

When 'religiosity' competes with materialism, charitable giving takes a hit

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Religious people tend to be more charitable than their nonreligious counterparts, but they'll think twice about opening their wallets if it prolongs their next big purchase, according to new research from Baylor University's Hankamer School of Business.

Baylor researchers James A. Roberts, Ph.D., professor of marketing, and Meredith David, Ph.D., assistant professor of marketing, partnered on a study that examined the relationship between [religiosity](#) and charitable giving, and what drives the latter. They found that religiosity—the way people live out their lives based on their faith—can drive donors to give. But when [materialism](#)—that self-serving want for more money or material possessions—enters the equation, giving decreases.

"At once, we want to help others, but at the same time, we desire the money and possessions that we all cherish to a greater or lesser degree," the researchers wrote. "It is the result of such give-and-take between opposing values that drives our behavior as donors to charitable causes."

A total of 180 adults participated in the study, which is published in *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*.

Roberts and David looked specifically at religiosity's effect on peoples' attitudes toward helping others (AHO) and attitudes toward charitable organizations (ACO).

Religiosity, they explained, is different from religious affiliation; it "is

something that individuals experience outside of their place of worship and constitutes a way of viewing and experiencing the world that is different from their less religious (or nonreligious) counterparts." They said they approached the study with the idea that helping others is a common rule among major religions.

In general, the research showed that those expressing [higher levels](#) of religiosity were found to possess more favorable attitudes toward helping others and to charitable organizations. And those with stronger attitudes toward helping others also expressed a greater breadth in their giving.

But higher levels of religiosity do not guarantee open wallets, David said.

"We can't always assume that religiosity ensures charitable giving," she said. "Our study results suggest that increasing materialism lessened the positive effect of AHO on the breadth of giving."

Roberts, a nationally recognized expert on consumerism, said he and David, a nationally recognized expert on consumer behavior and well-being, weren't too surprised by the study's findings, given a basic understanding of human nature and the self-centeredness that accompanies materialism. However, they believe that understanding these dynamics can benefit charitable organizations as they identify potential donors and prepare for "the ask."

"Although materialism was found to reduce the breadth and likelihood of charitable giving in the present study, it could spur charitable giving if it is driven by self-serving motivations," they wrote in the "managerial implications" section of the study.

In other words, appeal to the donors' inclination to give AND their desire for public acknowledgment.

"Large donations that come with naming rights, spur news coverage or exceed the donations of other prominent individuals are all examples of how materialism can be used to drive [charitable donations](#)," they wrote.

Provided by Baylor University

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