JOURNAL OF
EMERGING INVESTIGATORS

Article

The role of recipients' race, gender, and species as incentives for charitable giving

Natalia Antonides-Jensen [1] , Roberto Antonides Campos [1]
[1] American School, Madrid, Spain

SUMMARY

While most not-for-profit organizations (NFPOs) find it challenging to raise funds and generate public interest in their causes, NFPOs focused on the welfare of animals seem to face even less support from society. This idea motivated us to investigate what factors drive individuals to help someone or something. Specifically, we tested the hypothesis that individuals support causes that are similar to themselves in terms of race, gender, and species. If this hypothesis were true, it could explain why animal-focused organizations have a harder time fundraising than organizations focused on helping humans. It would also have implications on how NFPOs should define target sponsor segments and efficiently use their resources in fundraising. Overall, we found that our participants favored causes that were closely associated with their race, gender, and species profile. We were able to statistically support the assertion that white Spanish subjects from Madrid overwhelmingly prefer charities aimed at white Spanish children instead of black African children. With respect to gender, our data overwhelmingly support the hypothesis that women prefer charities aimed at supporting a women's health issue versus a men's health issue. Our results with respect to men favoring men's health issues versus women's health issues were inconclusive. Finally, our data shows that overall, preferences for animal charities are lower than for charities supporting humans.

INTRODUCTION

In 2017, a total of $410 billion was donated to charitable causes in the United States, an increase of 3% inflation-adjusted dollars from 2016 (1). Outside of the United States the charity market is also changing.

According to DAFNE (Donors and Foundations Network in Europe), there are over 129,000 not-for-profit foundations (NFPOs) in Europe, most of which are relatively young (2). For example, more than 70% of Germany's foundations were established after 1990 and in Spain, 69% of foundations are under 18 years old (2). The global south has also experienced growth in the non-profit sector, although more inconsistently (2). The recent growth in the total amount of money donated to charities is due to several factors, including an increase in individual wealth and smaller family sizes, which lead to individuals who can afford to donate large sums (2).

In the United States in 2017, education was the most popular charitable cause (14% of donations) followed by human services charities (12%) (1). Even though donations to animal and environmental charities increased, they only made up 3% of the total 2017 United States donations (1). Internationally, education was the most popular cause, followed by health and social services.

Why is this the current situation? Why are certain causes more popular than others? It is clear that people's preferences are developed in very complicated ways. Context seems to play a big role. While religious charities are the most popular for baby boomers in the United States, millennials prefer to support children- and youth-related causes (3). Age likely plays a role in determining people's preferences. One's nationality also exerts an influence. A 2017 study found that for North Americans, the most popular charities were religious-based, contrary to Asia where children- and youth-related charities were most popular (3).

Other studies show that individuals want to fit into the norms of their social groups when deciding on donating to charitable causes. The UK Behavioural Insights Team demonstrated that communicating charity norms of a subject's profile (such as race and gender) increased average contributions (4). That is, when it comes to making charitable donations, individuals desire to follow the norm of their profile group (4). Another study by Croson and Shang demonstrated that revealing similarities between a prospective donor and the profile of current donors increased the probability and overall amount of donation by the prospective donor (5). In summary, individuals are more likely to make higher donations to causes that are supported by other individuals with the same profile characteristics (race, gender, etc.).

There is a wide body of research aimed at understanding individual motivation driving charity. In the work, "Behavior and Charitable Giving," the authors outline much of the research performed to understand individual behavior and therefore identify the strategies that can improve charity fundraising (6). We learn that individuals are influenced by the charitable actions of their social peers when making their own donation decisions, so a charity can boost fundraising by stating that others of similar race, income, social status, and gender support it. We also learn that providing specific examples of the benefits of a charity group also increases the possibility of raising funds (6). To add to this existing body of knowledge, it is important to understand whether demographic similarities between donors and recipients also motivates charitable giving.

