviour can be identified in a number of areas, however, broadly speaking, it falls into two categories: the first relates to the provision of public services in new and innovative ways and generally takes place under the auspices of established social services; the second is a broader activity within which individuals set up

new approaches to specific problems within the social economy. The term 'caring capitalism' has been coined to describe this type of activity because the achievement of relevant social goals relies on competitiveness in the marketplace. As such it is of interest to consumer researchers, yet there is very little research available into the attitudes of the various consumer groups which participate in, or benefit from, these activities.

The purpose of this research is to explore consumer responses to The Big Issue (BI) venture. Primarily, the objective of the research was to examine consumer motives for buying the BI magazine and, in particular, to understand whether they see the purchase as a commercial or an altruistic exchange. Furthermore, given that homeless people themselves sell the magazine, the research explores how consumer motives are influenced by beneficiary portrayal conveyed through BI vendors.

BACKGROUND

The BI magazine is a nationwide publication and has grown to become a UK household name, such that even the BBC's programme *Eastenders* has its own vendor. Started in 1991 in London by John Bird, replicating a similar initiative in New York, the magazine is produced by independent UK companies as part of a social franchise. There are separate editions of the magazine produced in Wales, the North of England, London, South-West England and Scotland. In Scotland alone approximately 65,000 copies are sold per issue. Funds to support the cause of homelessness are accumulated because most of the profits from these companies are directed into The BI Foundation, an associated charity set up in 1998. Thus consumers do not give to the charity but make a purchase from the commercial organisation that donates its profits to charity.

The mission statement of The Big Issue in Scotland (BIiS), as identified in its July 1999 to June 2000 business plan, is:

> 'To enable homeless people to earn an income by operating a profitable business which produces, markets and distributes a quality weekly magazine and to use the success of this enterprise to support and promote strategies which tackle social exclusion nationally and internationally.'

The core value of the BI is to help the homeless by involving them in an empowering process, rather than simply providing them with free services as is typical of charities. This orientation is reflected in the BI's tag-line 'a hand up not a hand out'. Entrepreneurial initiatives of this type are strongly supported by the UK government, which has expressed a preference for activities that aim to draw the 'socially excluded' into mainstream economic life. BI vendors may be homeless, ex-homeless or vulnerably accommodated individuals. Anyone from the age of 16 years and above can sell the magazine. Vendors are entitled to sell the BI magazine for up to two years after they are housed; they currently buy the magazine for 40p and sell it to the public for £1, thus making a profit of 60p. The BI may be sold only by badged vendors. To become a badged vendor applicants must satisfy the organisation that they are genuinely homeless and agree to follow the vendor Code of Conduct, which prescribes behaviour and specifically prohibits begging alongside selling the magazine.

The effectiveness of the BI depends on understanding the reasons why consumers choose to support the initiative. As an organisation the BIiS clearly wants the magazine to be a purchase for its own sake, having the side effect of helping the homeless, and believes that the quality of the product is a driving motive. The nature of the sale and the role of the homeless themselves as vendors, however, mean that it is closely associated with charitable giving. This paper seeks to build an

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understanding of consumers' motives for entering into exchanges with this type of social enterprise. The conceptual framework adopted is concerned only with the motivation for purchase and beneficiary portrayal and does not attempt to replicate previous studies which have identified a range of social and psychological factors that influence both buying and helping behaviour. Rather, the research concentrates on the unique factors of the BI as social entrepreneurship, consumers' desire for the BI magazine *vis-à-vis* their desire to help the homeless and the influence of the people selling the magazine, who are also the beneficiaries, on consumers' motivation to buy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been a vast amount of research on consumer motives for buying products in commercial settings. Despite great diversity in approaches and applications, there is general agreement within this body of work that, at a fundamental level, consumers buy goods because of the utilitarian and non-utilitarian (eg emotional, epistemic, social) benefits ensuing from the use/consumption of the item purchased (Sheth *et al*., 1991). In contexts such as charity trading or social enterprises, where the trading organisation is able to help people in need as a consequence of consumers' purchases of their product, the intangible rewards of helping are likely to play at least some role in motivating consumers to buy. Consumer helping behaviour in general is an area that has been relatively neglected by marketing researchers (Bendapudi *et al*., 1996). Motivation is, however, one dimension of consumer helping behaviour that has received relatively more attention in the existing body of research. The two main aspects of motivation that have been explored in the literature are the external stimuli that prompt helping and internal motives for helping that moderate a person's response to those stimuli.

