

USE OF IMAGES IN CHARITY ADVERTISING: IMPROVING DONATIONS AND COMPLIANCE RATES

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ABSTRACT

Psychology, through its research on marketing, has extensive applications to aid advertising and compliance with donation requests. Four experiments examined the influence that images of people placed in charity donation advertising have on donations and compliance rates. Experiment 1 and 2 examined images used in charity advertising in terms of the emotions they generated in respondents. Images of children were found to be particularly powerful in generating emotional reactions. Experiments 3 and 4 manipulated emotional intensity generated by images within donation requests, and found that images showing negative emotions generated significantly larger monetary donations, and significantly larger donations of items and time. The results are discussed in relation to the construction of charity advertising, and opportunities for applying psychology to social marketing and poverty reduction.

INTRODUCTION

Burnett and Wood (1988), in their model of the donation decision process, point to the uniqueness of the social exchange that occurs when donating to charity. Gifts are made with no tangible reward. Donating does not involve an impersonal exchange, but is usually predicated on the seeking of a reaction to a serious human condition. This immediately makes donation a personal matter involving emotions and value judgements. Clearly, then in seeking an answer to the question of what makes people donate, it is important to consider the images of people, particularly with respect to their emotionality, used in advertisements for charitable organisations.

Previous research has been concerned with, for example, the social desirability of donating to charities (e.g., Jiobu & Knowles 1974; Middleton & Edwards 1990, with respect to providing a justifiable memory). More recent research has not been particularly concerned with the personal aspects of charity donation. Rather, there has been emphasis on recall of amount and frequency of charity donation (e.g., Burt & Popple 1998); the effectiveness of charity incentives in promoting other products (e.g., Strahilevits & Myers 1998); the factors such as donation magnitude that contribute to willingness to pay more for a branded good that is linked to a charity (e.g., Irwin 1999); and again the demonstration that charities should be aware of social desirability factors when selecting the content of their advertisements (e.g., Louie & Obermiller 2000).

Another area of research has examined different approach techniques, such as foot-in-the-door (e.g., Bell, Cholerton, Fraczek & Rohlf's 1994), door-in-the-face, low-ball, and legitimization-of-small-donation to increasing charitable contributions (see Weyant 1997) for a review). Of more particular relevance to this study is the small amount of research which

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has examined the use of pictures and images in advertising. Scott (1994) discuss how images used in advertising must be cognitively processed, and that many images that are assumed to be information devoid can in fact be affect laden. Eayrs and Ellis (1990) compared charity advertising posters showing mentally handicapped children and adults, and reported that images which elicited the greatest commitment to give money were those that prompted feelings of guilt, sympathy and pity. This finding is interesting and suggests a broader examination of the use of images in charity advertising could provide findings useful to a range of charities.

It is not uncommon to find images of people used in charitable donation advertising. These vary from recognisable public figures to scenes showing starvation, war, disabled individuals, and so on. The first question we addressed in the present research was what effect, if any, the nature of the images of people used in advertisements for charity would have on respondents. Consistent with the work of Eayrs and Ellis (1990), our assumption was that one type of effect might be revealed through measures of the emotions which the images prompt. Accordingly, Experiment 1 addressed the question of whether or not particular types of images used in charity advertising, such as children versus adults, provoke varying emotions in respondents'. Experiments 2 explored the nature of the emotions used and evoked in a sample of charity advertisements. Experiments 3 and 4 addressed the question of whether the nature of the emotion generated by an image placed in charity advertising is related to donation behaviour. In other words, and to look at the question from a practical perspective, can a charity increase compliance rate and amount donated by selecting a particular type of image to use in their advertising?

Given that there is some consensus that donating is a type of pro-social behaviour (Burnett & Wood 1988), respondents may feel more inclined to donate when particular emotions are expressed by images (and hence engendered empathetically in the potential donator). For example, a sad image of a child, through the vicarious experience of sadness, might suggest that the appropriate response would be to give; whereas an image of a happy child may not prompt such ready donating. Of course, this could be argued either way. Seeing a happy child on a charitable advertisement might well prompt greater potential donations as it allows the donor to see *the results* of donations.

Experiment 1

Participants

Thirty-three participants completed a questionnaire, 4 males with a mean age of 21.1 years and 29 females with a mean age of 25.1 years.

