Prevention Versus Treatment: How Negative Emotion and Charitable Appeal Affect Donation Behavior

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This research investigates the effect of negative emotions on donation behavior depending on the type of charitable appeal used by the charity. Four studies show that anger (sadness) encourages donations when the charitable appeal emphasizes the prevention (treatment) of the charity’s cause.

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It is All in the Pitch: New Insights into How the Framing of a Charitable Appeal Influences Giving

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Paper #1: Charitable Giving to Teachers with the Same Name: An Implicit Egotism Field Experiment
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Paper #2: Giving to Versus on Behalf of: Charitable Gift Requests Lead to Less Generous Giving
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Paper #3: “You Saved a Life”: How Past Donation Use Increases Donor Reactivation via Impact and Warm Glow
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SESSION OVERVIEW

The act of giving to those in need is a fundamental value held by American consumers (Bendapudi, Singh, and Bendapudi 1996). However, it is not fully known what motivates consumers to donate to charitable organizations (Liang, Chen, and Lei 2016; Small and Verrochi 2009). This lack of understanding is evidenced by the fact that charities in the United States lose out on an estimated $47 billion in donations every year from failing to meet the needs of potential donors (Camber Collective 2015). In this session, we will focus specifically on understanding how the framing of different charitable appeals (i.e., messaging used in the donation solicitation) influences consumer giving. Four papers provide new insights into when charitable appeals are effective at encouraging giving based on the underlying needs of the donor.

The first paper (Munz, Jung, and Alter) shows that donors give more when the charitable appeal highlights that the recipient of the donation shares (versus does not share) the same surname as the donor. The beneficial effect of a donor/recipient surname match was said to be driven by implicit egotism, whereby people inherently gravitate towards others who resemble themselves. The second paper (Samper, Chan, and Hamilton) examines giving when the charitable appeal is made on a recipient’s gift registry (i.e., donating to a charity in lieu of gifts to the recipient). Their results show that charitable appeals made on gift registries result in significantly less given by donors compared to gifts directly to the recipient, even if the recipient has explicitly asked that the donation be their gift. The decreased giving was shown to be driven by the donor’s perception that their donation to a charity is not an actual gift to the recipient. The third paper (Shehu, Clement, Winterich, and Langmaack) shows how donor reactivation rates increase when a charitable appeal highlights the use of the prior donation (versus appeals that simply acknowledge the prior donation or detail future donation use). The beneficial effect of an appeal based on prior donation use on reactivation rates was found to be serially-mediated by the donor’s sense of having an impact and warm glow. The fourth and final paper (Fajardo and Salerno), explores how negative emotions influence giving depending on the type of charitable appeal used. Specifically, they find that anger (sadness) increases giving when the charitable appeal emphasizes the prevention (treatment) of its cause. Furthermore, the beneficial effect of anger (sadness) is shown to be driven by a need to take corrective action (need to foster social bonding).

Thus, the objective of this session is to address two key questions: (1) what are the ways in which the framing of a charitable appeal influences giving and (2) through what psychological mechanisms do such effects occur? Four papers demonstrate that consumers vary dramatically in their giving depending on how the charitable appeal is framed. We expect ACR attendees interested in the topics of prosocial behavior and consumer well-being to be our primary audience with the session also being of general interest given the scope of theoretical constructs covered.

Charitable Giving to Teachers with the Same Name: An Implicit Egotism Field Experiment

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

We examined the external validity of name effects and implicit egotism by conducting a large field experiment.

Implicit egotism is the tendency for people to like identifiers associated with themselves, including their own names and the numbers of their birthday, and to apply these positive associations to decisions, objects, and other people that resemble them. Researchers have documented implicit egotism in areas such as altruistic behavior (Burger et al. 2004; Chandler, Griffin, and Sorenson 2008; Garner 2005; Guéguen, Pichot, and Dreff 2005; Oates and Wilson 2002) among the first name (Study 2, consumer decision making (Brendl et al. 2005; Garner 2005; Kachersky 2011) to choose a name for a charity, letter name letter branding (Fajardo and Salerno), explores how negative emotions influence giving depending on the type of charitable appeal used. Specifically, they find that anger (sadness) increases giving when the charitable appeal emphasizes the prevention (treatment) of its cause. Furthermore, the beneficial effect of anger (sadness) is shown to be driven by a need to take corrective action (need to foster social bonding).