Internal motives

In terms of an individual's internal motives for helping, perhaps the most fundamental debate centres around the issue of whether prosocial behaviour is driven by altruistic or egoistic motives (Griffin *et al*., 1993; Batson *et al*., 1989; Cialdini *et al*., 1987). According to Batson *et al*. (1989), empathy, experienced when altruistic motives are at work, results in a need to lessen the distress of the victim. In contrast, egoistic motives are associated with personal distress and people engage in helping behaviour to reduce their own distress rather than to relieve the suffering of the victim (Cialdini *et al*., 1987). Although these two motives appear to be opposites, it is generally accepted that helping frequently contains a rewarding component (Baumann *et al*., 1981; Harris, 1977) as well as an altruistic dimension. If, therefore, purchasing the BI magazine is partly motivated by a desire to help, empathy and personal reward are likely to feature among consumers' reasons for buying. Studies of consumer donation behaviour more generally provide insights into the specific form that these motives might take. This body of research has identified a range of motives that constitute rewards for helping. Economic reasons for giving that have emerged, most notably in research conducted in the USA, are tax advantages and enhancing chances of career progression (Dawson, 1988). Social and emotional rewards identified include public recognition, self-esteem, the satisfaction of expressing gratitude for one's own wellbeing, relief from feelings of guilt and obligation, the anticipation of reciprocation and simply feeling good about oneself (Burnett and Lunsford, 1994; Bruce, 1994; Dawson, 1988; Amos, 1982). Research has not identified a similar range of dimensions of empathy; however, evidence advanced in models of helping decision making suggests that there is some complexity to the empathetic motive. For example, Guy and Patton (1989) suggest

that individuals assess whether or not the beneficiaries 'deserve' helping, weighing up whether or not they are 'to blame' for the position in which they find themselves. The decision models also emphasise that people's propensity to help is influenced by their assessment of whether or not they can 'make a difference' to the beneficiary.

These types of motives also influence why people choose not to give or cease to support a particular charity. McGrath (1997) recorded that between 40–60 per cent of all new donors to charities lapse. He posited that, while initial motives for giving may be altruistic, subsequent and repeat donations may be due to the satisfaction that a donor derived from the first gift. McGrath (1997) found that lack of satisfaction emanated from concerns about charities failing to make efficient use of funds, spending too much on administration or, worst of all, misusing funds. All of these issues are relevant to the BI. Over the years, press reports have highlighted drug use by vendors, they have also raised questions regarding the effectiveness of selling the magazine as a way of helping people to combat homelessness. Indeed, it has been suggested that selling the BI becomes a form of job and that vendors do not use it as a stepping stone out of homelessness.

External stimulation

The second aspect of consumer motivation to help relates to the external stimuli that prompt helping. Unlike many other domains of consumer behaviour, the need to help others, through giving to charity or otherwise, is rarely recognised by consumers in the absence of external stimuli. Research into charitable giving has suggested that, in addition to its brand image and reputation, a charity needs both to pay attention to the message and request variables of its communications (Bendapudi *et al*., 1996). Message variables relate to factors such as beneficiary portrayals, explanations of the cause of the need, beneficiary/donor similarity, labelling, social comparisons and the helping choices provided. Bendapudi *et al*. (1996) identify request variables to include the nature (money, time, blood) and the size of the request. This paper suggests that request variables that influence consumer response also incorporate the mode of ask, which refers to where, when and by whom donations are solicited.

Several of these stimulus factors are worthy of investigation to gain an understanding of consumer motives to buy the BI. A key feature that differentiates the BI initiative from charities is that the homeless themselves sell the magazine. Moreover, it is primarily the vendor from whom a consumer buys a magazine who benefits from the sale, although there is a contribution to the homeless more widely, because a portion of the sale goes to the BI Foundation. Therefore, this paper explores how consumers are influenced by the fact that they come into direct contact with homeless people when buying the BI magazine. Two main issues are addressed. First, how does the request variable of 'who' sells the magazine influence consumers and, secondly, how are they influenced by the message variable relating to 'beneficiary portrayal', that is, how the vendor presents themself in appearance and manner.

