

When Altruistic Decisions Shape Egoistic Motives: Motivation Shift in Sequential Charitable Support

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Abstract

Prior studies of sequential moral behaviors suggest that when people believe they have made a moral decision (e.g., engaged in a prosocial act), subsequent decisions would be less moral. This paper investigates the motivation shift hypothesis, suggesting that people's prosocial behavior is consistent when asked to make subsequent donations; however, their prosocial motivation is inconsistent. To test this hypothesis, two charitable message appeals were used: a message that focuses on the benefits to others (i.e., altruistic other-benefit) and a message that focuses on the donors' benefits (i.e., egoistic self-benefit). In a pilot study and three experiments, this paper suggests that after agreeing to an altruistic charitable request, people are more generous if they see a self-benefit message appeal. We propose that consumers' moral status plays a role which increases egoistic motivation in subsequent charitable decisions, following an altruistic charitable giving. This pattern is only observed when the subsequent request is asked by a different charity, as opposed to the same charity.

Keywords: moral licensing, charitable message appeals, moral status, sequential prosocial decision.

1. Introduction

As a result of targeted advertising, consumers are often exposed to additional charitable requests after making an initial donation (Xiao and Yue 2020). Almost 85% of people who make their first donation make another donation to either the same or a different charity (Bennett and Ali-Choudhury 2009), indicating that most people are consistent in their giving behavior. We argue that although people are more likely to become consistent donors, their follow-up donation is reduced if stimulated by unsuitable motivation. We show that this is because people shift their donation motivation after making an initial donation.

It has been long acknowledged that the motivation to help others may stem from a genuine desire to benefit others and oneself. Therefore, charitable campaigns often use messages that appeal to an other-benefit or self-benefit motivation that may induce different responses from potential donors (White and Peloza 2009). For instance, people respond more positively to an other-benefit message when it is presented in public. Meanwhile, a self-benefit message is more effective in private settings (White and Peloza 2009). While consumers, in general, are more attracted to other-benefit appeals, self-benefit appeals are more effective when consumers are mentally or physically exhausted (Jin et al. 2021). However, little is known regarding the effectiveness of other-benefit versus self-benefit messages when they are used in a sequential donation context. An exception to this research gap is a study by Brunel and Nelson (2003) which showed significant gender differences in responses to sequential charitable appeals. When people were presented with two different charitable messages sequentially, females favored the first charitable appeal, while males preferred the second. Their study provided empirical evidence to suggest that message order matters. Nevertheless, information regarding the effectiveness of message appeals after an initial donation is lacking. Given that both self and

other-benefit messages are frequently used by charities, people may be sequentially exposed to these messages in daily life.

The present study aims to investigate the effectiveness of other vs. self-benefit messages in a sequential donation context. Specifically, we examine how people shift their giving motivation from altruistic to egoistic when asked to make a follow-up donation. In practice, we seek a way to increase prosocial consistency among those who have made an initial donation by using a combination of different message appeals. Other-benefit and self-benefit messages appeal to distinct motivations, as well as signaling different levels of morality in the act of prosocial behavior. Altruistic helping is normatively considered more moral than egoistic helping (White and Peloza 2009) because altruistic helping focuses on reducing others' hardships, while egoistic helping appeals to one's self-interest. We found that although people are consistent in their donation behavior, their donation motivation is shifted from altruistic to egoistic. This motivation shift indicates that the type of message appeal can increase or decrease consistent prosocial behavior. Furthermore, we show that prior altruistic helping enhances moral status, which promotes a decision to engage in egoistic helping afterward. However, this motivation shift only occurs when the subsequent donation is requested by a different charity, not by the same charity.

Overall, the present study contributes to our understanding in four ways. First, this study is among the first to demonstrate the effectiveness of combining different message appeals in a sequential donation context. In a pilot and three experiments we show how a prior act can shape one's motivation for a subsequent act in sequential donation requests (altruistic act → egoistic motive). Second, we empirically show that altruistic decisions boost one's moral status, which in turn shifts one's prosocial motivation from altruistic to egoistic. Third, our findings offer

practical implications, by highlighting the importance of a combination appeal strategy. Where previous research suggests matching an appeal type to a charitable context, our findings suggest that a combination of charitable appeals can be helpful in a sequential request scenario. Our findings suggest that charities may maximize donations (both time and money) when an other-benefit message is used first, followed by self-benefit message. Lastly, our findings have the potential to motivate future investigations into the impact of motivation shift upon active donations (e.g., donor retention, reoccurring donation decision-making, donor rewards etc.). In summation, these findings have important implications for understanding the role of different charitable appeals and sequential prosocial decisions.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Other-benefit vs. self-benefit charitable appeals

Two types of appeals are often explored in the advertising literature: other-benefit and self-benefit appeals (Chang 2012; Chang and Lee 2011; Jin et al. 2021; Kim et al. 2021). Other-benefit message appeals (i.e., altruistic appeals) highlight the direct impact that a donation will have on the beneficiary, while self-benefit appeals (i.e., egoistic appeals) focus on the rewards to be accrued by the benefactor. These self-benefit rewards may include personal health (Jaeger and Weber 2020), reputational (White and Peloza 2009) or monetary benefits (Jolene Fisher and Hopp 2020). Brunel and Nelson (2000) argue that among all prosocial motives, egoism and altruism are the most important ones in terms of persuasion.

There exists debate regarding which type of appeal is more effective (White and Peloza 2009). Proponents of self-benefit appeals relate prosocial behavior with a cost-benefit analysis.

They suggest that people engage in charity when the favorable incentives for themselves outweigh the costs (Ferguson et al. 2008; Holmes et al. 2002). In contrast, others believe that other-benefit messages are more effective due to their non-commercial nature, which emphasises altruism (Fisher *et al.* 2008). The third form of appeal is a mixture of egoistic and altruistic. However, Feiler et al. (2012) argue that mixing both appeals together would have a negative effect because the presence of both motives will increase donors' perceptions of persuasive intent and subsequently lead to negative responses to the charity. Despite the debate, altruistic helping is commonly considered more moral than egoistic helping. This is because altruistic helping may increase another's welfare at the expense of one's own welfare (Eisenberg *et al.* 2016).

2.2. Moral consistency vs. moral licensing

Research on moral self-regulation can be divided into moral consistency and moral licensing. Moral consistency refers to consecutive moral actions when people who showed virtuous behavior subsequently make donations (Iten *et al.* 2018). Moral consistency has its roots in the cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1962) and self-perception (Bem 1972) theories, which propose that individuals tend to avoid a disharmony between beliefs and attitudes. In contrast to moral consistency, moral licensing is a tendency to diverge from a former moral action in a subsequent decision (Schlegelmilch and Simbrunner 2019). Apparently, acting virtuously can license people to do otherwise later (Effron and Conway 2015). Thus, moral licensing is a tendency to commit morally ambiguous behavior after previously engaging in moral acts. Moral licensing started to receive attention following the work of Monin and Miller (2001), who argued that people are more likely to state a prejudiced view after expressing a non-prejudiced opinion.

