

Study unlocks why public appeals may fall flat with some would-be donors

September 28 2017



Bonnie Simpson, Assistant Professor, Consumer Behaviour at the DAN Department of Management and Organizational Studies, Western University, Canada. Credit: Western University

It has long puzzled fundraisers why, in any appeal, some people will eagerly jump in with the throng while others equally passionate about the cause will reject the same pitch.

Now research led by Western researcher Bonnie Simpson is nearer to figuring out why some people are—and aren't—motivated by public appeals, and how fundraisers might better tailor requests.

A new paper, "When Public Recognition for Charitable Giving Backfires: The Role of Independent Self-Construal" online in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, says people whose self-definition includes a strong streak of independence will sometimes balk because appeals seem too much like following the crowd.

"They see public appeals as [social pressure](#) calling them to be like everyone else who gives in a certain way and at a certain time. They see themselves as resisting the influence to act as others might expect them to," said Simpson, Assistant Professor, Consumer Behaviour at Western's DAN Department of Management and Organizational Studies, and lead author of the study. "It's not that they don't want to give. They want to give, but more privately."

The study is co-authored by Katherine White, professor of Marketing and Behavioural Science at the Sauder School of Business at University of British Columbia; and Juliano Laran, Professor of Marketing at the School of Business Administration, University of Miami.

"If asked to donate at a grocery-store checkout, for example, people with a greater sense of independence may decline. By contrast, people who place a high value on interdependence will often respond positively," said Laran: "They think, 'other people are giving, I want to be part of that movement, I want to help.' "

The study asked people a series of questions about how they view themselves and about their giving patterns. And it found that sometimes the difference between someone's willingness to give, or not give, was in how the question was worded.

"For individualists who believe they are resistant to others' influence, the 'ask' may need to be phrased differently. This group is more likely to give if we tell them it's their choice, that not everyone is doing it and that they can be quiet leaders for the cause," Simpson said.

"By encouraging people to give through their own free will, they are more likely to donate even when public recognition is involved," said White. "The lesson isn't that public or private appeals work better, but that organizations should be willing to change the language of the 'ask' based on interdependence or independence traits among donors, which may ultimately change response rates."

More information: Bonnie Simpson et al, When Public Recognition for Charitable Giving Backfires: The Role of Independent Self-Construal, *Journal of Consumer Research* (2017). [DOI: 10.1093/jcr/ucx101](https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucx101)

Provided by University of Western Ontario

Citation: Study unlocks why public appeals may fall flat with some would-be donors (2017, September 28) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-09-appeals-fall-flat-would-be-donors.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.