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Cover Page Footnote

Thanks go to Dr. Paul Story and Charles Elliott for helping me make this project come to life.

Watch Me Give: Narcissism as a Moderator to Donating to a Nonprofit

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Abstract

With increased online connectivity in the current generation, more nonprofit organizations are focusing their efforts on producing online marketing appeals. Therefore, it has become necessary to identify the effect some appeals have on different people. The present study seeks to determine whether an organization offering increased recognition will result in a greater willingness to give by people with narcissistic personalities. Additionally, it will determine if “willingness” to give or “amount” given are different based on genders or employment status, as prior research suggests. Results indicated that whether the organization offered increased recognition or not, narcissism did not affect willingness to give or amount given. Women were more willing to give than men, and employment status did not hold any bearing on the willingness to give or amount given. Limitations of the study are provided, and implications for future research are discussed.

Keywords: narcissism, nonprofits, charity, giving behaviors, donating

Whereas nonprofit organizations used to include fundraisers, going door-to-door, recruiting on sidewalks, and sending out flyers, over the past two decades the world has experienced a paradigm shift. Increased connectivity allows people to communicate directly over computers and mobile devices. Several nonprofits maintain an “online presence” and strategically use grassroots movements to attract people to their cause (Patel, 2016; Shattuck, 2014). The 2017 Benchmarks, an annual survey of several different nonprofit organizations, show that online revenue for nonprofits has grown by 14% with monthly giving growing at a rate of 23% (Benton et al., 2017).

Researchers in the field of nonprofit marketing are working to identify the factors that motivate people to donate and how these factors can be translated into appeals.

Variables such as income level, social pressure, and ties to the charity based on prior experience impact willingness to donate (Bendapudi, Singh, & Bendapudi, 1996). Although empathy is a factor shown to predict charitable behavior (Griffin et al., 1993; Verhaert & Van den Poel, 2011), recognition has also been positively related to donating in a number of studies, especially when publicizing the donations and names of the highest donors (Karlan & McConnell, 2014; Kim & Um, 2016; Samek & Sheremeta, 2017; William, 1998; Winterich, Mittal & Aquino, 2013). This method stimulates a sort of “competition” between donors who strive to be the highest contributor. An example of this can be seen from the “Ice Bucket Challenge” that occurred in the summer of 2014.

The viral challenge involved pouring ice water over your head, which is a well-known remedy to the symptoms of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), and electing three others to do so, or otherwise donating to the Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Association (ALSA). After celebrities and political figures like Robert Downey Jr., Bill Gates, Will Smith, and Oprah began endorsing the trend, it rapidly took off. The result was an annual donation to the ALSA of around 115 million dollars, a huge boost from the 23.5 million dollars made the year before (Ohlheiser & Ohlheiser, 2016; Wolff-Mann, 2015).

Posting a video performing the Ice Bucket Challenge pairs that person alongside celebrities who did it as well, giving them recognition and even praise. This idea may be especially appealing to those with narcissistic traits, which include being less empathetic with a focus on wanting to feel unique and special (Watson, Grisham, Trotter & Biderman, 1984). Konrath, Ho, and Zarins (2016) found of the people who participated in the Ice Bucket Challenge, those who videoed themselves pouring ice buckets over their heads rated significantly higher in narcissism than those who didn't. Therefore, people with narcissistic traits may be more willing to give to a nonprofit if it offers the opportunity to receive recognition or praise, like having your picture seen by others. Hypothesis 1 states that people primed with narcissism will be more willing to donate to a nonprofit that offers greater recognition, compared to those not primed with narcissism.