Without contradicting previous studies on the behavior and motivation of charitable giving, we proposed that the profile of the charitable target group plays an important role

_____ Organization dedicated to fighting child poverty in Spain
_____ Organization dedicated to promoting sustainable development
_____ Humanitarian help to children in Africa
_____ Organization dedicated to mammary cancer research
_____ Help to abandoned dogs
_____ Medical help to men suffering from prostate cancer

Figure 1. Charity descriptions used for preference survey. Participants ranked their charity preference from 1 to 6, with 1 being the highest (most likely to donate) score.

in determining the donor's charity preferences. The more donors are alike to something or someone, the more likely they are to help them. For this reason, donors tend to choose to help charities that help those with similar backgrounds to themselves. Our experiment tested this hypothesis, and we concluded that similarity does in fact play an important role in charitable giving decisions.

To test our hypothesis, we developed a survey which collected personal demographic data from subject participants. The survey then asked the participants to rank six different causes in order of preference. The survey was formulated to detect any favoritism to causes associated with the same race, species, and gender as the participant. Of the six possible answers, two charities compared race preferences, two charities compared gender preferences, one charity was an animal-related charity, and the last charity was a random choice not associated with any of the previous charities. To assess the impact of the race variable, we analyzed the preference of the two race charities by the subject. If the subject gave a higher rating to the same race charity, then we considered it to be a positive result, and if the subject preferred a different race charity, we deemed it a negative result. To test the impact of gender, we carried out the same process of comparison with respect to the two gender-based charities. Finally, to test the preference for an animal-related charity, we identified the average position selected with respect to the other five "human"-oriented charities.

RESULTS

Race Test

We asked a group of people to rank six different charities in order of preference, with 1 being the highest score (most likely to donate to) (**Figure 1**) . Two of those charities were race-related. Of these two, one charity helped poor African children and the other helped poor Spanish children. The other four charities were of a different nature, serving as fillers with respect to the race test, so that the subjects were unaware of our race analysis. For the race test, we only paid attention to the relative ranking of just the two race-related charities. A subject that ranked the race-related charity identified with his/her own race profile higher than the race-related charity that differed from his/her race profile was given a positive result, and a subject that ranked the race-related charity that differed from his/her race profile lower than the race-related charity identified with his/her own race was given a negative result.

Of the 102 subjects, 100 were white and two were Latino; 58 were women and 44 were men (**Figure 2**). Because the Latino sample was so small, only the white population was analyzed in terms of race-related charity preference. For the sample of 100 white subjects, information was collected from 57 white women and 43 white men (**Figure 2**). The average age of the subjects was 47.3 years. If the subject showed preference for the charity that shared similar traits by ranking the white Spanish children charity higher than the African children charity, then the survey result was a positive with a numerical value 1. If the subject selected preference for the charity without similar traits, the African children charity, then the survey results for that participant was deemed negative with a numerical value 0.