Questionnaire

Charity advertising material (donation envelopes, stickers on donation boxes, etc.) was searched for images of people. Sixteen images were selected for the study. These images were labelled A to P and showed a male infant sitting on a step, a nurse and young girl, an old woman and young boy, a woman and infant boy, a male Salvation Army officer and vagrant man, a public figure and his two children (1 boy and 1 girl), a female Salvation Army officer praying, two male New Zealand army officers in front of a Red Cross vehicle, an old man and an old female with a walking stick, a hospital orderly and an old man in a wheel chair, two women and a young boy carrying bedding and belongings, a male Salvation Army officer and three male street kids, a pregnant woman holding a cat, a young boy carrying a gun, an infant girl sitting on the grass, and an older woman and a young woman holding a baby, respectively. Each image was scanned into a computer and printed 6 x 7 cm in black and

white at the top of an A4 page. Twenty-two 7-point emotion scales were listed under each image. Each scale was anchored 1 = low to 7 = high, and asked participants to rate the degree to which the image evoked feelings of happiness, well-being, anxiety, worry, fear, dread, anger, irritation, frustration, sadness, bleakness, disgust, offence, contempt, shame, humiliation, guilt, responsibility, regret, pride, embarrassment and self-consciousness. The cover page of the questionnaire asked for participant age and gender. Five different orders of the sixteen images were used.

Procedure

The experiment used a repeated measures design with each participant rating each image (A to P) on the 22 emotion scales. Participants completed the questionnaire in a laboratory setting, taking approximately 15 minutes to do so.

Results & Discussion

Table 1 shows the mean ratings on each emotion scale for each image. The first 3 columns of Table 1 show the results for the three images of children. Two of these clearly prompted positive emotions in our respondents, while the third image (first column of data in Table 1), showing a male child holding a gun, prompted strong negative reactions in that it led to the highest ratings of anxiety, worry, fear, dread, anger, frustration, bleakness, disgust, offence, contempt, shame, humiliation, guilt, responsibility and regret. Images A, C, and P produced the highest happiness and well-being ratings—all of these pictures showed smiling children. The highest mean ratings of pride came from picture F that showed the public figure with his two children.

Table 1: Mean ratings for each picture on each emotion scale used in Experiment 1

Emotion	C	C	C	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
	n	a	o	&C	&c	&d	&f	&k	&l	&p	e	g	h	i	j	m
Happiness	1.6	6.2	5.3	3.5	5.7	4.8	5.3	3.9	1.8	5.3	2.8	3.6	3.2	3.6	4.4	4.0
Well-being	1.8	5.9	5.3	3.6	5.7	4.9	5.2	3.8	2.0	5.3	2.5	3.7	3.2	3.4	4.0	4.2
Pride	2.4	3.6	3.3	2.3	3.8	3.1	3.9	2.8	2.3	3.8	2.0	2.8	3.6	2.6	2.6	3.0
Anxiety	5.2	1.6	1.8	3.9	1.9	2.7	2.3	3.7	4.6	2.6	3.5	3.5	3.9	3.2	3.1	3.0
Worry	5.3	1.5	1.6	4.1	1.9	2.8	2.3	3.7	4.7	2.2	3.8	3.4	3.8	3.3	3.3	3.0
Fear	5.1	1.3	1.9	3.1	1.5	2.3	1.8	2.9	4.5	1.9	2.7	2.8	3.7	2.7	2.7	2.3
Dread	7.5	1.3	1.6	2.8	1.4	2.2	1.7	2.5	4.1	1.7	2.6	2.8	3.4	2.6	2.4	2.1
Anger	5.2	1.3	1.5	3.2	1.3	1.7	2.1	2.8	4.2	1.6	2.7	2.1	3.2	2.3	1.6	1.7
Irritation	4.8	1.3	1.3	2.8	1.2	1.8	2.0	2.6	3.8	1.6	2.5	2.0	3.0	2.4	1.9	1.7
Frustration	4.9	1.3	1.4	3.1	1.3	1.7	1.7	2.7	3.8	1.6	2.6	2.2	2.9	2.6	2.1	1.9
Sadness	5.3	1.3	1.6	3.0	1.8	2.3	1.8	3.2	3.9	1.8	4.3	3.3	3.5	3.2	4.0	2.5
Bleakness	5.3	1.2	1.6	2.9	1.6	2.3	1.6	3.2	3.8	1.6	4.2	2.9	3.6	2.9	3.6	2.2
Disgust	4.6	1.1	1.3	2.1	1.2	1.4	1.6	2.5	3.2	1.4	2.4	1.8	2.1	1.9	1.4	1.5
Offence	4.2	1.1	1.4	2.0	1.1	1.4	1.4	2.1	2.9	1.4	2.1	1.8	1.9	1.9	1.4	1.6
Contempt	3.8	1.6	1.7	2.0	1.5	1.9	1.8	2.0	2.8	1.7	2.2	1.9	2.0	1.9	1.9	1.6
Shame	3.0	1.2	1.3	2.0	1.2	1.5	1.7	2.4	3.0	1.4	2.6	1.7	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.7
Humiliation	2.7	1.2	1.2	1.9	1.2	1.4	1.4	2.3	2.8	1.4	2.4	1.6	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.5
Guilt	3.3	1.2	1.3	2.0	1.5	1.5	1.5	2.3	2.6	1.4	2.6	2.0	2.3	2.2	2.0	1.6
Responsibility	3.3	2.1	1.8	2.8	1.9	2.0	2.0	2.5	2.9	2.5	3.1	2.0	3.0	2.8	3.1	2.2
Regret	3.3	1.4	1.4	2.2	1.5	1.6	1.8	2.4	2.7	1.6	2.6	2.0	2.6	2.3	2.2	1.9
Embarrassment	2.5	1.2	1.2	1.9	1.3	1.6	1.6	2.3	2.8	1.8	2.1	1.6	1.8	1.9	2.0	1.6
Self-consciousness	2.3	1.4	1.5	2.4	1.5	1.7	1.7	2.5	2.8	1.4	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.2	2.2	2.0