However, there is significant controversy as to whether these effects hold in the real world, or instead may be artifacts of analytical purposes. The challenges (typical of correlational research) include the potential for reverse causality (Simonsohn 2011a), cherry-picking in selecting variables or data sets to analyze (McCullough and McWilliams 2010; Simonsohn 2011a, 2011b). Specifically, most of the evidence for real world effects comes from archival data collected for other purposes. The challenges (typical of correlational research) include the potential for reverse causality (Simonsohn 2011a), cherry-picking in selecting variables or data sets to analyze (McCullough and McWilliams 2010), third-variable explanations (Simonsohn 2011a), and failing to perform the correct analysis (Dyjas et al. 2012; Gallucci 2003). In the face of these major challenges, some have claimed, “the current state of empirical evidence for implicit egotism, as indicated by the most recent publications in two of psychology’s top journals is that it holds up in the lab but seems to be spurious in the field” (Pelham and Carvallo 2015, 693).
We helped address these challenges by conducting a large field experiment. We partnered with DonorsChoose.org, an online charitable giving platform that connects primary and secondary schoolteachers requesting funding for projects in their classrooms with potential donors who can browse and donate any amount desired to a project of their choosing. DonorsChoose owns an email list of past donors, some of whom we sent an email request for donation to aid either a teacher with the same surname as the donor or a teacher whose name did not match.

We implemented a form of two-group yoked design. From the population of potential donors whose name matched at least one teacher and who were not family relatives, potential donors were randomly assigned to one between-subjects condition. Teachers appeared exactly once in each condition. Thus the teachers (used as stimuli) were the same in each condition. All that varied between conditions was whether or not the teacher surname matched the donor surname. In order to facilitate this design, we first had to randomly reduce the size of the list to achieve a two-to-one ratio of donors to teachers. No deception was employed in our field experiment; all of the teachers were actual teachers requesting funding.

We sent an email including the teacher’s name in the subject line to participants in each condition. The email asked donors to support a project led by the subject teacher, who shared a surname with the donor in the match condition but not in the non-match condition. The dependent measures were the count who opened the email, clicked on the link, and donated, and the donation amount.

The name match manipulation positively affected all measured outcomes. Name match email recipients were significantly more likely to open the email (35.1% vs. 27.6%; χ²(1, N = 30,302) = 196.0, p < .001) and to click on the link in the email (6.9% vs. 4.6%; χ²(1, N = 30,302) = 69.4, p < .001). Conditional on opening the initial email, the likelihood of clicking on the link was significantly greater in the name match condition (19.6% vs. 16.8%; χ²(1, N = 9,497) = 12.1, p < .001). Those in the name match condition were significantly more likely to donate than those in the non-name match condition (χ²(1, N = 30,302) = 3.4, p = .004), and on average they donated more than twice as much (M = $0.20, SD = $7.98) as those in the non-name match condition after a natural-log transformation (M = $0.09, SD = $5.46; F(1, 30295) = 8.02, p = .005).

However, as suggested elsewhere (Simonsohn 2011a), observed effects attributed to name matching could alternatively be due to in-group favoritism. That is, certain names convey lots of information about ethnicity, and people may be favoring their own ethnic group rather than favoring their own surname. While our data do not contain information about ethnicity, to attempt to control for this possibility we used data from the 2000 US Census. The data set provides the percentage likelihood that each surname belongs to a particular ethnicity, including percentages for six ethnicities. We appended these percentages to our data for both the potential donor’s surname and the corresponding teacher’s surname.

To attempt to control for ethnicity matching, we examined the 88.8% of cases for which the most likely ethnicity of the potential donor matched the most likely ethnicity of the teacher. All our reported outcomes were robust to this selection criterion (all ps < .02). We found similar results when instead utilizing all ethnicity information in the census data and calculating Euclidean distances for each name-pair.