82% of the subjects showed preference for the charity

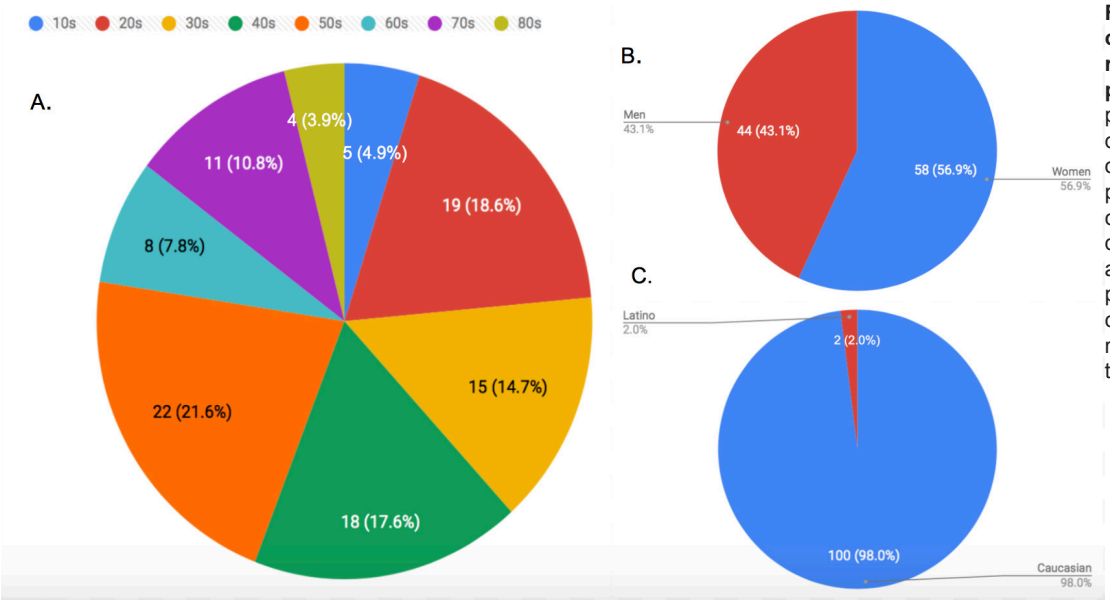

Figure 2 . Distribution of age, sex, and race of survey participants. (**A**) A pie chart illustrating the distribution of ages among the participants. (**B**) A pie chart illustrating the distribution of women and men among the participants. (**C**) A pie chart illustrating the races present among the participants.

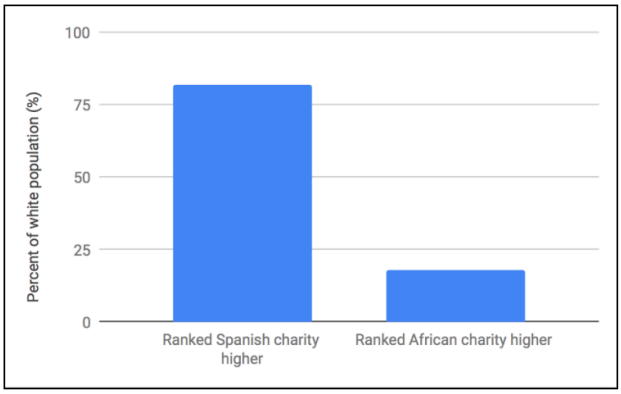

Figure 3. Graphical results for the race test. Graph illustrating what percentage of the Caucasian population favored the Spanish charity and the African charity. The graph shows how the Caucasian population preferred the Spanish charity.

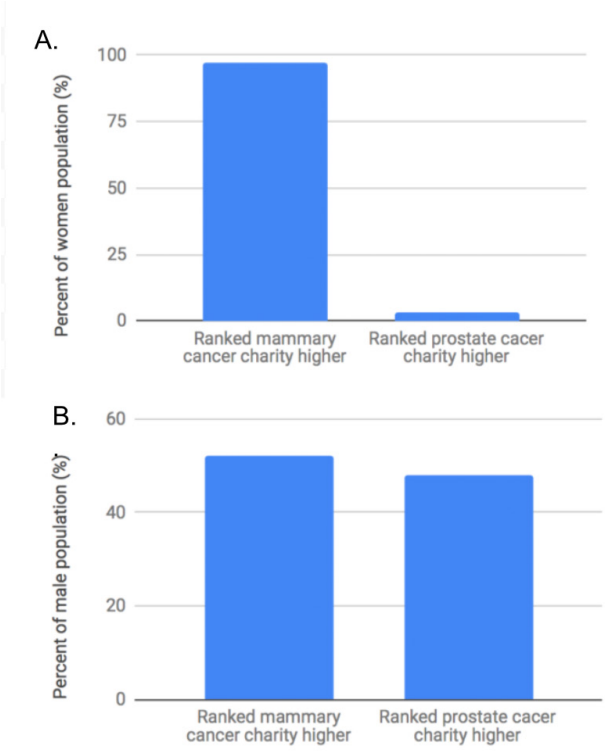

Figure 4. Graphical results for the gender test. (**A**) A graph illustrating what percentage of the female population favored the mammary cancer charity and the prostate cancer charity. (**B**) A graph illustrating what percentage of the male population favored the mammary cancer charity and the prostate cancer charity.

supporting similar traits, the white Spanish children charity (**Figure 3**). Those who preferred the Spanish children charity ranked it by an average of 1.98 choices higher than the African children charity within the 1-6 score scale (*t*-test, *p* -value = 0.032).

Gender Test

For the gender preference test, we defined two of the six survey charities as gender-oriented charities. The charities tested were mammary cancer as a female-oriented charity and prostate cancer as a male-oriented charity. If the subjects showed preference for the charity that shared similar gender traits (by ranking this cause higher up), then the survey result was a positive with a numerical value 1. If the subject selected preference for the charity with a different gender trait (by ranking this causes lower than the other), then the survey results for that participant was deemed negative with a numerical value 0.