C= Child; A = Adult; a to n indicate charity advertisements

Based on our sample of images, and the emotion ratings, it seems that charities tend to make use of images that prompt positive emotions more than negative. Furthermore, with the exception of the images showing children (and particularly the image of a male child with a gun), most of the emotion ratings were at the lower end of the scale.

Experiment 2

Experiment 1 established that images used in charity advertising were perceived as emotion provoking. In particular, the images of children seem to be particularly effective prompts for emotion. Experiment 2 attempted to explore this potential further with the aim of identifying images that range from provoking strong negative emotions through to strong positive emotions. The aim was then to use these images in Experiment 3 to determine their effect on charitable behaviour. While Experiment 1 found a strong emotional reaction to the male child holding the gun, our interest was in the effect of the ‘person image’ and we specifically avoided images that showed objects in the following experiments.

Participants

Forty participants completed the questionnaire, 14 males with a mean age of 27 years and 26 females with a mean age of 25.7 years.

Questionnaire

Material on children’s emotions was searched for images of children showing extreme negative through to extreme positive emotion. We selected four images (all of girls aged from 6 to 9 years) for the study respectively expressing extreme negative emotion, mild negative emotion, mild positive emotion and extreme positive emotion. Each image was scanned into a computer and printed 6 x 7 cm in black and white at the top of an A4 page. The twenty-two 7-point emotion scales used in Experiment 1 were listed under each image and participants were asked to rate the degree to which the image evoked each emotion. The cover page of the questionnaire asked for participant age and gender. Five different orders of the four images were used.

Procedure

The experiment used a repeated measures design with each participant rating each image on the 22 emotion scales. Participants completed the questionnaire in a class setting, taking approximately 8 minutes to do so.

Results & Discussion

Table 2 shows the mean emotion scale ratings for each of the four images. The means shown in Table 2 largely confirm our classification of the four images. The extremely negative image received the largest mean ratings on 12 of the 19 negative emotions and the smallest mean ratings on all three positive emotions. In contrast the extremely positive image received the largest mean rating for two of the three positive emotions and was rated consistently very low on the negative emotions. The mild negative and mild positive images also obtained ratings consistent with our expectations.

Table 2: Mean ratings for each picture on each emotion scale used in Experiment 2

Emotion	Extreme Negative Image	Mild Negative Image	Mild Positive Image	Extreme Positive Image
Happiness	2.0	2.2	6.0	6.5
Well-being	2.1	2.3	5.8	6.2
Pride	1.8	2.2	3.9	3.6
Anxiety	4.1	3.8	1.4	1.3
Worry	4.4	4.0	1.3	1.2
Fear	3.1	2.4	1.1	1.2
Dread	3.1	2.4	1.1	1.1
Anger	2.0	2.8	1.1	1.2
Irritation	2.1	2.8	1.2	1.2
Frustration	2.5	3.2	1.1	1.2
Sadness	5.3	4.7	1.3	1.2
Bleakness	5.1	4.7	1.1	1.1
Disgust	2.0	2.9	1.0	1.0
Offence	2.0	2.8	1.0	1.0
Contempt	1.9	3.1	1.3	1.1
Shame	2.9	2.5	1.1	1.1
Humiliation	2.9	2.5	1.2	1.1
Guilt	2.4	2.4	1.3	1.1
Responsibility	2.8	2.4	1.5	1.3
Regret	3.0	2.8	1.3	1.2
Embarrassment	2.5	2.1	1.6	1.3
Self-consciousness	2.7	2.5	1.6	1.4

Experiment 3

Participants

Forty-five males with a mean age of 31.6 years and forty-nine females with a mean age of 28.8 years participated in Experiment 3.