Within the non-match condition we also checked for name letter effects (Nuttin 1985), a standard paradigm of implicit egotism. By chance, 742 (6.1%) donor surnames in the non-match condition shared a first letter with the teacher. After selecting for ethnicity matching as above, the results provide consistent directional evidence for small name letter effects on all variables and significant differences on opening the email (χ²(1, N = 11,789) = 5.2, p = .023) and average donation (F(1,11787) = 3.93, p = .048). By testing for name-letter effects in a randomized field experiment and controlling for ethnicity matching, we provide the most unbiased test of implicit egotism in the field to date.

Giving to Versus on Behalf of: Charitable Gift Requests Lead to Less Generous Giving

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Gift registries requesting charitable donations in lieu of gifts have gained popularity, adding a new layer of magnanimity to the prosocial act of gift giving. At first glance, this seems like an optimal way to make both givers and receivers happy while raising a substantial amount of money for a good cause. First, since the recipients explicitly ask for a donation, one avoids the pitfall of a prosocial gift being underappreciated by receivers (Cavanaugh, Gino and Fitzsimons 2015). Further, by giving recipients exactly what they have requested (Gino and Flynn 2011) and not diverging from the registry (Ward and Broniarzycz 2016), recipients will be happier while givers have an easier task.

Yet how do givers respond to these requests? Does the type of registry influence how much money they give? One might assume that the amount a giver decides to spend on a gift should not be determined by the type of gift requested by the recipient—that is, whether the gift is to or on behalf of a recipient should not rationally influence the amount allotted to a wedding gift. However, this research demonstrates that gift givers give less money to charity registries than to cash registries. We propose that despite people explicitly considering contributions as their gift to a recipient, givers are less likely to view such a contribution as a true gift and therefore give an amount commensurate with what they consider a typical charitable donation. We test this effect across four studies.

In study 1, participants were asked to imagine they were invited to a close friend’s wedding an hour away. They were told that the couple had requested no boxed wedding gifts, and instead had a cash registry fund and a charity registry fund. Participants were asked how much money they would give to each fund, allocating the money as they wished. We found that participants gave much less to the charity registry than to the cash registry (M_Cash = $61.10, M_Cash = $130.08; F(1, 62) = 36.88, p < .0001).

In study 2, we conceptually replicate the finding that participants give less to charity gift registries using a 2 (gift registry: charity, cash) × 2 (recognition: public, not stated) between-subjects design. In a similar wedding scenario, participants imagined that they had been invited to a wedding and that the couple had registered for either donations for their local homeless shelter (charity registry) or cash for renovations to their home (cash registry). We also tested whether the effect would persist even when participants knew that their name and the amount of money they chose to give would be emailed to the couple (public recognition) to rule out perceived accountability to the couple as an alternative explanation. We found only a main effect of registry type (F(1,184) = 3.99, p = .05). The effect of public recognition and the registry by recognition interaction were not significant (p > .61). Charity registry participants gave less (M_Public = $57.45 and M_Public = $78.70 and M_Public = $77.26).
them of the amount of cash they typically give as a wedding gift beforehand. Participants were assigned to a 2 (gift registry: charity, cash) × 2 (intervention: control, reminder) between-subjects design. In the control condition, participants read about a similar scenario as in study 2. Participants in the intervention condition were first presented with either a charity or cash reminder prior to the study: “How much do you think a person should give when they give a one-time charitable donation / wedding gift.” Results revealed a significant interaction ($F(1, 291)=5.68, p<.02$). In the control condition, replicating prior studies, participants gave significantly less to the charity (vs. cash) registry ($M_{\text{charity}}=$59.29, $M_{\text{cash}}=$85.53). Yet, in the reminder condition, there was no longer a difference ($M_{\text{charity}}=$82.13, $M_{\text{cash}}=$76.97).