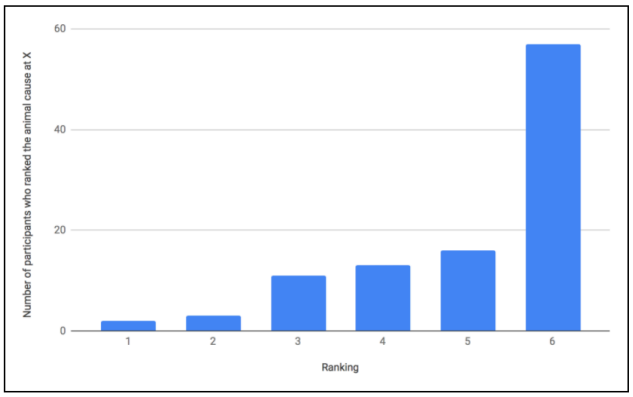

Figure 5. Graphical results for the species test. Graph illustrating the number of subjects that ranked the animal cause at each level. Note that 1 is the highest ranking and 6 is the lowest ranking. The graph shows how the majority of people gave the animal charity fairly low scores.

The overall survey resulted in 77% of the subjects preferring the charity supporting people with similar gender traits. On average, those who preferred the cancer charity related to their gender ranked it by an average of 1.66 choices higher than the selection for the cancer charity related to the opposite gender.

23% of the participants ranked the cancer charity related to the opposite gender above the cancer charity related to their own gender. Within the female subgroup of 58 subjects, 97% preferred the mammary cancer cause above the prostate cancer cause (**Figure 4**), and on average, selected mammary cancer by 1.68 degrees above prostate cancer. However, the 44 male subjects also preferred the mammary cancer charity (**Figure 4**). 52% ranked the mammary cancer higher by an average of 1.62 degrees.

Animal Test

Of the charities we asked the population to rank, there was just one related to animals. The relative positioning of this charity to the other human related charities tells us about preference for animal-related charities. The majority of the sample population favored human-related causes rather than animal-related causes. The average placement for the animal cause was position 5.04 on the 1-6 scale. Only two subjects ranked the animal cause as the most important, while 57 ranked it as the least important (**Figure 5**). In total, 64.7% of the subjects surveyed selected the animal-related cause

behind all four human-related causes, 12.7% of the subjects selected the animal-related cause behind three of the four human-related causes, 12.7% of the subjects selected the animal-related cause behind two of the four human-related causes, 7.8% of the subjects selected the animal-related cause behind one of the four human-related causes, and only 2.0% of the subjects selected the animal-related cause before all four of the human-related causes (**Figure 5**).

DISCUSSION

Our initial hypothesis was that individuals are biased towards supporting groups or causes that are similar to themselves in terms of race, gender, species, etc. If this hypothesis is true, it could explain why animal-focused organizations have a harder time fundraising than organizations focused on helping humans. It would also have implications on how NFPOs should fundraise, define target sponsor segments, and efficiently use their investments in fundraising.

With regards to the race test, the fact that almost all Spaniards prefer helping the Spanish kids shows like-race favoritism was present, supporting the hypothesis. That the *p* -value was smaller than 0.05 indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the preference for the Spanish children charity and the African children charity. This means that the like-race favoritism was strong, further supporting our hypothesis.

It is important to note, however, that the reason for such results might not be due to the theory that we support those most similar to ourselves. The Spanish charity might have been picked because it was generally more appealing. While the African and Spanish charities were presented in the most similar way possible, there could be other aspects rather than race that could have caused a favoritism towards the Spanish charity. Ideally, both Spanish and African people would have been tested for this experiment. To really support the hypothesis, the results should have shown how a group of Spanish participants chose the Spanish children charity in a significantly higher proportion, and a group of African participants, for example, chose the African children charity in a significantly higher proportion.