Previous research has examined request variables such as the size of the request (eg Schibrowsky and Peltier, 1995; Fraser *et al*., 1988) and requests for donations of different types (eg Fisher and Ackerman, 1998; Broadbridge and Horne, 1994; Allen and Butler, 1993; Allen and Maddox, 1990; Pessemier *et al*., 1977), but there is little prior research into charitable giving that considers the effects of 'who' makes the request. The typical scenario for charitable giving is that a representative of the charitable organisation asks consumers for help on behalf of the beneficiaries. Although consumers may react differently

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depending on the nature of the person representing the charity, this situational variable has received less attention than more general perceptions of the charity, its reputation and brand image (eg Hibbert, 1995). Yet, consumers' negative reactions to charities' use of paid employees or agencies for collecting donations, as found by Hibbert and Horne (1997), suggest that consumer perceptions of the asker may be an important influence on their helping behaviour. Because of the peculiar situation whereby homeless people, ie the beneficiaries themselves, are the front-line staff for the BI, the question of 'who asks' was expected to have an influence on consumers' responses in this context. Given that elsewhere consumers have responded negatively to individuals unassociated with the charity, it was anticipated that the direct involvement of the homeless in selling the BI magazine would have a positive influence on consumers.

The helping behaviour literature incorporates a reasonable amount of research on message variables, including research on fear appeals (eg Bennett, 1998; Boyd, 1995), emotional appeals (Bagozzi and Moore, 1994), labelling and dependency (Moore *et al*., 1985) and message framing (Smith and Berger, 1995; LaTour and Manrai, 1989). There has been little research, however, that has considered beneficiary portrayal specifically as a message variable. Beneficiary portrayal for the BI, where it is the appearance and manner of the BI vendors that provide the most visible portraits, makes this a peculiar case. Normally, charities ensure some consistency in their communications and, as part of that, the way in which they portray their beneficiaries. The individuality of vendors means that, where the BI is concerned, consumers are exposed to a great diversity of portraits and their overall image is a product of their stereotyping.

In summary, motives for buying the BI magazine may relate to the desire for the product or to help the homeless. Where helping motives influence behaviour, the authors would expect both an altruistic and egoistic dimension to the motivation and for consumers to be influenced by some of the factors identified in the helping decision-making models. With regard to external stimuli prompting purchase of the BI, the direct involvement of homeless people in selling the magazine was anticipated to have a positive influence on consumer responses. There is inadequate existing research, however, to predict how the portrayal of the beneficiaries, through the appearance and manner of the vendors, will affect consumer motivation to buy the magazine.

RESEARCH METHOD

The objective of this research is to investigate consumer motives for purchasing the BI and how beneficiary portrayal, conveyed through vendors' manner and appearance, affects consumer responses to individual vendors and the BI in general. While it could be argued that Scotland is unrepresentative of the UK market for the BI, it was considered appropriate to concentrate on this region for a number of reasons. First, there is a Scottish edition of the BI and therefore the product is consistent across locations. Secondly, homelessness and its associated problems is a common problem in large cities and the available statistics suggest that Scottish cities are comparable to most of their English counterparts in terms of the size of the homeless population and the initiatives to tackle it. Finally, the BIiS is one of the most successful of the BI initiatives, selling in excess of 65,000 copies per edition.

This research is inductive in nature and is not designed to 'prove' any hypotheses regarding BI purchase, rather it is designed to gain a better understanding of motivations for purchase. As such the fieldwork was designed to elicit as wide a viewpoint as possible. As no data is available on who

buys the BI (other than sales statistics) it is not possible to define the population of purchasers or to design a random sample. Rather it was decided to elicit the views of as many individuals, either purchasers or non-purchasers, as possible in a one-week period, using face-to-face, researcher-completed questionnaires in the five Scottish cities in which the BIiS is sold: Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dundee and Stirling. In each city a central, pedestrian shopping venue was selected and individuals approached at random over a three-hour lunchtime period. The main problem with this method is the very high number of individuals approached who declined to stop; however, in total 645 usable questionnaires were completed across the various locations. In keeping with the exploratory nature of the research the questionnaire comprised mainly open-ended questions asking individuals for their buying motives and attitudes towards the BIiS and required a high level of post-coding and categorisation by the research team. The questionnaire was piloted on a student group prior to the main survey.