Questionnaire

The cover page of the questionnaire asked for the participant's age, gender and 'How many times in the last 12 months have you made a donation?' The remainder of the questionnaire was comprised of five sections. Each section occupied a separate page, was headed with an identical narrative description of Charity X which either included one of the four images assessed in Experiment 2, or in one case no image at all, and asked 3 questions: (1) If approached by a collector, how much money would you donate to Charity X?; (2) If Charity X visited your residence collecting food items (e.g., tinned fruit, etc.), how many items would you donate?; (3) If Charity X decided to run a door-to-door appeal in your area, how much time would you have available to help?

The narrative charity description read: "*Charity X was founded over 50 years ago with the aim of rebuilding and re-establishing the lives of children and young people affected by the destruction of war. Since then, Charity X has made a difference to the health and wellbeing of over 3 million children. The help provided has been in the form of food, clothing, shelter,*

health care and education. However, in order to continue to bring hope to the lives of children, we need your help. It is through working with people like you, who are prepared to give the gift of time, finances or resources, that we are able to rebuild these precious lives. Help us help them make a difference”.

Five different versions of the questionnaire were printed with the sections in each in a different random order.

Procedure

Participants were told that the study was aimed at examining donating behaviour and that they were required to indicate their donation behaviour in response to five different requests.

Results & Discussion

Table 3 shows the mean (and standard deviation) responses to each question for each image and the results of repeated measures analysis of variance. Inspection of Table 3 indicates that the extreme negative emotion image produced the largest mean monetary donation, the largest mean number of items donated, and the largest time donation.

Table 3: Mean estimated monetary, item and time donations for each image condition used in Experiment 3

Question	Extreme Negative Image	Mild Negative Image	Mild Positive Image	Extreme Positive Image	No Image	Anova F(5,87) =
Money	6.75 (8.93)	5.65 (5.64)	4.88 (5.30)	5.15 (7.22)	4.48 (6.84)	19.84, P < .000
Items	3.21 (2.30)	2.72 (2.01)	2.45 (2.00)	2.53 (2.00)	2.21 (2.00)	36.596, P < .000
Time	1.55 (4.87)	.91 (2.15)	.84 (2.06)	.82 (1.59)	1.08 (4.57)	5.447, P < .01
Compliance Money	85.2	87.3	83.0	80.9	73.5	
Compliance Items	87.3	86.2	82.0	83.0	75.6	
Compliance Time	41.5	39.2	39.2	37.3	30.9	

Donating is also concerned with compliance rates, defined as the percentage of a population that donate. Seventy-nine percent of our sample indicated they had donated at least once in the past 12 months (range = 0-52 times, mean = 5.6 times). The bottom section of Table 3 shows the compliance rates for the 5 experimental conditions. Values over 79 percent in Table 3 indicate a compliance rate above the population baseline. Inspection of the compliance rates indicates that the extremely negative and mildly negative images generally

had the highest compliance rates, and for money and item donation these were above the population compliance baseline.

Experiment 4

Experiment 3 found that images showing negative emotions seem to increase the quantity of donations (money, items and time), and also that it may not simply be the nature of the emotion (positive/negative), but the degree or strength of the emotion which is important. Experiment 4 attempted to systematically explore this possibility, and also to replicate the finding that images showing negative emotions increase the quantity of donation in comparison with narrative only requests.

Participants

Forty-six participants, 21 males with a mean age of 24.6 years, and 25 females with a mean age of 24.0 years completed the experimental questionnaire.

Questionnaire

An actor (7 year old girl) was employed to generate a sample of photographs showing a range of sad emotions. The actor's mother provided short stories to the actor to evoke the emotions, and took the photographs. The actor was fully briefed before and after the photo session. A total of 40 photographs were produced, and 4 photographs were selected for the study (labelled B to E in Table 4). Selection was based on the photographs showing mild to extreme sadness, respectively.