Finally, in study 4, we extend our effects to a baby shower registry and examine how registries that donate a proportion of money given (e.g., ECHOage) may influence the amount given. We also explicitly test for process. Participants were randomly assigned to one of five conditions in a between-subjects design that varied the amount going to charity: 0% (pure cash gift), 25%, 50%, 75% and 100% (pure charity gift). Participants imagined that their friend was having a baby and had put together a registry. For conditions 25% and above, participants learned that a certain percentage of their gift would go to a charity fund for the research and treatment of birth defects, an organization chosen by their friend. Participants were asked how much they intended to give and, to further test our proposed process that participants’ perception that the amount given was a gift to the recipient (rather than a charitable donation), rated the extent to which they would feel like they were giving a gift. A one-way ANOVA revealed a marginal effect of amount ($F(4, 591)=2.22, p<.07$): $M_{0\%}=$43.96, $M_{25\%}=$44.96, $M_{50\%}=$48.98, $M_{75\%}=$44.98, $M_{100\%}=$36.52). Replicating prior studies, participants gave marginally less in the pure cash (0%) vs. pure charity (100%) conditions ($p=.09$). Moreover, this difference was mediated by the degree to which they felt like they were giving a gift ($CI_{95\%}=-9.06, -2.34$). Participants were also more willing to part with their money in the 50% and above, participants learned that a certain percentage of their gift would go to a charity fund for the research and treatment of birth defects, an organization chosen by their friend. Participants were asked how much they intended to give and, to further test our proposed process that participants’ perception that the amount given was a gift to the recipient (rather than a charitable donation), rated the extent to which they would feel like they were giving a gift. A one-way ANOVA revealed a marginal effect of amount ($F(4, 591)=2.22, p<.07$): $M_{0\%}=$43.96, $M_{25\%}=$44.96, $M_{50\%}=$48.98, $M_{75\%}=$44.98, $M_{100\%}=$36.52). Replicating prior studies, participants gave marginally less in the pure cash (0%) vs. pure charity (100%) conditions ($p=.09$). Moreover, this difference was mediated by the degree to which they felt like they were giving a gift ($CI_{95\%}=-9.06, -2.34$). Participants were also more willing to part with their money in the 50% versus pure charity (100%) condition ($p=.004$), revealing a quadratic effect ($p=.02$) as the charity amount increases.

Across these four studies, we find robust evidence that givers give less when a gift registry requests charitable donations than when they request cash. This effect persists even when it is clear that the couple will know how much givers had contributed and can be moderated by reminding participants that the donation is a form of a gift or by linking the gift amount to the charity amount.

**“You Saved a Life”: How Past Donation Use Increases Donor Reactivation via Impact and Warm Glow**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Increasing competition and demographic changes are forcing non-profit organizations (NPOs) to focus on reactivation strategies for lapsed donors. Due to the pro-social nature of donations, NPOs cannot use monetary incentives which are usually used for customer win-back in commercial contexts (Homburg, Hoyer, and Stock 2007; Thomas, Blattberg, and Fox 2004; Tokman, Davis, and Lemon 2007). Research has demonstrated that in pro-social contexts, monetary incentives lead to crowding out of donor motivations (Benabou and Tirole 2006; Frey and Jegen 2001; Heyman and Ariely 2004). Consequently, NPOs need reactivation strategies that do not impair, but trigger motives that lead lapsed donors to re-donate. The need for reactivation strategies is high as donors are difficult to retain. For example, data from the German Red Cross Blood Donation Services show that dropout rates or active donors may go up to 17.8%.

In practice, NPOs often use mailings that acknowledge lapsed donors’ past donations. Indeed, such practices are supported by literature on charitable behavior which has shown that recognition is an important motivator of donation behavior in general (Fisher and Ackerman 1998; Karlan and McConnell 2014; Supphellen and Nelson 2001; Wang and Tong 2015; Winterich, Mittal, and Acquino 2013). However, we still know little how recognition of past donations may affect donor reactivation. On the one hand, informing lapsed donors of the past donation use may increase transparency, and hence, donation impact, leading to higher reactivation. One of the main motivations for many donors is to help others, as evidenced by both the warm glow theory of giving (Andreoni 1990), as well as the impact theory of philanthropy (Duncan 2004). NPOs act as intermediaries and manage the transfer between donors and donation recipients, such that donors oftentimes are unsure of what happens with their donation (i.e., whether it was really used to help a person in need). On the other hand, information of past donation use may lead to licensing (Mazar and Zhong 2010). Literature on donor reactivation shows also limited insights on how information from past donation use may influence reactivation. Most of the studies investigate personalized reactivation mailings based on information from past donations (e.g., amount of money donated). In some settings, such as after disasters, suggested donation amounts based on a lapsed donors’ previous donation backfires (Ryzhov, Han, and Bradic 2016), whereas in general reactivation attempts such as giving requests, using the last donation amount in reactivation mailings increases reactivation behavior (Verbaert and Van den Poel 2011). However, there are no insights on how including the use (rather than personalized information from) past donations affects reactivation.