Following Monin and Miller's work, moral licensing theory was widely used to explain motivation and behavior in several research domains such as racist attitudes (Effron et al. 2009; Merritt et al. 2012), environmentally friendly behaviors (Mazar and Zhong 2010; Meijers et al. 2019), consumer purchasing decisions (Huber et al. 2008; Khan and Dhar 2006) and charity donations (Conway and Peetz 2012; Cornelissen et al. 2013; Jordan et al. 2011).

Prior consumer behavior studies reinforced the argument that people license their problematic behavior after a prior moral act. For example, Meijers et al. (2019) argue that purchasing environmentally friendly products may reduce intention to engage in environmentally friendly behavior afterwards. In the same vein, consumers who imagined themselves as moral give less amount of donation than those in control group (Hu and Tao 2021). Scholars argue that the satisfaction associated with making significant progress towards a goal, engenders incongruent subsequent decisions (Huber et al. 2008).

2.3. Motivation shift hypothesis

Consumers often make a decision which is affected by decisions which precede it. In a prosocial context, prior moral behavior can influence subsequent prosocial decision-making (Liu and Aaker 2008; Schlegelmilch and Simbrunner 2019). When people are considering whether to help others, their prior experiences with morality may assist them in making a subsequent decision. Recognizing prior moral behavior licenses people to perform more self-interested behaviors (Cornelissen et al. 2013). For example, when people reflect on their good behavior in the past, or describe themselves as moral, they are less likely to cooperate (Kong *et al.* 2020) or donate (Conway and Peetz 2012; Cornelissen et al. 2013; Jordan et al. 2011). Nisan and Horenczyk (1990) argue that when people encounter a moral conflict, they do not aspire to be

virtuous, but rather permit themselves to deviate away from what they believe to be moral behavior. This deviation is thought to occur despite one's knowledge of right from wrong and despite one's ability to resist temptation. Rather, these deviations are thought to be guided by the principle of moral licensing.

We propose that a moral licensing effect may occur in consumers' donation motivation while retaining their consistent prosocial behavior. In this instance, people's behavior is positively consistent where a prosocial deed is followed by another one, however, their prosocial motivation is shifted from altruistic to egoistic. Wang (2021) suggests that even when people voluntarily engage in prosocial behaviors, it is natural that the prosocial actors have a sense of unpleasant sacrifice. In a more extreme case, Fujiwara (2009) argues that prosocial behavior is associated with the development of major depression due to imbalance relationship between the giver and the beneficiary. Given that consistent prosocial behavior comes with award and sacrifice, people strategically accommodate both outcomes by keep helping consistently while shifting their prosocial motivation. In line with that, Hansen *et al.* (2018) argues that one way to retain prosocial behavior constantly is by maintaining a good balance between the interests of others and oneself.

Ross (2011) discusses prosocial motivation in terms of egoism and altruism where the central concept of egoism is to fulfil one's self-interest, as opposed to altruism which focuses on benefits for the beneficiary. To explicate the motivation shift hypothesis, we included different types of charitable message appeal (other-benefit vs. self-benefit) within the framework. Since an egoistic prosocial motivation is regarded as a balancing material to an altruistic one, it is expected that after an individual engages in altruistic helping, they will be more motivated to

conduct another prosocial act if it is coupled with a self-benefit appeal (see Figure 1). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1. After compliance with an other-benefit charitable request, a subsequent self-benefit message will generate more charitable support than an other-benefit message.

2.4. Moral Status

Individuals use guidelines when making a moral decision, such as moral standards (Chang, 2021) or the activation of prior moral decisions (Kong *et al.* 2020). Moral status refers to an individual's moral state, which is considered as a point of reference in making moral decisions. Unlike moral identity which is a set of moral traits that may influence moral actions (Aquino *et al.* 2009), moral status is affected directly by one's prior moral behavior. In this study, moral status is a combination of positive and negative emotions experienced by an individual as a result of responses to a prosocial request. Moral status is conceptualized by combining two moral concepts, moral credit (Lin *et al.* 2016) and moral distress (Gollwitzer and Melzer 2012). Individuals gain moral credits for behaving in morally laudable ways and performing socially approved acts (Lin *et al.* 2016). Meanwhile moral distress is experienced when individuals encounter threats to their moral self-image after violating moral standards (Gollwitzer and Melzer 2012). People fluctuate continually around an equilibrium, depending on their prior behavior. Therefore, these two concepts represent one's current moral status; either positively, when an individual experiences an excess of moral credit, or negatively, when moral distress is considerably higher than moral credit.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

The moral licensing framework suggests that people attempt to maintain balance in addressing moral conflict (Nisan and Horenczyk 1990). Like a bank account, people may have a surplus of moral status when they initially engage in positive behavior, which can then be used to purchase a license to commit subsequent ambiguous moral acts. This balancing and licensing behavior has been empirically demonstrated (Cornelissen et al. 2013). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2. After compliance with an other-benefit charitable request, people's moral status will be increased. The enhanced moral status leads more egoistic helping motivation for a subsequent charitable support; thus, a self-benefit message is more effective than an other-benefit message.

2.5. Same vs. Different Requester Effects

Most prosocial actions are the result of prosocial requests (Goldman et al. 1983). Compliance with a prosocial request is determined by situational factors such as when and where the request is made (Jin et al. 2021; White and Peloza 2009). The identity of the prosocial requester is also critical. For instance, literature suggest that when people are asked to make a second donation, the requester's identity, and familiarity play an important role in generating compliance. Girandola (2002) observed the highest increased intention to help for a second time, when the same requester made the appeal. Terrier *et al.* (2013) found that after rejecting the first

request, people tend to comply with the second one even if it is made by a different requester, but only when the first requester is present.

When the same charity asks for a subsequent donation, we propose that moral consistency effect is more salient than moral licensing effect. Prior research has found that when consumers agree to an initial request, they are more likely to comply with a second request from the same, rather than a different requester (Burger and Petty 1981; Chartrand et al. 1999). Burger and Caputo (2015) posited that people help at Time 2 because of their commitment to help the requester at Time 1. In the same requester condition, moral consistency is superior to moral licensing because donors want to keep a positive self-image and to ensure that the same beneficiary obtains help with the same prosocial motive (i.e., altruistic). When a different requester makes the second prosocial request, the “obligation” to keep a positive self-image and the need to maintain a consistent prosocial motivation becomes irrelevant. Consequently, a shift in motivation occurs when a different requester asks for help. That is, despite consistent prosocial behaviors in a sequential prosocial context, an initial altruistic motivation changes into an egoistic one as driven by a desire for balance in motivation. As such, we hypothesize:

H3. After compliance with an other-benefit charitable request, a subsequent self-benefit message will generate more support than an other-benefit message, when issued by a different charity. This motivation shift will decrease when the second request is issued by the same charity.

3. Pilot Study

3.1. Method and design

We examined the hypothesis that prior moral behavior leads people to conduct egoistic helping rather than altruistic helping. Participants were 126 college students (44% female, $M_{age} = 22.69$). Power analysis for Analysis of Variance was conducted with an alpha level of 0.05, a power of 0.80 and a moderate effect size of 0.30 (Faul et al. 2009). Based on these assumptions, the sample size was considered sufficient. The same procedure was employed across all studies to determine the minimum sample size. Student samples are commonly used in social science and experimental studies. This is especially appropriate if the study emphasizes human behavior and decision-making processes, or focuses on internal validity or theory testing (Stevens 2011; Thomas 2011).

