

# Donors more likely to give to COVID causes when font matches message

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The donation appeals, in each typeface, that researchers showed to study participants. Donation appeals are most successful when the typeface in which they are written matches the tone of their messages, a new study has found.

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Appeals seeking donations to help fight hunger during the COVID-19

pandemic were more successful when the typeface in which the appeal was written mirrored the tone of the donation request, a new study has found.

In a study that asked prospective donors to consider whether and how much to give to a local food bank to help fight hunger during the coronavirus pandemic, researchers found that donors were more likely to give when heartfelt messages were written in typefaces that looked like handwriting, and when messages that talked about the power of an organization were written in typeface that looked more business-like.

In other words, make the font match the message to get more donations, the researchers said.

"Our research suggests that simply changing the typeface of appeals messages could make those appeals stronger and encourage people to make donations," said Huiling Huang, a consumer sciences doctoral student at The Ohio State University and lead author of the study, which was published last month in the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*.

When the message was a warm one, with a tone that played up the emotions of what the fundraising organization could do, donors were more likely to give when the message was written in font that looked like handwriting.

When the message was focused on the competency of the organization, on its efficiency and on its power, donors were more likely to give when the message was written in a font that was clearly generated by a computer—much like the font you're reading now.

Previous research in this area has found that donation requests that utilize warmth-focused messages emphasize friendliness, care and

love—characteristics that convey good intentions and a desire to help others. Donation requests that focus on an organization's capabilities, efficiency and effectiveness, on the other hand, convey that organization's ability to achieve a goal. Both are effective fundraising techniques, but this new study indicates that those appeals can be even more effective if paired with the appropriate typeface.

Huang said previous analyses have shown that most donation appeals are printed in a business-like font. Depending on the message, she said, those organizations might be leaving donations on the table.

For this study, researchers asked study participants to imagine that they were picking up takeout from a local restaurant, and that, in the drive-through line, there was a flyer stating that the restaurant had partnered with a local food bank to collect donations to offset the pressures the food bank faced because of the pandemic.

Researchers offered the "prospective donors" two sets of requests for donations. One set's message focused on the strength and competence of the organization. The other's message focused on warmth and the organization's ability to positively affect lives. Each was written in two different typefaces: One that looked similar to a person's handwriting, and one that was clearly computer-generated.

Then, the researchers asked the study participants how likely they were to make a donation. They also asked questions about how deeply the participants trusted and would be loyal to the hypothetical restaurant, based only on the donation appeal.

They found that study participants were more likely to give, by a factor of about one-sixth, when the message matched the typeface—warm messages with handwritten font, competence-based messages with computer-generated font.

Study participants also reported feeling more trust toward the restaurant asking for donations when the typeface matched the tone of the [appeal](#). The researchers measured trust because many businesses have turned to raising money or awareness for social causes—what researchers call "Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)" marketing—to build loyalty in their brands.

Studies have shown that consumer trust in a business is related to loyalty.

"We focused on a restaurant for this study, but I think our findings can be applied to a broader context way beyond restaurants and hospitality," said Stephanie Liu, senior author on the paper and an assistant professor of hospitality management at Ohio State.

"A lot of companies are using social responsibility messaging to enhance customer loyalty, and brands who solicit any types of donation can benefit from these findings. By matching the message to the [font](#), they can build trust, which leads to loyalty."

**More information:** Huiling Huang et al. "Donate to help combat COVID-19!" How typeface affects the effectiveness of CSR marketing?, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* (2020). [DOI: 10.1108/IJCHM-05-2020-0462](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-05-2020-0462)

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