Table 4: Mean estimated monetary, item and time donations for each image condition used in Experiment 4

Question	No Image	Mild Negative Image			Extreme Negative Image
	A	B	C	D	E
Money	5.77 (10.4)	6.28 (9.3)	6.08 (8.5)	7.33 (10.18)	7.88 (10.45)
Items	3.0 (3.0)	3.34 (3.76)	3.39 (3.26)	3.65 (3.24)	4.17 (4.04)
Time	45.7 (118.2)	48.6 (122.6)	49.3 (122.4)	56.8 (122.4)	65.8 (145.3)
Compliance Money	80.4	82.6	84.7	86.9	86.9
Compliance Items	78.2	82.6	86.9	84.7	89.1
Compliance Time	36.9	39.1	41.3	43.4	41.3

Each photograph was combined with the narrative charity description used in Experiment 3. The experimental questionnaire contained each of these charity descriptions, plus a narrative only description. The three questions used in Experiment 3 were listed under each charity description. The different charity descriptions were combined into the questionnaire in 5 different random orders.

Procedure

The experiment used a repeated measures design, with every participant completing the donation questions for each variant of the charity description. A research assistant, blind to the experimental hypotheses, was employed to collect the data. A haphazard sampling technique was used with individuals approached outside a university cafeteria.

Results and Discussion

Table 4 shows the means and standard deviations for each of the three donation questions, for each of the 5 charity description variants. Repeated measures analysis of variance indicated a significant difference in the means for all three donation types: money ($F(4, 176) = 6.135, P < .001$), items ($F(4, 176) = 4.699, P < .01$), and time ($F(4, 176) = 3.535, P < .01$). Post hoc contrasts using the Scheffé test indicated that the means for the narrative only variant and extreme sad variant were significantly different for both the item question and the time question. For donations of money, Scheffé tests indicated mean differences between conditions B and E, C and E, A and E, A and B, and A and C. These results replicate the findings of Experiment 3 in that charity descriptions which include a sad image resulted in individuals stating they would donate more money, items and time, compared to a narrative only description. Furthermore, as the strength of the emotion increases, the level of stated donating increased, significantly for money, and as a trend in the means for items and time.

As noted in Experiment 3, donating is also concerned with compliance rates. Eighty-two percent of our sample indicated they had donated at least once in the past 12 months (range = 0-90 times, mean = 6.1 times). The bottom section of Table 4 shows the compliance rates for the 5 experimental conditions. Values over 82 percent in Table 4 indicate a compliance rate above the population baseline. Inspection of the compliance rates indicates that the charity descriptions that included an image generally had higher compliance rates, compared to the narrative only variant.

General Discussion

The present results are very clear and can be summarised succinctly.

- 1) Images of children used by charities can provoke emotional reactions.
- 2) Images of children that evoke negative emotions appear to produce more and greater potential donations than those that evoke positive emotions.
- 3) Within the range of emotional intensity which we manipulated, the stronger the negative emotion evoked by an image of a child then the greater was the level of stated potential donating.

These results have both theoretical and practical implications. Given that the type of images used by charitable organisations do evoke emotional reactions in those that see them—are cognitively processed as suggested by Scott (1994)—presumably through some process of empathy, then it would be important theoretically to explore the nature of this emotional experience. Is it akin to the same emotion evoked by a ‘real-life’ event or is it in some sense

distanced from this? This is similar to the paradox of fiction as discussed, for example, by Levinson (1999). To take this problem to an image on a charity donation box for example, we know that the image is an image and we know that we normally have emotional reactions only to 'real' events, so how can we have a true emotional reaction to the image? Is it a different type or order of emotion? Be this as it may, the images, particularly negative ones, do evoke emotions.

At a more practical level, the message from the present results is clear. Currently, based on our ongoing collection and examination of charity advertising materials, charities appear to use images of people, sometimes adults and sometimes children, which evoke more positive than negative emotions. Our results, which are consistent with those of Eayrs and Ellis (1990), suggest charities should carefully select images for their advertisements that show negative emotions such as sadness. Of course, the experiments reported here are of the questionnaire type, although the results are extremely consistent and clear. Nevertheless, a field study on actual donations, rather than prospective donations, remains to be done. Supporting the investment in such a study is the work of Eamonn and Bibby (2002) which reported that stated intentions to donate were predictive of donating

A further issue that needs empirical clarification concerns the nature of the emotion evoking material used by charity organisations. In the present study the images have all been of people, some of whom are expressing emotion. It is also possible to use images of children or adults undergoing some type of positive or negative experiences, which could range from mild to extreme. Again, these would be likely to evoke emotional reactions in the potential donor, but perhaps of a different type to those evoked by emotional expressions. While there appears to be utility for a charity to use emotion provoking images, this must be balanced with a consideration of the ethics of such practices. Obviously charities need to raise money for various causes, however, this needs to be balanced against the rights of individuals to have their dignity protected. Perhaps the answer to this dilemma is to use actors to generate appropriate images and have clearly stated debriefing procedures.

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