Participants were asked to recall and write about an occasion in which they behaved morally. The instructions were as follows: *“Please recall an event when you were loyal to a friend, were generous when you could have been selfish, were kind to someone for no particular reason, or caring toward someone who needed you.”* Event recall tasks are a common method used by scholars to stimulate moral licensing effects (Conway and Peetz 2012; Cornelissen et al. 2013; Schwabe et al. 2018). Four participants were removed from the main analysis because they wrote nonmoral events. Following this task, participants were randomly exposed to one of two charitable appeals - featuring either a self-benefit or an other-benefit message. The self-benefit message promoted the potential benefits for donors. The advertisement emphasized egoistic messages such as: volunteering makes people feel less lonely, helps them through a personal problem, and increases their self-esteem. Meanwhile, the other-benefit or altruistic message

informed participants that donating their time would help both cancer patients and their caregivers. Participants were then asked to indicate their willingness to volunteer with the charity on a 9-point Likert scale.

3.2. Measures

This study used two items to assess a participant's intention to volunteer to with the focal charity; "How likely would you to be to make a time donation (i.e., volunteer) to the charity?" and "How inclined are you to volunteer to the charity?". Both of these items and the manipulation check questions were adapted from White and Peloza (2009), and used a 9-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 9 = strongly agree).

Sample of manipulation check questions include "To what degree is this an altruistic appeal?" and "To what degree is this an egoistic appeal?". Indexes of the perceived self-benefit and other-benefit were created by reversing the scores of the last two items and calculating the average score of other-benefit and self-benefit appeals. The higher the score of the index, the more altruistic the message (see Appendix A for all ads and measures in Study 1).

3.3. Results and Discussion

The other-benefit message ($M = 6.89$, $SD = 1.25$) was rated as being more altruistic than the self-benefit message ($M = 5.55$, $SD = 2.02$; $F(1, 120) = 18.97$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$). Two coders, blind to the two conditions and hypothesis, coded the stories in the event recall task (Jordan et al. 2011). They assessed the morality of the recollected behaviors on a 9-point bipolar scale (-4 = very immoral, 4 = very moral). Inter-coder reliability was high (Interclass correlation coefficient = .91). The coders' ratings were averaged as the final score. The index of morality

was generated from a one-sample t-test. The index indicated that participants recalled and wrote more moral events in their lives ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.18$; $t(121) = 31.74$, $p < .001$) from the test value of 0 as the midpoint. The mean difference is 3.38 (95% $CI = [3.17, 3.59]$). Thus, the manipulation worked as expected.

The results showed that after recalling moral behaviors, participants were more willing to donate in response to the self-benefit message ($M = 5.04$, $SD = 2.15$) than the other-benefit message ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 2.24$; $F(1, 120) = 4.89$, $p = .029$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$). This suggests that when people consider themselves moral, egoistic helping is more appealing than altruistic helping.

4. Study 1

Study 1 was designed to examine individuals' responses to two different, sequential charity requests, made by two different charities. Only an other-benefit message was used in the first charity request, because altruistic message appeals are a common perspective of charitable organizations in communicating their activities (Bendapudi et al. 1996). Two different message appeals (i.e., other-benefit and self-benefit) were used in the second charity request.

When people comply with an initial other-benefit appeal, we expect that a self-benefit (vs. an other-benefit) message would generate more charitable giving in response to a subsequent request. We propose that enhanced moral status, resulting from responses to the initial request, is responsible for this relationship between the first donation and the effectiveness of message type in the second donation.

4.1. Method

We recruited 150 adult participants (49% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 35.64$) via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). We used MTurk participants in order to increase the external validity of the findings. Some concerns have been raised regarding the quality of data from MTurk (Fleischer et al. 2015). In response, we pre-screened the MTurk participants to improve data quality as suggested (Buhrmester et al. 2018). The participants in the studies had to be located in the USA and had an approval rate of at least 95%. They were also restricted from taking part in more than one study. Once the participants completed a study, they were given a specific qualification that prevent them from participating in subsequent studies. The screening procedure as described above was applied to all studies. Six participants who indicated having personal problems with the charities or health concerns regarding blood donation were removed from the analysis.

Participants were asked to respond honestly to the charitable advertisements. All participants were exposed to an other-benefit ad to promote blood donation, then they were asked to indicate their intentions to participate in a hypothetical blood drive. Immediately after this, we measured moral credit and moral distress. The participants then answered the manipulation check questions and completed a filler task that consisted of simple math problems (Jordan et al. 2011). As a subsequent request, participants were then exposed to either a self-benefit or an other-benefit ad from a charity for cancer research. The self-benefit message highlighted the benefits of volunteering, such as making friends, and increased self-esteem. The other-benefit message informed them that volunteering would support cancer patients and caregivers. We then we measured their willingness to volunteer, manipulation checks and demographics (See Appendix B for the ads).

4.2. Measures

Blood donation intention. The intention to make a blood donation was measured by a single question, “Do you intend to make a blood donation to the charity?” Responses were recorded on a binary scale (1= Yes, 0 = No). A participant’s blood donation intent reflects their compliance with an initial other-benefit message.

Moral credit. This variable was measured with a 4 item-scale adapted from Lin, Ma, and Johnson (2016; $\alpha = .97$). The items were: (a) After making the decision, I feel I earned credit for performing a morally laudable behavior (b) After making the decision, I feel that I earned credit as a moral person (c) After making the decision, I feel that I built up my account of moral credits (d) After making the decision, I feel that the decision I made added to my moral credit. The questions were answered on 9-point scales (1 = strongly disagree, 9 = strongly agree).

Moral distress. The scale, adapted from Gollwitzer & Melzer (2012; $\alpha = .60$) consisted of four items. The items were: (a) How guilty did you feel after making the decision? (b) How exciting was the decision? (reverse coded) (c) How much did you enjoy the decision? (reverse coded) (d) Did the decision give you a bad conscience? Participants answered the questions on 9-point scales (1 = not at all, 9 = very guilty). Volunteering intent for the subsequent charity request and manipulation check questions were identical to those used in Study 1.

Moral status. This measure was calculated by subtracting the value of moral distress from moral credit. A high value indicates high moral status.

4.3. Results

Manipulation check

As intended, participants perceived the first ad as presenting an other-benefit message. The results of a one sample t-test exhibited that the participants rated the message appeal as altruistic ($M = 7.30$, $SD = 1.62$; $t(143) = 17.01$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.42$) based on a test value of 5 as the midpoint of the scale. The mean difference was 2.30 (95% CI = [2.03, 2.57]). For the second ad, the other-benefit message ($M = 6.79$, $SD = 2.16$) was rated as being more altruistic than the self-benefit message ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 2.50$; $F(1, 142) = 21.34$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$). Thus, the results indicated that the manipulations worked as intended.