Subsequently, focus groups were conducted in Glasgow and Edinburgh, the main locations for BI sales in Scotland. Participants were recruited in the street and were asked to attend discussions in the evening. Twelve participants were signed up for groups in each location and offered an incentive of £25 for attending. Unfortunately, the turnout rate was relatively low and only two focus groups were conducted. A total of 13 consumers attended the two groups; five in Edinburgh (two males, three females) and eight in Glasgow (four males, four females). While there are no hard and fast rules as to the optimum number of participants for focus groups, the Edinburgh group of only five participants could be regarded as too small; however, the nature of the discussion suggests that the participants were interested in the subject and had a contribution to make to the research. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 60 years. The groups were conducted in hotels in each city, they were tape-recorded and transcribed. In the analysis of the data, common themes were identified and the data were compiled around those themes (Creswell, 1994) with attention given to similarities and differences in attitudes towards particular issues.

RESULTS

The results detailed below start with a profile of the sample for the quantitative research. The findings on consumer motives for buying the BI are then presented, focusing on the comparative importance of product acquisition versus helping as motives for buying the magazine. Finally, results pertaining to beneficiary portrayal and its effects on consumer motivation are detailed and discussed.

Respondent profile

The final sample for the quantitative stage of the research comprised 645 adults (aged 16 or over). The Appendix gives an overview of the respondents in terms of sex, age and employment status. There is a greater proportion of females in the sample (59 per cent) and a bias towards the younger age groups. In terms of employment, individuals working full-time were the largest group (44 per cent) and the rest of the sample was distributed across the other five employment categories. The proportion of the sample obtained from each of the five Scottish towns and cities was as follows: Glasgow 32 per cent, Edinburgh 33 per cent, Aberdeen 18 per cent, Dundee 9 per cent and Stirling 9 per cent, which broadly mirrors the sales of the BI in the various locations. The breakdown of the sample in terms of socioeconomic groups was: AB 16 per cent, C1 30 per cent, C2 16 per cent and DE 38 per cent.

Purchase behaviour

Half the respondents were current purchasers of the BIiS, 23 per cent said

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that they had bought it in the past but no longer bought it and 27 per cent had never bought it. Cross-tabulations and chi-square tests were conducted in order to examine the relationships between the characteristics of the sample and their purchasing of the BI. Sex ($p = 0.000$) and age ($p = 0.003$) were found to have a significant relationship with purchase behaviour; males and those in the two highest age groups (56–65 and over 65 years) were more likely than expected to have never bought the BI. The effect of employment status on purchasing of the BI was also significant ($p = 0.003$). Consumers in full and part-time employment and students were more likely to be current buyers of the BI, whereas retired people and those who were unemployed or not working were more likely to have never bought the magazine. Thus, it appears that employed females, aged under 55 years, is the core consumer segment for the BIiS, which confirms the impression of the organisation.

Consumer motives for buying the BI magazine

To gain some insight into the magazine's utility as a buying motive, respondents who currently buy the magazine ($n = 323$) were asked whether they buy more than one copy of the same edition and who reads the magazine. Most buyers stated that they did not buy more than one copy of each edition (92 per cent). Some (7 per cent) reported buying multiple copies 'sometimes' and a minority (1 per cent) said that they 'always' buy more than one copy of the same edition. The fact that most consumers only buy one copy of the magazine implies that there is a utilitarian value associated with the purchase. There is further support for this interpretation of the data in respondents' answers to the question of how many people read their copy of the BI, where the majority (62 per cent) reported that it was read by at least one other person. An alternative interpretation is that consumers are satisfied that the purchase of one edition fulfils their responsibility to help the homeless. Guy and Patton (1989) suggest that an individual's perception of their responsibility to help influences helping behaviour. By selling a bi-monthly magazine, the BI may be helping consumers to establish the extent of their responsibility to help.

Individuals' motives were more directly examined via an open question on reasons for buying the BI magazine. This question was addressed to respondents who were current buyers of the magazine and those who had bought it in the past. Responses to this question were post-coded and the most common responses—those cited by at least 5 per cent of the sample—are detailed in Table 1.

Two main themes were evident: the desire to help the homeless and the utility of the product. Almost three-quarters of respondents buy the magazine to help the homeless. The second and third most commonly cited motives relate to the product itself, however: 'I enjoy the contents/articles' (15 per cent) and 'it's a good read' (14 per cent). A further 5 per cent simply said 'I like the magazine'. These motives clearly emphasise that, for some individuals, purchasing the BI magazine is an act of exchanging goods for money.