Another reason why Spaniards preferred this charity might not be solely because the children were of their own race. In fact, this test did not only test race but also nationality and geographic location as the two charities compared differed in all three ways. The results, thus, show that it is not just that we prefer helping those of the same race, we also prefer helping those near us nationally and geographically. The reason this might be, however, can vary. One hypothesis is that the pure fact that the children share the person's race, nationality, and geographic location pushes them to help those children. However, other factors can be at play. For example, some Spaniards might prefer to give money to Spanish organizations so that the Spanish economy (the economy that affects them most directly) becomes richer. Also, they might trust Spanish-based NFPOs more than African-based NFPOs. Thus, they would choose to help the Spanish kids not because they are Spanish, but because they trust more that the Spanish association will actually use their money for a good cause.

With regards to the gender test, the female subjects' preferences suggested that humans prefer helping those like themselves, in this case those of the same gender. The results for the male subjects, however, supported the null hypothesis that preference is not tied to gender. This may be because, while in the race test the choices were very clear and easy to understand, the choices in the gender test may not be equal.

That is, the level of awareness of mammary cancer versus prostate cancer is not the same. The level of awareness of mammary cancer is higher than that of prostate cancer (7). Hence in the gender experiment, two forces influenced the results – the similarity bias and the level of awareness of the two cancers by the subjects.

Overall, however, we believe these results show that some form of gender favoritism exists. However, other forces could also have been at play. For example, women might have chosen to support mammary cancer not because it is a cancer that affects women, but because it may be a cancer that affects more people in general. Also, more women might have supported mammary cancer because it is a cancer that affects them individually not because it is a cancer that affects a certain gender in most cases. If some of the women surveyed suffered from mammary cancer, it is very likely that they choose this cause really to help themselves. While it is unlikely that all women who answered the survey suffered from mammary cancer, it is true that some of the women might have. While this might also explain why some men chose prostate cancer, it is important to consider that prostate cancer is less common, so the likelihood that this is the case is smaller. Nonetheless, the fact that women might have chosen the mammary cause and men might have chosen the prostate cause because they themselves were suffering from the disease reduces support for the hypothesis.

Finally, for the animal test, the subjects' overwhelming preference for human-related causes versus animal-related causes further supports the hypothesis that we are more likely to help those like us. These results further explain why it is so difficult for animal causes to compete for charity funds – the recipients of the charity are the most dissimilar from the population of donors. However, the reason for such results might not have been simply because of like-species favoritism. Other forces could have been at play. For example, people may prefer the human-oriented charities because those charities are better known.

Another factor that could explain the preference for human charities over animal charities could be an idea that the human species has a higher level of self-awareness and hence its suffering is greater than that of animals. These concepts could be ingrained in religious beliefs that place the human as a special species.

For all three tests, it is important to consider the role

wording might have played in the results. Certain charities were presented in the survey with a different writing style. For example, the description "organization dedicated to helping poor children in Spain" is written more actively than the other choice, "helping children in Africa". Such differences could have been at play, pushing people to pick the option that was better written. This would be a serious flaw in the experiment as wording would be involuntarily pushing people to certain option, disguising what they actually prefer. However, most charities were presented in a somewhat similar manner, so we do not think this flaw is serious enough to make the experiment inconclusive. While alternative explanations for the results exist for each test, we believe that the results in general provided substantial evidence that supported the hypothesis: people prefer to help those like themselves.

As the sample of subjects surveyed was quite large and varied, it is important to be cautious when generalizing the results to the entire population. This is especially true when considering that the sample consisted largely of white Spaniards from a specific neighborhood in Madrid.

For NFPOs, these are important findings to consider. With this information, NFPOs can better understand where their prospective support will come from and thus they can implement more effective fundraising strategies to reach specific target segments that is most likely to donate to their causes.

At first glance the results may seem discouraging for organizations aimed at helping those different from the general population. However, the results do show that for those causes there is a small sample of the population willing to help the cause. With this in mind, NFPOs understand how important it is to create specifically aimed fundraising campaigns. It is not efficient to carry out general fundraising campaigns to the whole population when only a very small portion of the audience will be moved to donate. What NFPOs need to do is find a way to target that small group, wisely using their fundraising resources. For example, our research showed that 2% of the participants ranked the animal cause first. While this might seem like a very small and thus discouraging portion, there is in fact a small proportion of the general population that breaks from the norm and supports animal causes. Animal NFPOs should perform research to find the specific profile characteristics of this small segment of the population and design their fundraising activities to reach that specifically defined segment.