Narcissism and Giving Behavior

People typically give out of an intrinsic need to benefit a person or people they care about. However, other motivations include a mature act of self-sacrifice and

selflessness, a social obligation, and a means of serving themselves (Wolfenbarger, 1990). Those with narcissistic traits may be especially driven by the last motivation as their goals have been found to be less related to social acceptance than self-enhancement, suggesting they would prefer to be praised rather than genuinely liked (Raskin, Novacek, & Hogan, 1991). For example, those with narcissistic traits in a relationship give gifts as a means of power and relationship maintenance rather than because of an intrinsic desire to give (Hyun, Park, & Park, 2016). If this is the case, and certain people are less empathetic to others, then charities that design their marketing around empathetic appeals should have difficulty attracting people with narcissistic traits or having them donate a substantial amount of money, at least, not without allowing for a potential gain in their eyes. If they believed they would be gaining praise, or something that would substantiate their self-view from the transaction, they would arguably be more willing to donate than those with a genuine concern for the cause.

Demographic Information

Four secondary hypotheses are based on the demographic questionnaire presented at the end of the survey. The first is whether gender is related to giving to charities and nonprofits. German researchers have found that whereas men tend to make larger donations than women, women are more likely to spread their donations amongst different charities (Emrich & Pierdzioch, 2015). Similarly, Dutch researchers have found that Dutch men donate more than Dutch women, but women donate more often and donate to more organizations than men (De Wit & Bekkers, 2016). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is that men will donate more money overall than women. Hypothesis 3 is

that women will be more “willing” to donate than men.

Additionally, employment status should indicate a likelihood to donate. Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng & Keltner (2010) found that people with a lower economic status were more generous and likely to donate more to charity compared to people with a higher economic status. This might be due to the increased level of compassion for others felt by members of a lower class (Stellar, Manzo, Kraus, & Keltner, 2012). Although the size of donations increases with income level, the percent of income that is given to charity is larger for middle- and lower-income levels (PhilanthropyRoundtable). Brooks and Wilson (2007) suggest lower-income people tend to give more (a greater percentage of their income) than higher-income people, but higher-income people are more willing to give and give more frequently. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is that being employed will result in a greater willingness to donate overall than being unemployed. Hypothesis 5 is that being unemployed will result in willingness to donate greater amounts than those employed.

Method

Participants

A sample of 381 students was recruited from Kennesaw State University (70 males, 231 females, $M = 21.42$, $SD = 5.85$). Some students were offered extra credit in exchange for their participation, while others were not. Of the surveys taken, 75 were left unfinished. Of the participants who filled out the demographic questionnaire at the end of the survey, 44.6% were Caucasian, 17.6% were African American, 3.9% were Asian, and 6.6% were Hispanic/Latino.

Procedure

For the experiment, random assignment was necessary to eliminate any effect individual preference of the charity (The American Red Cross) had on individuals’ willingness to donate. Students were randomly assigned into two groups; the Prime group received the narcissism prime, and the Control group did not. Each group was then broken into Recognition and Non-recognition groups. In the Recognition group, participants were confronted with a hypothetical scenario where if they donated there was a high chance they would get recognition. In the Non-recognition group there was a low chance of recognition. At the end of the survey, an optional demographic questionnaire asked about the participants’ gender and employment status.

Measures

Prime. Participants in the Prime group were asked to take at least five minutes and write down a time when they felt superior and the center of attention. The prompt included wording from statements from the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) related to Superiority and Exhibitionism and was based on previously demonstrated methods of priming narcissism (de Bellis, Sprott, Herrmann, Bierhoff, & Rohmann 2016; Raskin & Terry, 1988; Sakellaropoulo & Baldwin, 2007). The prompt is: “Please take at least 5 minutes to write about a happy experience in your life when you were being praised and felt like the center of attention. Describe it in as much detail as you can.” The Control group received the writing prompt, “Please take at least 5 minutes to write about what you did yesterday. Describe it in as much detail as you can.”