We propose that informing lapsed donors of their past donation use influences reactivation behavior positively, and that this effect is transmitted through a serial mediation via donation impact and warm glow. In a field experiment conducted in cooperation with the German Red Cross, we investigate the effectiveness of past donation use on reactivation behavior. We compare the influence of appeals based on past donation use to a best-practice mailing which simply acknowledges the past donation, as well as to a mailing based on future donation use. The results indicate that providing information on past donation use increases the probability of re-donation compared to both other appeal types.

In two online studies we replicate this effect for blood and monetary donations and investigate the psychological transmission mechanism behind it. We propose and demonstrate that the influence of past donation use on the intention to re-donate is transmitted through increased warm glow. Specifically, the transmission is a serial mediation, in which past donation use increases the perceived donation impact, then induces warm glow which translates into a higher intention to donate in future. Our results support the serial mediation for blood and monetary donations.

Our work provides much needed academic evidence and our results are relevant for managers and researchers alike. Our work contributes to the literature on donor reactivation, and more generally to literature on pro-social behavior. With respect to donor reactivation, we start first by linking literature on warm glow and donation impact with the literature on lapsed donor reactivation to show that warm glow is an important driver of donor reactivation. Specifically, we show that for donor reactivation purposes, it is not sufficient to merely incorporate personalized information from the past donation history, or acknowledge a past donation. NPOs should rather incorporate information that is able to increase the perceived donation impact, and the warm glow. Second, we add to the theoretical understanding of how different types of reactivation appeals work, and
expand the literature on how donation appeals can be utilized for reactivation strategies.

With respect to the literature on pro-social behavior, this study adds to the current stream of literature on the role of warm glow in pro-social processes. Current studies have shown how warm glow mediates service satisfaction for participants in a green program (Giebelhausen et al. 2016). We show that warm glow is an important motivator of re-donation behavior in reactivation campaigns and for pro-social behavior. In addition, our findings are also relevant for literature on recognition effects (Wang and Tong 2015; Winterich et al. 2013). We show how recognition should be framed in the reactivation context and describe the underlying process.

Lastly, our research also relates to the current research on customer win-back (Kumar, Bhagwat, and Zhang 2015; Pick et al. 2016), and shows how win-back strategies work in the pro-social context. Consequently, besides the academic relevance, our work is highly relevant for NPO managers. Our proposed strategy, which informs lapsed donors of their past donation use can be easily implemented by NPOs. Many NPOs rely on donor relationship systems, so that information from past donation use is easily available. In fact, blood donation services in Sweden have implemented this strategy (although not exclusively for lapsed donors) and inform donors on the use of their last donation.

**Prevention versus Treatment: How Negative Emotion and Charitable Appeal Affect Donation Behavior**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

A consumer’s decision of whether to donate to a charity is oftentimes driven by emotion (Andreoni 1990; Batson 1990). Prior research has focused largely on the role of negative emotion in shaping donation behavior, although a consensus has not been reached as to whether its effect is beneficial or detrimental (Andrade and Cohen 2007; Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008).

We propose that these divergent findings are because most donations research has (1) examined negative emotion using a valence-based approach (i.e., negative mood) rather than an emotion-specific approach and (2) not considered how the charitable appeal (i.e., messaging used in a donation solicitation) may be received differently depending on a person’s emotional state. This research is the first to examine each of these two factors concurrently. We chose to focus our efforts specifically on the effects of anger and sadness based on prior research showing that anger discourages helping (Polman and Kim 2013), whereas sadness encourages helping (Small and Verrochi 2009).

Thus, prior research suggests that anger (sadness) will discourage (encourage) donations.