Motivation shift in sequential donation

Fifty-four percent of the participants complied with the initial other-benefit request. A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the interaction effect of charity responses to the initial request (yes vs. no) and message appeals (self-benefit vs. other-benefit) on donation intent for the subsequent request. The interaction effect was significant ($F(1, 140) = 5.30$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$), as well as the main effect of message appeals for the subsequent request ($F(1, 140) = 6.70$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$). The main effect of charity responses at the initial request was also significant ($F(1, 140) = 4.22$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$), indicating that those who agreed to make the initial donation showed higher donation intent in the second donation than those who refused the initial charity request.

The results of a simple effects analysis (see Figure 2) showed that the self-benefit message ($M = 6.14$, $SD = 2.06$) generated a significantly greater time donation intent than the other-benefit message ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 2.38$; $F(1, 76) = 13.76$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$) when their

response to the initial request of blood donation was “yes.” However, for those who said “no” to the initial request, we did not find any difference between the self and other-benefit message ($F(1, 64) = .05, p = .82, \eta_p^2 < .001$).

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

We examined the mediating role of moral status and the moderating role of message appeals with a bootstrap moderated mediation analysis (Process Model 14; 10,000 samples; Hayes 2013). A participant’s response to the initial request (1 = yes, 0 = no; the independent variable) and the message appeal type for the subsequent request (1 = self-benefit, 0 = other-benefit; the moderating variable) were dummy coded. One’s moral status was treated as a mediating variable, while the dependent variable was the intention to donate time in response to the subsequent request.

First, we found that the relationship between one’s response to the initial request and moral status was significant ($b = 2.22, SE = .54, p < .001$). Second, we found that an interaction between one’s moral status and the message appeal type used in the second advertisement had a significant effect on one’s time donation intent. Moral status ($b = .12, SE = .09, p = .16$) and message appeals ($b = .42, SE = .38, p = .27$) did not predict intention to donate. However, the interaction effect between moral status and message appeals on donation intent was significant ($b = .24, SE = .11, p = .03$).

The results revealed a conditional indirect effect of response to the initial donation request upon subsequent donation intent (see Figure 3). The mediation path, response to the initial charity request \rightarrow moral status \rightarrow time donation intention, was significant when

participants saw the self-benefit message ($b = .81, SE = .28, 95\% CI = [.34, 1.41]$), but not when they saw the other-benefit message ($b = .27, SE = .22, 95\% CI = [-.13, .75]$) at the subsequent donation request. Moderated mediation index ($b = .53, SE = .31, 95\% CI = [.02, 1.26]$) indicating an indirect effect of response to the initial donation on time donation intent.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

4.4. Discussion

This study demonstrates the motivation shift effect in sequential donation decisions. People who complied with the first altruistic charity request, showed more donation intent in the subsequent request. However, they responded more positively to an egoistic rather than an altruistic subsequent charity request. This indicates that an initial altruistic decision shapes an egoistic prosocial action when people are asked to make two consecutive prosocial decisions. The results confirm that the path response to the initial charity request → time donation intention is mediated by moral status and moderated by message appeal type. As predicted, when participants comply with an initial altruistic request, their moral status is enhanced. Those who are high in moral status favor a self-benefit message which, in turn, increases charitable giving intentions for a subsequent request.

5. Study 2

The goals of this study were threefold. First, it attempted to replicate the findings of Study 1, while adding a time gap between the initial request (Time 1, hereafter) and the subsequent request (Time 2, hereafter). We intended to examine whether the motivation shift

occurs when there is a temporal gap between the first and the second requests because in daily life individuals generally receive sequential charity requests at two different time points. Second, we further aimed to extend external validity by examining monetary donation intent as the dependent measure. Third, this study tested the impact of sequential requests from the same organization (vs. different organizations) upon subsequent donation intent.

5.1. Method

Six-hundred MTurk participants were involved in the Time 1 session. This study used a 2 (Requester type: same vs. different) x 2 (Time 2 message appeals: self-benefit vs. other-benefit) between-participant experimental design. Money donation intention was the the dependent variable. As in Study 1, only other-benefit messages were used at Time 1. In the same requester condition, the advertisements featured a children's charity both at Time 1 and Time 2, while the participants in the different requester condition saw an ad for a cancer research charity at Time 1 and a children's charity at Time 2. Participants were asked to make a time donation at Time 1 and a monetary donation at Time 2. There was a 24-hour time gap between Time 1 and Time 2.

After seeing the first charity advertisement, the participants were asked to indicate their willingness to donate time using a binary choice (yes or no). Next, the participants completed moral credit and moral distress measures. At the end of the Time 1 measures, participants were informed that they would receive an email regarding instructions and a link to the second part of the survey in the next 24 hours. Five hundred and twenty-eight participants indicated that they would participate in the second part of the study. They received an email containing instructions and a link to the subsequent study in the following day.

At Time 2, after exposure to the second ad, the participants were asked about their intention to make a monetary donation. The participants then answered the demographic and manipulation check questions. They were finally debriefed and thanked. All measures in this study were identical to the items used in Study 1.

5.2. Results

Three hundred and two participants (44% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 37.33$) attended the Time 2 session. The final sample was 286 participants after excluding 16 participants who indicated failing attention check questions or having personal problems with charities. We conducted the analyses both with and without the excluded cases and found no considerable differences.

Manipulation checks

The message manipulations worked at Time 1 and Time 2. Manipulation checks were conducted for the charity advertisements. At Time 1, two ads were examined with one-sample t -tests with the test value of 5 as the midpoint. The participants rated the ad from a charity for cancer research ($M = 7.54$, $SD = 1.48$; $t(146) = 20.79$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.72$) and the ad from a children charity ($M = 7.35$, $SD = 1.58$; $t(138) = 17.46$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.49$) as highly altruistic. The mean difference was 2.54 (95% CI = [2.30, 2.78]) for the cancer ad, and 2.35 (95% CI = [2.08, 2.61]) for children's ad. Thus, the manipulations worked.

At Time 2, the manipulation check results from the children's charity advertisement showed that participants in the other-benefit condition rated the message as more altruistic ($M = 7.77$, $SD = 1.45$) than participants who saw the self-benefit message ($M = 5.91$, $SD = 2.07$); $F(1, 284) = 76.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .21$. The results confirmed a significant difference between self and

other-benefit message as perceived by the participants. The manipulations for this study were successful.

Motivation shift in sequential donation

Sixty-three percent of the participants complied with the initial other-benefit request. A three-way ANOVA test was conducted with donation intention at Time 2 as the dependent variable, and three independent variables; charity responses at Time 1 (Yes vs. No), Requester type (same vs. different) and Time 2 message appeals (self-benefit vs. other-benefit). The three-way interaction effect was significant ($F(1, 278) = 14.08, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$), as well as the main effect of the charity responses at Time 1 ($F(1, 278) = 110.55, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .28$), such that when participants agreed to donate at Time 1, they had a higher donation intent at Time 2. However, the main effects of requester type ($F(1, 278) = 1.29, p = .257, \eta_p^2 = .005$) and Time 2 donation message appeal ($F(1, 278) = 1.21, p = .271, \eta_p^2 = .004$) were not significant.

To better understand the link between charity responses at Time 1 and donation intent at Time 2, we conducted a separate two-way ANOVA for the requester type groups (same vs. different charities). The two independent variables were (a) yes vs. no response at Time 1 and (b) self vs. other-benefit message at Time 2. The dependent variable was monetary donation intent at Time 2.