Scenario. Recognition was determined by how visible the participant’s

picture would be on the organization's website. How many pictures were present on the organization's website (very little for the Recognition scenario or a lot for the Non-recognition scenario) was expected to affect how much the donor feels they stand out from others and will be noticed. Additionally, the amount of prior funding each charity advertised (either \$5 in the Recognition scenario or \$100,000 in the Non-recognition scenario) implied a level of public support and was believed to affect how much a donor would feel they were special for donating. Participants either received a scenario that featured a lot of people's pictures with a large amount of prior funding or one that featured very few pictures with a small amount of prior funding.

Giving Questionnaire. Willingness to give was measured to see whether the prime was a significant moderator in the number of donations. Questions that followed the scenario included, "Assuming you just got paid, how much are you willing to give?" and "Compared to the average KSU student, how likely are you to donate to the American Red Cross?" Some options are on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Not at all likely" to "Very Likely", and monetary questions offered choices ranging from "None" to "Over \$100". After the participants completed the survey, they were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire. The questionnaire asked about religious affiliation, ethnicity, gender, and employment status.

Results

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to test the main effects and interaction that prime (IV) and scenario (IV) had on willingness to give (DV). There was not a significant main effect of prime. There was no difference between the willingness to give in the prime condition ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.07$)

compared to the control condition ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.13$), $F(1, 302) = 0.08$, $p = .773$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$. Nor was there a recognition main effect; there was no difference in willingness to give between the recognition ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.09$) and control ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.11$) conditions, $F(1, 302) = 0.36$, $p = .549$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$. There was also no significant interaction between prime and recognition, $F(1, 302) = 0.04$, $p = .838$, partial $\eta^2 = .000$. The average response was a "neutral" willingness to give.

Additionally, there was no difference in the amount participants were willing to donate between the prime condition ($M = 1.44$, $SD = .65$) compared to the control condition ($M = 1.39$, $SD = .66$), $F(1, 302) = 0.37$, $p = .546$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$. Nor was there a difference between the recognition ($M = 1.47$, $SD = .66$) and control condition ($M = 1.35$, $SD = .65$), $F(1, 302) = 2.39$, $p = .123$, partial $\eta^2 = .008$. There was also no significant interaction between the prime and recognition on amount donated, $F(1, 302) = 0.01$, $p = .914$, partial $\eta^2 = .000$. The average amount that was willing to be donated regardless of condition was less than \$10.

An independent t -test was used to test the hypothesis that men (IV) would donate more money overall (DV) than women. Hypothesis 2 was not supported; the difference between the amount of money men ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 1.33$) were willing to donate was almost significantly larger than women ($M = 1.72$, $SD = .96$), $t(299) = 1.96$, $p = .051$. However, a Levene's Test of Homogeneity showed that the variances between men ($N = 70$) and women ($N = 231$) were significantly different ($p = .041$) so the result should be taken loosely. The same test was used to determine if women (IV) had a greater willingness to give (DV) than men. Hypothesis 3 was supported; women ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.08$) were significantly more

willing to donate than men ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.12$), $t(299) = -2.157$, $p = .032$.

An independent t -test was used to determine if being employed (IV) was related to a higher willingness to give (DV). Hypothesis 4 was not supported; results showed those who were employed ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.06$) were not significantly more willing to donate than those who were unemployed ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.15$), $t(299) = 1.224$, $p = .222$. The same test was used to determine if being unemployed (IV) was related to a willingness to give more money (DV). Hypothesis 5 was not supported: unemployed individuals ($M = 1.84$, $SD = 1.12$) were not willing to give significantly more money than employed individuals ($M = 1.75$, $SD = 1.03$), $t(299) = -.715$, $p = .475$.

Discussion

The goal of the study was to determine if a nonprofit could tailor an appeal to narcissists to increase their willingness to donate. Based on past research on narcissism and giving behavior, we expected that a plea appealing to narcissists' need for recognition and praise would lead to this result (de Bellis et al., 2016; Watson et al., 1984). However, the results from the study showed this was not the case. Those primed with narcissism were not more willing to donate, no matter if the scenario offered a small or large opportunity for recognition. There was also no difference between the *amount* they were willing to donate.