Furthermore, the reason why people tend to prefer helping those similar to themselves might be simply because they have more information about issues affecting people like them. For example, women are probably more aware of the harmful effects of breast cancer than prostate cancer, a cancer that will never affect them. Understanding this is crucial for NFPOs. The reason we like helping those similar to ourselves is because we better understand them and can thus empathize more. Through campaigns, NFPOs should aim at educating people about their cause so that they can become as sympathetic as those who are similar to the beneficiaries of the cause.

Many future research questions arise from this investigation. It would be interesting to isolate different age groups and nationalities to see if the importance of similarity is different for distinct generations and nationalities. Also, as this investigation underscores the necessity of profiling, it would be important to further explore the most effective ways of doing this.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To test the hypothesis, we created a survey which was completed by all participants. The survey consisted of two sections. The first section asked for the participant's age, race, and gender. The second section asked the subjects to rank six causes in order of preference. To quote, the survey instructions read, "Please rank the following causes from 1 to 6, 1 being the one you are most interested in actively helping". For each of the causes, we did not use names of charities but instead described the cause. In **Figure 1**, the descriptions we used for each charity are shown. After extensive surveying of random people on the streets, information from 102 subjects was collected.

The experiment was conducted at Plaza de Felipe II in Madrid, Spain. Plaza de Felipe II is located in a middle to upper middle-class neighborhood of Madrid. It is a highly transited commercial area of Madrid. The surveyor asked the passersby if they would be willing to take a survey regarding their charitable organization preferences. They were asked to sign a consent form and then completed the survey. The surveys were performed over a period of four evenings from 6-8 pm. Those that took the survey were offered a paper survey and a pen to mark their preferences.

To analyze the relationship between the subjects' race, gender, and species and their preferences we observed the relative positioning of certain charities. In the gender and race test, we identified if the charity of the participants' same gender/race was preferred over the charity of unlike race/gender. This was accomplished by comparing the rankings (1-6) of each of the two charities (the two race-related charities for the race test and the two gender-related charities for the gender test). If the participant placed the like-charity at a higher ranking, the response resulted in a positive 1, while a lower ranking of the like-charity counted as a 0. For the species test, we calculated what percentage of the subjects placed the animal-related charity in each rank position.

Of the six charities presented, one was a “filler” charity concerning environmental causes. This cause was included as a filler choice to distract participants in order to make it difficult, if not impossible for participants to understand that the survey was testing the relative race and gender preferences. If this cause was removed, it would be more evident that some causes were grouped in pairs and were only different with regard to gender or race. This could have placed pressure on

the participant and biased their responses.

When analyzing, we also carried out a *t*-test for the race test results. Microsoft Excel was used to calculate the percentages and averages and to perform the statistical calculations and the *t*-test.

Received: March 17, 2019
Accepted: July 08, 2019
Published: July 31, 2019

REFERENCES

1. "Giving Statistics." *Charity Navigator*, Retrieved on 3 Jan, 2019 from www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=content.view&tid=42.
2. "Giving USA 2019 Annual Report of Philanthropy." *Giving America*. Retrieved on 3 Jan, 2019 from www.grenzebachglier.com/wp-content/uplods/2018/06/Grenzebach-Glier-Webinar-Giving-USA-Report-6.12.2018.pdf.
3. Non Profit Tech for Good. *2017 Global Trends in Giving Report*. Retrieved on 3 Jan, 2019 from https://givingreport.ngo/.
4. UK Behavioural Insights Team (2013, May 24). *Applying Behavioural Insights to Charitable Giving*. Retrieved in Feb, 2019 from https://www.bi.team/publications/applying-behavioural-insights-to-charitable-giving/.
5. Croson, R., & Shang, J. (2015, July 20). *Social Influences in Giving*. Retrieved in May 2019 from https://nonprofitquarterly.org/social-influences-in-giving/.
6. Ideas 42 (2014). *Behavior and Charitable Giving*. Retrieved in May 2019 from https://www.givingtuesday.org/lab/2016/09/behavior-and-charitable-giving.
7. Schulmana, Claude C. "Awareness of Prostate Cancer among the General Public: Findings of an Independent International Survey." *European Urology* , vol. 44, no. 3, Sept. 2003, pp. 294-302.