Different Requester Condition

In the different charity condition, the main effect of charity responses at Time 1 (yes vs. no) was significant ($F(1, 143) = 24.22, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .14$), indicating that those who agreed to donate at Time 1 showed a higher donation intent at Time 2, compared with those who refused to

donate at Time 1. In contrast, the main effect of message appeal was not significant ($F(1, 143) = .91, p = .34, \eta_p^2 = .006$). More importantly, the interaction effect was significant ($F(1, 143) = 10.25, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .01$), such that when the participants complied with the charity request at Time 1, there was a significant difference in donation intent at Time 2, depending upon the message type. The results of a simple effect analysis showed that for those who said “no” at Time 1, we did not find any difference between the self and other-benefit messages ($F(1, 143) = 2.11, p = .16, \eta_p^2 = .021$) in generating donation intent at Time 2. In contrast, when their response at Time 1 was “yes,” the self-benefit message ($M = 6.88, SD = 1.74$) generated a significantly greater money donation intent than the other-benefit message ($M = 5.32, SD = 2.57, F(1, 143) = 11.07, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .11$). However, since homogeneity of variance was violated as indicated by Levene’s test results ($F(1, 86) = 9.31, p = .003$), we conducted a Mann-Whitney U Test. The test revealed significant donation intent difference between self-benefit ($Mdn = 7, n = 45$) and other-benefit messages ($Mdn = 6, n = 43, U = 606, z = -3.04, p < .01, r = -.32$).

Moderated mediation effects were examined by conducting a bootstrap analysis (Process Model 14; 10,000 samples; Hayes 2013). Results showed that moral status mediated the link between charity responses at Time 1 and donation intention at Time 2, as moderated by message appeal at Time 2. First, we found that charity responses at Time 1 predicted moral status ($b = 5.27, SE = .49, p < .001$), indicating that those who agreed to donate time at Time 1 were more likely to donate money at Time 2. Second, we examined the interaction effect of moral status and message appeal on donation intent. Results show that moral status \rightarrow donation intent ($b = .04, SE = .08, p = .61$) and appeal \rightarrow donation intent were not significant ($b = .62, SE = .37, p = .09$). Nevertheless, we found a significant interaction effect ($b = .23, SE = .09, p = .02$).

The index of moderated mediation was significant ($b = 1.20$, $SE = .52$, 95% CI = [.19, 2.28]), demonstrating an indirect effect of charity responses at Time 1 on donation intent at Time 2. However, the indirect effect was conditional. The indirect effect was significant when participants were exposed to the self-benefit message ($b = 1.41$, $SE = .42$, 95% CI = [.59, 2.25]), but not significant when they were exposed to the other-benefit message ($b = .21$, $SE = .46$, 95% CI = [-.72, 1.09]). This moderated mediation pattern is identical to the results of Study 1 (see Figure 4).

[Insert Figure 4 about here]

Same Requester Condition

In the same requester condition, the main effect of message appeals was not significant ($F(1, 135) = .37$, $p = .55$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$). The main effect of charity responses at Time 1 (yes vs. no) was significant ($F(1, 135) = 103.09$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .43$). That is, when people's decision to volunteer was "yes" (vs. no) at Time 1, their donation intention was greater at Time 2. The interaction effect was significant ($F(1, 135) = 4.48$, $p = .035$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$). The results of a simple effects analysis showed that the self-benefit and other-benefit messages did not differ in terms of donation intent, regardless of whether a participant's response to the initial request was "yes" ($F(1, 135) = 1.77$, $p = .19$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$) or "no" ($F(1, 135) = 2.70$, $p = .11$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$). Although the significance test did not reach .05, there was a reversed pattern, such that the other-benefit (self-benefit) message produced a better result when the participants response to the initial request was yes (no).

A bootstrap moderated mediation analysis (Process Model 14; 10,000 samples; Hayes 2013) did not find an indirect effect of charity responses at Time 1 (1 = Yes, 0 = No) on donation intention at Time 2, as mediated by moral status. The effect of charity responses at Time 1 (1 = Yes, 0 = No) on moral status was significant ($b = 5.89, SE = .48, p < .001$). However, the interaction effect of moral status and message appeals at Time 2 on donation intention was not significant ($b = -.06, SE = .09, p = .47$). Moral status \rightarrow donation intention was significant ($b = .29, SE = .08, p < .001$) while message appeal \rightarrow donation intent was not significant ($b = .16, SE = .34, p = .63$). Thus, the indirect effect of charity responses at Time 1, toward donation intention at Time 2, as mediated by moral status was not confirmed ($b = -.37, SE = .53, 95\% CI = [-1.40, .67]$) (see Figure 4).

5.3. Discussion

As predicted, the motivation shift effect occurred for participants in the different charity condition, while a moral consistency pattern was observed in the same charity condition, although the effect did not reach the significance level. After agreeing to help a requester, one's commitment would be more salient, if a following prosocial request was asked by the same requester (Burger and Caputo 2015). This leads to moral consistency which is represented by donating based on an other-benefit message at Time 2, after previously committing to donate based on the same appeal at Time 1. These results contribute to the moral licensing theory by proposing the role of requester types (i.e., same vs. different) as a factor that can direct future donation behavior. Practically, the findings are important because online fundraising platforms offers an alternative fundraising environment where potential donors are exposed to charitable requests from different organizations within a single digital platform. Donors can donate to the charity that they have donated in their last donation or to a new charity. This study also managed

to replicate Study 1's findings while extending external validity by using monetary donation intent and a 24-hour time gap between Time 1 and Time 2.

6. Study 3

Although Study 1 and Study 2 have provided empirical evidence of a motivation shift in sequential donations, they do not reflect actual behaviors since the participants were asked to report behavioral intentions. The goal of Study 3 was to examine whether a motivation shift occurs when the participants are asked to contribute a real money donation to a charity.

6.1. Methods

Two hundred MTurk workers participated in the Time 1 session. This study used two conditions (self-benefit vs. other-benefit) between-participant experimental design. The dependent variable was a real monetary donation to a real charity. We used two different charities. The first charity focuses on helping supports young people with high physical needs to live in appropriate house while the second charity helps terminally ill children to grant their wishes. As in Study 2, there was a 24-hour time gap between Time 1 and Time 2.

At Time 1, the participants saw a charitable ad from the youth charity. Following that, the participants were asked to indicate their intention to volunteer to the charity using a binary choice (yes or no). At the end of the session, the participants were informed that they are invited to participate in a subsequent short study in the next 24 hours in exchange for \$0.50. All of the participants indicated that they were interested in joining the subsequent study. The following day, they received an email containing instructions and a link to the subsequent study.

The participants saw a charitable ad at Time 2 asking them to make a monetary donation to the children's charity. They were randomly shown either a self-benefit or other-benefit appeal. The participants were informed that they could donate some or none of their \$0.50 study compensation to the charity. Afterwards, they answered demographic and manipulation check questions. The participants were finally debriefed and thanked.