The primary emotional influence on respondents was guilt, although a number of respondents expressed their sympathy for the vendors. Some respondents claimed that their guilty

Table 1 Common motives for buying the BI magazine

Motives	% sample
Want to help the homeless	73
Enjoy the contents/articles	15
It's a good read	14
It's a good cause	14
Like the vendor	6
Find it difficult to walk past	5
The vendors make you feel guilty if you don't	5
I like the magazine	5

Base = 474 respondents.

feelings were actively evoked by the vendors: 'the vendors make you feel guilty if you don't' (5 per cent); while others were less direct in identifying the source 'I find it difficult to walk past' (1 per cent). Both of these statements imply that some consumers buy the magazine with the express purpose of reducing their own discomfort. In comparison, a small number of respondents referred to sympathy as a motive for buying the magazine, saying 'I feel sorry for them' (1 per cent), 'help someone get on their feet/out of the poverty trap' (1 per cent of the sample) and 'it's a good idea/I agree with the philosophy' (1 per cent). These statements also reflect the feeling that the purchase/donation will *make a difference* (Hibbert and Horne, 1997; Guy and Patton, 1989), ie they reflect a belief that the way in which the BI operates is effective in improving the condition of the homeless.

When this question was asked in focus groups, some of the participants, in accordance with the BI's goals, recognised that they were giving money for a quality magazine, although rarely were they able to ignore the idea that there was a charitable dimension to this purchase. The first quote below is from a participant who valued the magazine for its own sake, which again suggests that the purchase is seen as an exchange of money for goods. This represents the 'best case' scenario for a social entrepreneurship initiative such as the BI. The second and third quotes indicate that consumers appreciate the product, to varying degrees, but highlight awareness of the helping component of the exchange.

> 'I actually read the Big Issue more than I read the newspaper because it seems to cover a lot of what is going on and it is not biased like some newspapers' (Glasgow F).

> 'I don't buy it out of guilt, I buy it because I actually enjoy the magazine. I know you can just give them money, you don't have to take the magazine' (Glasgow F).

> 'People who buy it are going to buy it as an act, the transaction is the thing and as you said it is a bonus if you get something that you like to read about and if you are looking to increase the readership, then you have got to find something that people are going to think, well, I wouldn't normally buy this, but if it has that in it . . . ' (Edinburgh F).

Further discussion in the groups indicated that few people saw the purchase purely as a commercial exchange. There were a number of statements made to the effect that if the magazine was sold in a newsagent's shop or a chain store consumers would not buy it and many other comments referred directly to the dominant role of the altruistic aspect of the exchange.

To identify whether consumers are aware of how the BI seeks to help the homeless, an open question was posed in the questionnaire asking respondents: 'What do you see as the role of the Big Issue in Scotland?'. Responses to this question are detailed in Table 2. The most common response—'to help the homeless to help themselves'—clearly acknowledges the goal of the BIiS to empower the homeless rather than simply to give them handouts. A number of the answers relate to particular aspects of the empowerment process. The second most popular answer—'to provide an income for the homeless' (30 per cent)—highlights the recognition that an income is an important factor in giving people choices in what to do with

Table 2 Consumer perceptions of the role of the BIiS

Answers given by at least 5% of sample	% sample
To help the homeless help themselves	62
To provide an income for the homeless	30
To make people more aware of homeless issues	21
To give the homeless a medium for expressing their views	10
To campaign on behalf of the homeless	9
To fight the homelessness issue on a public level	9
Don't know	13

Base = 645.

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their lives and enabling them to become active citizens. The four remaining items in Table 2 refer to the notion of raising the profile of the problem of homelessness, giving homeless people a voice and the opportunity to participate in political processes.

Participants in the focus groups also highlighted that the way in which the organisation helps people influences whether or not consumers support the initiative. Whereas the quantitative research identified the general motive of helping the homeless as the dominant reason for purchasing the BI magazine, in the focus groups much more attention was devoted to the way in which the BI operates and the process by which it seeks to improve the situation of homeless people. In particular, discussion in the focus groups centred on the empowerment of individuals who sell the magazine. Participants expressed that the active role of the homeless people as vendors was central to why they bought the BI, thus highlighting the importance of the request variable of 'who' asks them to buy.

> 'I think that this is showing that something is being done for the homeless and that the homeless are doing something for themselves' (Glasgow M).

The two quotes below also demonstrate the importance of the nature of the exchange in which the 'asker' is inviting consumers to participate.

> 'I think the positive thing is the way in which the vendors are represented—for me the key message is that these are people with pride and self-esteem' (Glasgow F).

