

Fundraising 101: Tempting alternatives increase willingness to donate

February 25 2015

Charities are always trying to understand what type of appeal will increase the likelihood of donations. According to a new study in the *Journal of Marketing Research*, people are also very driven by seeing the good in themselves. Referencing particularly indulgent products (not a simple cup of coffee), can significantly increase charitable donations.

"Giving to a charity increases when fundraisers ask people to compare the donation cost to something indulgent," write authors Jennifer Savary (Yale University), Kelly Goldsmith (Northwestern University), and Ravi Dhar (Yale University). "After envisioning something they see as selfishly pleasing, the decision not to donate then feels too selfish by contrast. People don't want to look selfish, even in their own eyes."

The authors conducted a field study, handing envelopes to passersby with a letter that asked for a \$5 donation to UNICEF. Some letters noted that "\$5 is how much it costs to buy a pint of Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream." Other letters compared the donation to the cost of a tube of Colgate 12-hour multi-protection toothpaste. Participants were asked to make their decision, and then return the envelope even if they had not made a donation.

The results showed that when people imagined their decision as making a donation or buying a tempting treat, they were overwhelmingly more likely to donate than when they imagined deciding between the donation and a utilitarian item such as a tube of toothpaste. The authors showed, via additional stages in the study, that this was because failing to donate

when thinking of the ice cream made people see themselves as selfish. In order to correct that negative feeling about themselves to something good, and see themselves in a better light, they donated.

"The message to charities is clear. Donation rates can be immediately improved by encouraging potential donors to envision a tempting, indulgent alternative. A significant number of people will then make the more generous choice," the authors conclude.

More information: *Journal of Marketing Research*: February 2015, Vol. 52, No. 1, pp. 27-38. [DOI: 10.1509/jmr.13.0244](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.13.0244)

Provided by American Marketing Association

Citation: Fundraising 101: Tempting alternatives increase willingness to donate (2015, February 25) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-02-fundraising-alternatives-willingness-donate.html>

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