6.2. Results

In total 122 participants (53% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 39.63$) completed the Time 2 session. The final sample of analysis was 120, after the exclusion of 2 participants for failing to answer attention check questions. We conducted analyses with and without the excluded cases and found no considerable differences.

Manipulation checks

The message manipulations were inspected at Time 1 and Time 2. At Time 1, the ad was examined with one-sample t-tests with the test value of 5 as the midpoint. The youth charity ad ($M = 7.40$, $SD = 1.49$; $t(120) = 17.59$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.61$) was rated as highly altruistic by the participants. The mean difference was 2.40 (95% CI = [2.13, 2.67]). At Time 2, the altruistic vs. egoistic manipulation of the charitable ad was inspected. The manipulation check results for the children charity's ad showed that participants perceived the other-benefit message as more altruistic ($M = 7.15$, $SD = 1.55$) than the self-benefit message ($M = 5.83$, $SD = 2.16$); $F(1, 118) = 14.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$. The manipulations for this study were successful.

Motivation shift in sequential donation

Forty-one percent of the participants complied with the initial other-benefit request. A two-way ANOVA test was conducted with money donation at Time 2 as the dependent variable, and two independent variables; charity responses at Time 1 (Yes vs. No) and Time 2 message appeals (self-benefit vs. other-benefit).

The results showed that the two-way interaction effect was marginally significant ($F(1, 116) = 3.82, p = .053, \eta_p^2 = .03$). The main effect of the charity responses at Time 1 was significant ($F(1, 116) = 14.62, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .01$), while the main effect of Time 2 message appeal was not significant ($F(1, 116) = 1.83, p = .18, \eta_p^2 = .02$). A simple effect analysis demonstrated that the participants donated more in response to the self-benefit message ($M = 22.11, SD = 14.37$) than the other-benefit message ($M = 13.71, SD = 12.97, F(1, 116) = 4.55, p = .04, \eta_p^2 = .09$) after they complied with the Time 1 charity request. This indicated a motivation shift effect. For those who refused the Time 1 charity request, there was no significant difference between other-benefit message ($M = 8.97, SD = 11.45$) and self-benefit message ($M = 7.44, SD = 14.45, F(1, 116) = .22, p = .64, \eta_p^2 = .003$) in generating a monetary donation (see Figure 5).

[Insert Figure 5 about here]

6.3. Discussion

The results show that a shift in motivation occurred when participants were presented with two different charitable ads sequentially. Most participants who agreed to volunteer at Time 1, donated more than those who refused to volunteer at Time 1. However, they donated more money in response to a self-benefit, rather than an other-benefit appeal at Time 2 after previously

agreeing to volunteer at Time 1 based on an other-benefit appeal. This again proved that donation motivation shifts occur, despite consistent prosocial behavior in a sequential donation setting.

By replicating Study 2's findings, we reinforce the validity of our motivation shift hypothesis in a sequential donation context. In addition, we demonstrate that the effect still exists when the participants were asked to donate money to a real charity. This is important because there exists a gap between intention and behavior.

7. General Discussion

This study examines the effectiveness of different charitable message appeals when they are used in a sequential donation context. Across three experiments, using time and money donations as dependent variables, we demonstrate that people are more interested in making sequential donation when different rather than the same message appeal is presented. We call this phenomenon the charitable motivation shift. Specifically, Study 1 shows that willingness to make a second donation is higher when other-benefit and self-benefit appeals are used consecutively. In Study 2, we replicate the findings of Study 1 with a different type of donation (i.e., monetary) as the dependent variable. We also found that the motivation shift is amplified when the subsequent appeal is made by different charity. In our last study, we extend the external validity of the findings by using a real monetary donation.

7.1. Theoretical Contributions

One of the situational factors that determines an individual's prosocial decision making is the activation of prior moral decisions (Liu and Aaker 2008). In other words, when people are

considering whether to help others, their memory of a prior moral decision may assist them. Prior research into moral self-regulation postulates that the conditions under which people behave morally (or not) is a determining factor of subsequent moral decisions (Blanken et al. 2015; Mullen and Monin 2016). The present research proposes that one's motivation to help others or oneself is an important factor in subsequent moral decision making. Three studies demonstrate that people are inclined to shift their prosocial motivations from altruistic to egoistic over time.

Charities frequently send prosocial requests to donors who have already donated, in an attempt to turn one-time donors into regular donors (Xiao and Yue 2020). Our research highlights the effectiveness of using different charitable messages sequentially in generating support from donors. That is, three studies using various donation contexts (i.e., volunteering, blood donation and monetary donations) consistently show that a prior altruistic decision facilitates a prosocial action based on egoistic reasons. Moral status increased donations, only when the charity used a self-benefit not an other-benefit message in a subsequent appeal. People perceived that their moral status increased after an initial altruistic act, making egoistic helping more relevant as it balances their moral position. Although prior studies suggest that an other-benefit message is more effective in charity campaigns (Brunel and Nelson 2003; Fisher et al. 2008), our findings suggest that a self-benefit appeal is more attractive in particular settings.

While prior studies of moral licensing in a prosocial context, predominantly focus on the dichotomy of helping versus not helping behavior, the present study verifies that moral licensing effect occurs even within two consecutive helping acts. Our findings show that people who comply with an initial charity request give more donations in subsequent requests, proving that people are consistent in donation behavior. However, inconsistency is observed in their giving

motivation. Across three experiments, we found that people shift their orientation from fulfilling other's needs towards their own self-benefit in terms of donation intent and behavior. Therefore, moral licensing effects impact one's motivation to perform a helping behavior: whether it is motivated by altruistic or egoistic reasons. This study then extends prior findings regarding moral licensing (Cornelissen et al. 2013; Jordan et al. 2011) by presenting different message appeals as a significant factor in subsequent donation intent.

By demonstrating the role of different message appeals in a moral licensing framework, the present study confirms reasoning from Cornelissen et al. (2013) who suggest that focusing on the benefits of giving, leads to a moral licensing effect. Cornelissen et al. (2013) argue that a consequentialist moral philosophy produces an assessment of the consequences of a prosocial action - whether to fulfil the interest of oneself or others, which eventually licenses a compromise between both interests. Therefore, being exposed to different message appeals, people are able to shift prosocial motivations in a subsequent prosocial decision. The present study extends Cornelissen et al. (2013) work in two ways. *First*, this study used a sequential donation procedure, where a consumer responds to two consecutive charitable requests (Study 1-3). *Second*, this study proposed donation order (i.e., same vs. different charity requester) as a moderating factor that influences the effectiveness of message appeals within a moral licensing framework (Study 2).

7.2. Practical Implications

Our findings suggest that charities could boost donations by utilizing egoistic appeals following donations to an altruistic appeal. Utilizing this strategy, sequential charitable campaign messages should follow an *other-benefit* → *self-benefit* appeal order. This approach is certainly

feasible, given most charitable campaigns are periodic. In addition, since other-benefit appeals are generally considered more common and effective than self-benefit appeals (Chang 2014), our research focuses on the effectiveness of subsequent appeals following an initial other-benefit appeal.