> '. . . the thing that I keep reminding myself of is that it is meant to be like a business, it is not supposed to be about charity, it is supposed to be about giving people pride, self-confidence, they shouldn't have to feel that they are begging, they are selling something' (Glasgow M).

The apparently commercial transaction that characterises the sale of BI magazines is seen as a way of signalling that vendors are part of the workforce, which the participants perceived to be essential to experiencing feelings of pride and self-esteem. One participant, who had himself been unemployed, explicitly linked employment with confidence and self-esteem and expressed his empathy with the BI vendors:

> 'It gives them a job, it gives them a role in life, a status, which can help in increasing their confidence and self-esteem. I have actually been unemployed through no choice of my own and when it happens to you, if you haven't chosen to give up work, you lose your role in society, you become a big zero' (Glasgow M).

One participant from the Glasgow focus group also highlighted that it is rewarding for the buyer to participate in the process of empowerment associated with the transaction.

> 'I don't know his name or anything, but we pass the time of day and it helps their self-confidence and self-respect—there's more to it than getting 60p' (Glasgow F).

The view that selling the BI gives the vendors self-esteem was not universally held, however. For example, a participant in the Edinburgh group suggested that selling on the streets was no better than begging in terms of dignity.

> 'It is not a case of giving people dignity, they are selling their wares in the marketplace as opposed to just saying have you any money for a cup of tea' (Edinburgh F).

Both the active involvement of the homeless and the nature of the exchange appear to influence consumers' responses to the BI. As was suggested in relation to the quantitative results, these factors relate to consumer perceptions that homeless people selling the BI *deserve* support and that, by buying a magazine, the consumer can *make a difference* (Guy and Patton, 1989).

Further evidence that purchases of the BI are motivated by the perception that it *makes a difference* emerged when participants from both Glasgow and

Edinburgh noted the importance of buying directly from homeless people and seeing where the money goes.

> 'Generally I get the bus into the centre of town and when I get off, I buy one off the first person that I see. I still think that the personal touch does have something to do with it, which I think is important, because the person who is given the money makes them feel that they are actually contributing directly to something, rather than indirectly buying, say, Oxfam Christmas cards or whatever, the money is actually going straight to the beneficiary' (Edinburgh F).

> 'There are so many vendors in the city centre, the reason that I would like to buy it from the same person, I would then feel that I was doing something, whereas when you see all these vendors, it is like a drop in the ocean, but if you were actually buying it from the same person you might feel that you are actually making some contribution to that individual' (Glasgow F).

In the case of the participant from Glasgow, the motive of directly helping the beneficiary was enhanced by the opportunity to repeatedly buy from the same vendor. Data from the quantitative research showed that only 26 per cent of consumers bought from the same vendor each time. The majority (70 per cent) bought from different vendors. This does suggest that there is scope for individual vendors to nurture relationships with consumers as a means of increasing the stability of their income.

Reasons for not buying the BI

The importance of the product utility versus helping motives was also explored by asking respondents who had bought the BI magazine in the past ($n = 151$) why they no longer bought it. The response most often obtained was simply 'I don't know' (19 per cent of the sample). Where consumers were able to give a reason, a common response for ceasing to buy the BI was 'I think it is too expensive/can't afford it' (10 per cent). Also, 'I don't like the content/features/articles' and 'I did not read it' were each cited by 5 per cent of the respondents. All of these responses suggest that the utility of the product was inadequate to sustain the repeat patronage of former BI readers.

An additional issue that was identified as a reason for ceasing to buy the BI was that 'there are too many vendors' (5 per cent). It is not clear why this deters consumers from buying the BI, although it may relate to notions that altruism should be a voluntary act (Radley and Kennedy, 1995) and consumers feel that the voluntary aspect is compromised when asked to buy a magazine very frequently.

Beneficiary portrayal

In the case of the BI, beneficiary portrayal has two aspects, perceptions of homelessness and the way in which vendors present themselves when selling magazines in the street. Uniquely, consumers of the BI come face to face with the beneficiaries of their altruism. In most charitable giving there is a degree of separation between the giver and the ultimate beneficiary, frequently mediated by an organisational structure that decides on the actual use of the money. With the BI the donor gives directly to the homeless individual, who in turn has direct control over how the money is spent.