One of the limitations of the study is the online format of the narcissism prime, which can cause decreased participation that can bias results (Huang, Liu, & Bowling, 2015; Ward, Meade, Allred, Pappalardo, & Stoughton, 2017). Participants were asked to follow the narcissism prompt for no less than five minutes and write in as much detail as

possible. This was to conjure in the mind a vivid experience of being praised and feeling superior, so these feelings would linger while they responded to the scenario. The prime was based on previous research concerning priming narcissism (de Bellis et al., 2016; Sakellaropoulo & Baldwin, 2007). However, because it was an online survey, the participants were asked not only to visualize and describe an experience but write it down for five minutes. According to the data, many people either wrote very little during the five minutes or simply waited until the timer ran out before moving on to the questionnaire. Future studies should ensure a manipulation check is performed on the narcissism prime beforehand.

Additionally, a fault could be in the amount of recognition each scenario offered. The opportunity for recognition differed in that a nonprofit with only \$5 in prior donations would have fewer support and less pictures of people on their website than a nonprofit with \$100,000 in prior donations, increasing the odds someone's picture would be seen and they would feel unique. However, both scenarios do offer the opportunity to gain recognition simply by being on the website, which means the difference in recognition between the two scenarios might be too similar. Future researchers should try to construct a scenario where opportunities for recognition are more obvious.

Lastly, almost all the questions included in the survey were formatted on a Likert scale, with the only responses available on a scale from 1-5. However, the effects of the prime or scenario might have been more measurable and significant had the responses been available in an open-ended format. For example, one of the questions, "Assuming you just got paid, how much would you be willing to donate?", might have

shown better results had it given the option to put what amount the participant wanted. Similarly, the question of employment status was simply a question of whether the participant was employed, not their annual salary. Allowing for an opened-ended answer might have meant more accurate results.

The hypothesis that men would donate more than women was not supported by the results, but the hypothesis that women would be more willing to donate than men was consistent with previous research (De Wit & Bekkers, 2016; Emrich & Pierdzioch, 2015). However, the sample included many more women than men, a ratio of roughly 3:1, which might have skewed the data. Additional researchers should aim for roughly equal amounts of each.

Employment status did not have a significant effect on willingness to give nor on the amount of money a participant was willing to give. One of the reasons behind the incongruity of results and previous findings is that the questions asked about employment status instead of “economic status” (a decision made to account for the sample consisting entirely of undergraduates). The question was also a binary response question instead of a Likert scale response question, which would have allowed for a range of options.

The results of the present study suggest the need for further research. If narcissism is linked to donor behavior, then it could open the door for future research for tailoring appeals. De Bellis et al. (2016) found that a “state narcissism” could be primed via marketing images. Photos of a car with the caption “You impress. Like the new Audi A6” as opposed to the caption “You belong. Like the new Audi A6”, were more successful in getting participants to choose

cars with mass customization options, like color or leather seats.

Additionally, the emergence of crowd funding sites like Kickstarter.com have provided people with a platform to promote their projects and ideas to receive donations. These sites allow for recognition in the presence of a sidebar that displays that person’s picture and amount donated. If narcissism is a factor in how much they are willing to donate, sites like these might tailor sidebars to those with narcissistic traits with the inclusion of things that bring attention to the donor. This applies especially to sites like GoFundMe.com, which unlike Kickstarter.com, do not provide donors with incentives, like tickets to a show or copies of a product.

Lastly, if future research determines there is a connection between narcissism and willingness to participate, it could aid organizations in development of social media trends that involve nonprofits. For instance, elements of the Ice Bucket Challenge include recognition and exhibitionism. People felt like thousands were watching and even got recognized when people accepted their challenge. In the future, there might even be a way of determining whether a trend will be successful in bringing in donations or raising awareness based on these factors.

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