Prior research suggests that moral licensing has a negative impact on helping behaviors. Effron and Conway (2015) metaphorically describe moral licensing as a process that changes virtuous people into villains. This sentiment is in line with prior licensing research, which suggests that charities receive less or no donations as a consequence of the moral licensing effect (Conway and Peetz 2012; Cornelissen et al. 2013; Jordan et al. 2011). However, the current study suggests that even though individuals are affected by a moral licensing mechanism, they can still positively contribute to charities. We demonstrate that by conveying the right message to donors, charities may receive increased donations.

Charities have developed collaborations with other institutions to achieve their common goals. These collaborations are established between charities or between a charity and other sectors' organizations such as commercial and public institutions. Such collaborations and partnerships can be in the forms of mergers, joint programs or information sharing (Guo and Acar 2005). For example, some charities found that sending direct mail to donors listed in other charity's databases, results in a better response than relying solely on their own database (Abdy and Barclay 2001). These joint charity campaigns trigger sequential charitable requests from different charities. Based on our findings, two or more charities can exchange information on donors' prior donations and selectively send the right charitable message appeals to the right donors. That is, after a donor donates in response to an altruistic appeal, an egoistic appeal would

generate more donation than an altruistic appeal, providing that the charitable message is conveyed by a different charity (vs. the same charity).

Advanced information systems enable charities to customize their campaigns (Erceg et al. 2018) and to work together with other charities to approach potential donors (Guo and Acar 2005). Online charitable crowdfunding platforms such as Facebook Fundraiser, GoFundMe, Just Giving, and DonorsChoose allow fundraisers to work in partnership. Two collaborating charities could cooperate to deliver a campaign based on an altruistic – egoistic message order. Using social media and emails, crowdfunding donation platforms can send a charitable message to donors who have donated previously to other charities.

7.3. Limitations and future research

The practical implications of this study only apply to charities that possess a database of prior donors. Future research may wish to use other information to predict donation behavior, such as luxury product consumption, food choice or social media use. Prior research has found that a motivation shift effect applies in a same domain but also across different domains (Khan and Dhar 2006; Mazar and Zhong 2010). Future research may investigate how prior consumption behavior affects motivation to engage in prosocial behavior (Schlegelmilch and Simbrunner 2019).

We measured the mediating constructs in between independent and dependent variables. One may assume that a moral licensing effects in our study is the result of a mere measurement effect, a condition where merely questioning an individual's intention alters his or her subsequent behavior (Morwitz and Fitzsimons 2004). In this study's context, asking the

participants to reveal their moral status may lead them to perform an egoistic helping act. Future research may address this concern by measuring the mediating construct after the dependent variable.

Our findings indicate that a motivation shift occurs when people donate money to a real charity. However, the money donated to the charity is rather small as we asked the participants to donate their \$0.05 prize money. We followed the practice of previous studies which used the same amount of currency (Everett *et al.* 2015; Kersbergen and Robinson 2019). Dissimilar to our experiment, many charities do not limit the amount of money donated which may elicit a higher amount of money. Future studies may increase the external validity of the findings by giving a limitless possible amount of money to donate.

Finally, since charities may use a self-benefit and other-benefit message together (Feiler *et al.* 2012; Kareklas *et al.* 2014), one may wish to explore the role of a mixed-message within a moral licensing framework. Prior studies argue that mixing two conflicting charitable messages, reduces an individual's willingness to donate (Feiler *et al.* 2012). However, the impact of complying with the mixed appeal upon subsequent donation behavior remains unknown. Does a mixed message lead to more egoistic helping at Time 2 because donors tend to overestimate their altruistic behavior and later license themselves to commit to egoistic helping? Or does a mixed-message lead to altruistic helping because individuals experience a decrease in moral status and then attempt to restore it by conducting an altruistic helping? Future research may solve this puzzle.

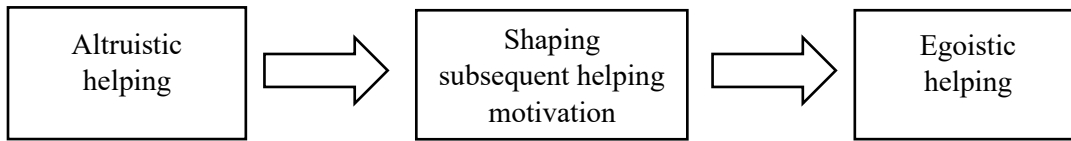


Fig. 1 Theoretical framework.

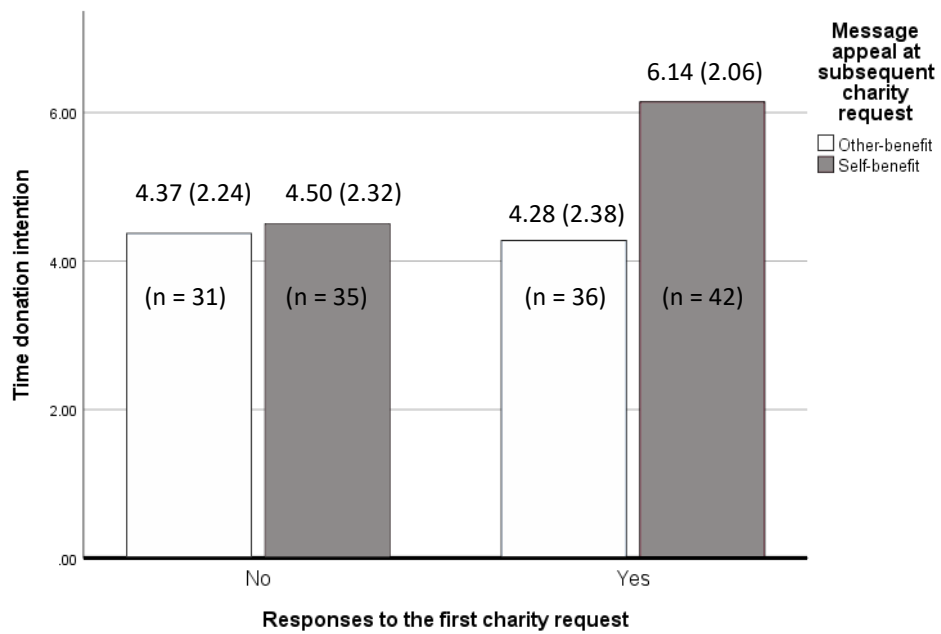


Fig. 2 Results of time donation intent in Study 1. Other-benefit message was used in the first charity request. Values are mean scores (standard deviation).