The importance that consumers place on how the money is spent is clearly illustrated by the fact that the most commonly cited reason for ceasing to buy the BI was that 'vendors are drug addicts/junkies' (18 per cent). This was very much a regional problem, 23 of the 27 respondents citing this reason were recruited in Glasgow, where drug abuse generally has been particularly problematic in recent years. It was, nevertheless, mentioned in both focus groups and the explanation for why this discourages purchase relates to the fact that consumers do not see themselves as helping if they buy the BI and the money is spent on something with negative consequences.

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Table 3 Consumer attitudes to vendors

Rating of BI vendors on their ...	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	d.k.	Mean
Appearance	10	16	34	34	4	1	2.85
How they ask you if you'd like to buy a copy of the BI	10	8	29	37	13	2	3.22
Their general behaviour	8	6	26	43	15	1	3.45

Base = 645.

Vendor manner and appearance were explored in the quantitative research by asking respondents to indicate their level of (dis)agreement with attitude statements. Respondents were asked to rate the vendor's appearance, their approach when making a sale and their general behaviour. Answers were given using a five-point scale where 1 = very poor and 5 = very good. The results are given in Table 3.

Respondents were generally positive about the behaviour of vendors and the way in which they sell the magazine. Given that the vendors are homeless people, the relatively low score for appearance is not necessarily a negative perception for consumers to hold, as is evidenced by the findings of the focus groups. Group participants overall were more inclined to buy from vendors who look more needy. The first quote below is from one such participant whereas the second quote is more paradoxical. It illustrates a participant's anecdotal experience of other consumers using the presentable appearance of vendors as a reason not to buy the BI. Although the participant himself disagrees with this position, because being able to dress in decent clothes is evidence that homeless people are being empowered by selling the BI, he shows similar bias towards buying from those whose appearance suggests that they remain in a relatively severe state of need.

> 'I have just spent four years being a student and there have been times that I have had literally 80p on a Tuesday to last me through to the Friday till I get paid and if you see a Big Issue seller who has a brand new pair of trainers or something like that you are not going to buy a Big Issue from that person. Even now that I am working I still don't have a lot of money, but I would buy from someone who looks more in need' (Glasgow F).

> '... trying to encourage people to buy the magazine, if they don't already and you get comments like some of them are better dressed than me, or they are smoking, and you know, why shouldn't they, this is their earnings and if they have to buy a new jacket or trainers or if they want to smoke, they have earned it and it is up to them what they want to do with it and you shouldn't be discouraged. At the same time they are getting on their feet, so you would be more likely to go to someone who is not maybe as well established and buy it from them' (Glasgow M).

Similarly when examining motives for not buying the BI, a number of other reasons given for ceasing to buy related to the vendors. Six per cent of the respondents who no longer buy the BI simply said: 'I don't like the vendors' and a further 4 per cent stopped buying because 'the vendors are aggressive'. These two responses suggest that certain consumers have constructed a negative stereotype of vendors and it represents a type of person with whom they prefer to avoid contact or simply to whom they do not want to give their money. When the focus group discussions considered the manner of vendors it was primarily in reference to unpleasant situations that participants had experienced themselves or, more often, had been experienced by people they knew, friends of friends, etc. The first quote below indicates that the individual in this case was able to accept the incident as a one-off, but other respondents indicated that negative experiences made them wary of BI vendors. In none of the incidences reported did the aggression lead to physical assault but participants, nevertheless, felt threatened by it.

> 'My sister was almost pushed up against a wall by one and that is why she won't buy it now, because she felt very threatened. And my brother-in-law came out of the Concert Hall one night to be asked to buy a copy and he said ''no thanks mate'', quite polite and it was a case of you spend £15 on a concert ticket but you can't spare a pound for a magazine. So there are problems but you have to remember that not all of them are like that' (Glasgow M).

> 'We were out and this girl asked us if we wanted the Big Issue, and we already had it, and the insults that were hurled at us, verbally, were unbelievable, and she followed us down the road, screaming at us' (Glasgow F).

> 'One of the things that I find extremely offensive is being called ''dear''. It doesn't bother me if someone is obviously under the influence of drugs, but the thing that really gets to me is being patronised and being called ''dear''. My one experience of an aggressive vendor was when I did my usual and I didn't acknowledge being called ''dear'' or something like that and he actually did follow me and chase me, he didn't attack me, he just kept calling after me' (Glasgow F).