The current research challenges this conclusion by considering how each emotion might influence donations differently, depending on the type of charitable appeal used. We find that both anger and sadness potentially encourage donations. However, for this to occur, the charitable appeal must be framed in a way that matches the underlying function of each emotion. Specifically, we propose that anger should encourage donation behavior when the appeal emphasizes the prevention of the charitable cause (what is being done to stop victimization from occurring). This effect occurs because an underlying function of anger is to empower consumers to take corrective action (Frijda 2005). By contrast, we propose that sadness will encourage donation behavior when the appeal emphasizes the treatment of the cause (i.e., what is being done to manage the consequences of victimization). This effect occurs because an underlying function of sadness is to motivate consumers to foster social bonding (Keller and Nesse 2006). We tested these predictions in four studies.

Study 1 used a 3 (donors’ emotional state: neutral, anger, sadness) x 2 (charitable appeal: prevention, treatment) between-subjects design. All participants read about histiocytosis (a life-threatening health disease). Emotion was manipulated via emotional contagion (Small and Verrochi 2009). Specifically, participants saw a picture and quote from a histiocytosis victim who either expressed anger, sadness, or neutrality about the diagnosis. Participants then received a donation solicitation from the Histiocytosis Association that either appealed to the prevention (“sponsoring medical research that would ultimately prevent this disease from claiming new victims”) or treatment (“providing life-saving treatment and care to improve the well-being of victims”) of histiocytosis. Donation behavior was assessed via the actual amount of money donated by participants (S0-S4).

Results showed a significant interaction between the emotion and appeal factors ($F(2, 129) = 5.12, p < .01$). Participants in the anger (sadness) envy condition donated significantly more money when the appeal was framed in terms of the prevention (treatment) of the disease.

Study 2 provided process evidence for the hypothesized psychological mechanisms driving the interactive effect of a donor’s emotional state and charitable appeal on donations. A 2 (donors’ emotional state: anger, sadness) x 2 (charitable appeal: prevention, treatment) between-subjects design was used. The procedure was identical to study 1, except that once participants indicated their willingness to donate, they were asked two questions about the decision: (1) whether their decision was driven by the need to fix what is wrong (need for corrective action) and (2) whether their decision was driven by the need to feel close to others (need for social bonding). A significant interaction emerged between the emotion and appeal factors ($F(1, 137) = 11.44, p < .01$), replicating the results of study 1. Moderated mediation analyses revealed that the beneficial effect of anger (sadness) on donation behavior framed in terms of prevention (treatment) was mediated by a need for corrective action (need for social bonding).

We hypothesized that anger encourages donations under a prevention appeal because the act of donating addresses the need to take corrective action. If this is so, an opportunity to partake in corrective action prior to a solicitation may attenuate the positive effect of anger on donations. Study 3 examined this possibility using a 2 (need for corrective action: control, addressed) x 3 (donors’ emotional state: neutral, anger, sadness) x 2 (solicitation orientation: prevention, treatment) between-subjects design. Emotions were manipulated by having participants watch a video pretested to either elicit anger, sadness, or neutrality. Next, in the need addressed condition wrote a letter to the university about a problem at their university and how it could be solved (control condition did not complete this task). Participants then received a donation solicitation that either focused on the prevention or treatment of Isilo fever (described as a life-threatening fever). Results revealed a significant three-way interaction ($F(2, 290) = 3.15, p < .05$). The control condition replicated studies 1-2. In the action addressed condition, angry participants no longer donated more under a prevention (versus treatment) appeal.

Study 4 examined whether an opportunity to reaffirm one’s social belongingness prior to a solicitation may attenuate the positive effect of sadness on donations. A 2 (need for belongingness: control, addressed) x 3 (donors’ emotional state: neutral, anger, sadness) x 2 (solicitation orientation: prevention, treatment) between-subjects design was used. Emotion manipulation was identical to study 3. In the need addressed condition, participants wrote about a friendship they currently have and value (control condition did not complete this task). Results revealed a significant three-way interaction ($F(2, 289) = 3.26, p < .05$). The control condition replicated studies 1-2.
In the action addressed condition, sad participants no longer donated more under a treatment (versus prevention) appeal. Collectively, this research contributes to the literatures on emotion, donation behavior, and prosociality. The findings illustrate how negative emotion has a more nuanced influence on donation behavior than previously thought. Finally, this research also highlights the importance of considering how the donation behavior of consumers may vary based on the appeal used by the charity.

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