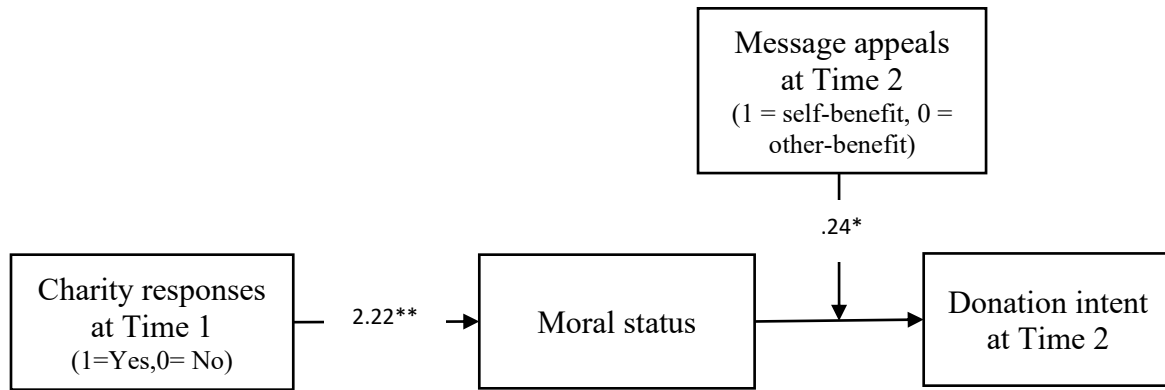
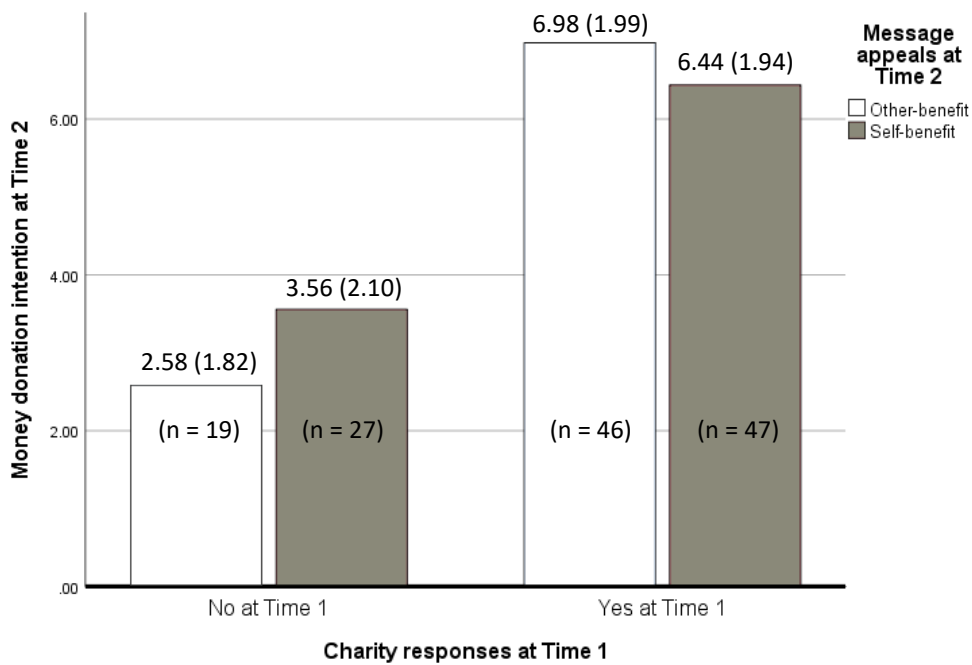


Fig. 3 The moderated mediation model of moral status in the relationship between charity responses at the initial request (Other-benefit message) and donation intent for the subsequent request in Study 1.

A. Same charity condition



B. Different charity condition

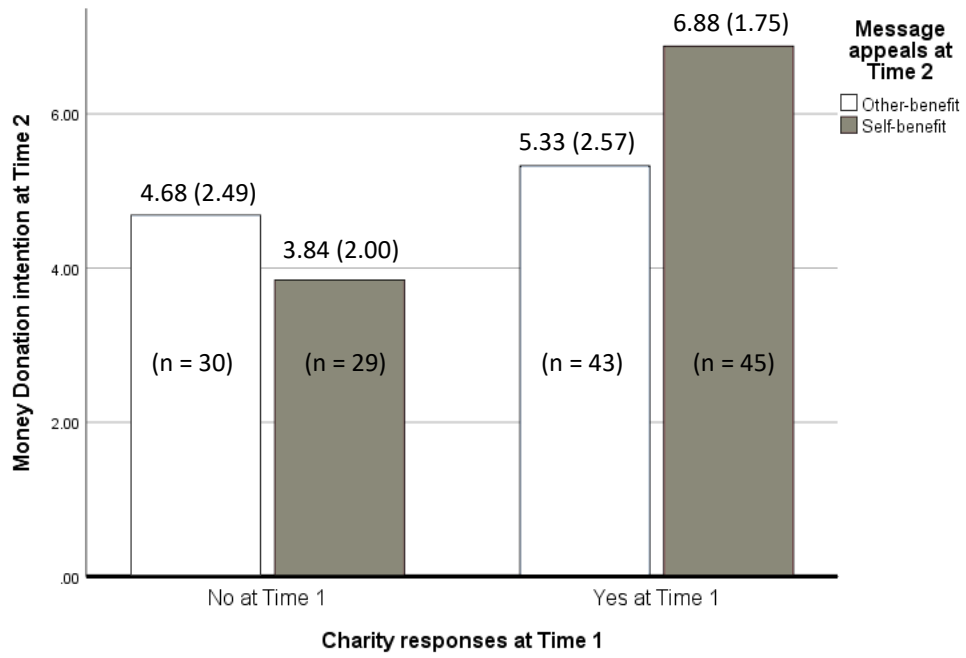


Fig 4 Results of monetary donation intent in Study 2

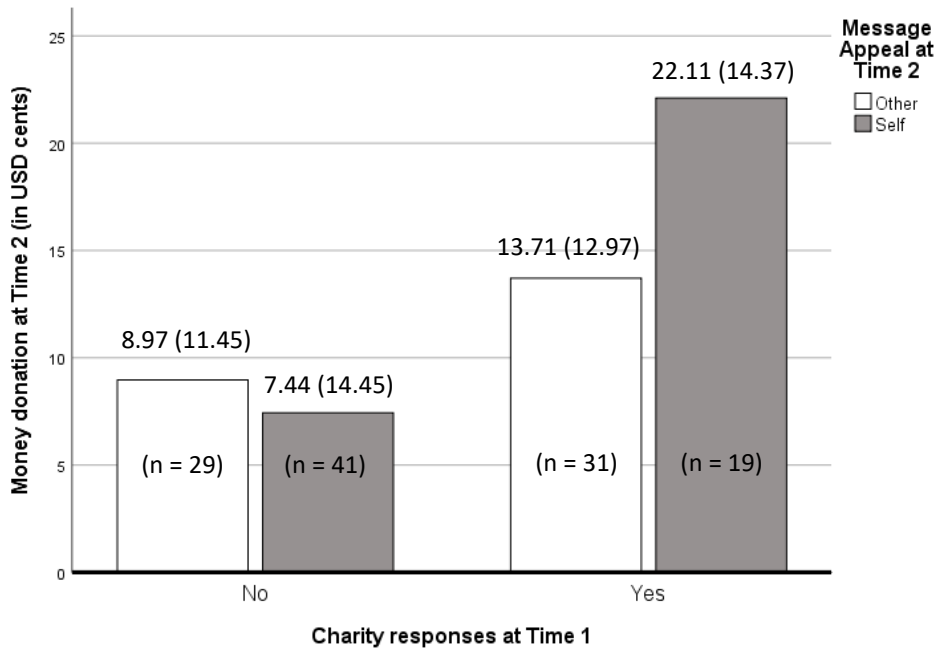


Fig 5 Results of monetary donation in Study 3

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