The focus of the quotes above is on the aggressive behaviour of the vendor; however, the participants' quotes also highlight the importance of other aspects of the interpersonal communication between vendor and customer, both verbal and non-verbal. This is consistent with the findings of research conducted in other contexts. For example, Radley and Kennedy (1995) and Hibbert and Horne (1997) found that the way in which a request for a donation is made in charitable contexts is an important situational factor in determining whether or not people make a donation. Notably, people are disinclined to give if they feel that the asker is restricting their freedom of choice to give by creating a situation in which they feel pressurised. Gabbott and Hogg (2000) have demonstrated that non-verbal communication is a key influence on consumer perceptions of service encounters. Further reference was made to the non-verbal communication transmitted through the vendor's choice of where to stand when selling the magazines and the fact that this put people off buying. One participant highlighted that vendors sell in places where it is evident that consumers have just spent money on themselves to increase the guilt factor, while another participant emphasised that it is intimidating when they sell outside banks.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the research demonstrated that, although many consumers place some utilitarian value on the BI magazine, few are able to see the purchase of the magazine as purely commercial. The helping dimension of the purchase is an important feature of the exchange and there are particular features of consumers' helping behaviour in this context. Importantly, consumers were motivated by the fact that the BI seeks to help the homeless through a process of empowerment, providing employment by selling the magazine rather than simply giving handouts. Reference to the emotions that motivate giving, particularly sympathy and guilt, implied that there was an altruistic and egoistic dimension to giving as has been argued for charitable giving generally. In this case, however, vendors were sometimes seen actively to provoke guilty feelings in potential customers, which was resented by consumers.

The research findings pertaining to the beneficiary portrayal in the case of the BI unveiled some tricky managerial problems, particularly concerning the physical appearance of vendors. Consumers, despite recognising the importance of empowerment in the BI initiative, were more prone to buy a magazine from a vendor who looked needy than one that appeared to be getting on their feet. The implication is that consumers feel more at ease helping in a traditionally charitable way rather than contributing to later stages of an

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empowerment process. Guy and Patton (1989) identified that perceptions of the *urgency of the need* influenced individuals' propensity to help and this seems to extend to this context of social enterprise. Also relevant to beneficiary portrayal was the manner of vendors. Although the quantitative data demonstrated that the sales approach and general behaviour of vendors were widely believed to be good, the focus group discussions demonstrated that critical incidents of aggressive behaviour or inappropriate sales tactics, be they personally or vicariously experienced, were prominent in people's memories.

There are managerial implications of both consumer buying motives in this context and their response to the beneficiary portrayal where the beneficiaries play a role as front-line staff. First, although it is core to the principles of social entrepreneurship that consumers regard the enterprise as offering quality goods or a service that is worth paying for, where the brand is associated with 'doing good works' consumers cannot be expected to ignore the helping dimension of the exchange. This suggests two options: first, there are opportunities to make the enterprise's empowerment goals and processes a unique selling point. If this is not desirable, consideration should be given to creating a brand that is not associated with charitable activities. As concerns beneficiary portrayal, there are managerial implications pertaining to codes of practice and training. Where social entrepreneurship initiatives have a service element to the consumer offering, staff need to be trained to provide service quality (Parasuraman *et al*., 1985), thus complementing the quality of the product on offer and not undermining it.

There are a number of limitations to this study, which should be acknowledged as a measure of its contribution. First, the conceptual framework for this study was limited to consumer motives for buying the BI and responses to beneficiary portrayal. There are, however, a wide range of social and psychological factors that influence consumer buying behaviour and helping behaviour and further research that explores this range of factors is required in order to gain a good understanding of how to maximise the success of social entrepreneurship initiatives. Secondly, a large sample was obtained for the quantitative phase of the research but, due to a poor response, there was a relatively small sample of participants in the qualitative research. Although a range of experiences was accessed through the focus groups, 'theoretical saturation' may not have been achieved with this size of sample. Moreover, the research was restricted to Scotland and may reflect cultural influences specific to this part of the world. Finally, the BI is a prominent case of social entrepreneurship, but it is of course a single example and, as such, the findings of this research are not widely generalisable. There are clear opportunities for further research to explore consumer response to other social entrepreneurship ventures.

APPENDIX RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Sex	(%)	Age	(%)	Employment	(%)
Male	41	16–25	20	Full-time	44
Female	59	26–35	27	Part-time	15
		36–45	18	Caring for home/children	7
		46–55	15	Unemployed/not working	11
		56–65	10	Student	7
		Over 65	10	Retired	15
		Not stated	—	Other	1

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