

# Self-Benefit Versus Other-Benefit Marketing Appeals: Their Effectiveness in Generating Charitable Support

Despite the growing need, nonprofit organization marketers have not yet fully delineated the most effective ways to position charitable appeals. Across five experiments, the authors test the prediction that other-benefit (self-benefit) appeals generate more favorable donation support than self-benefit (other-benefit) appeals in situations that heighten (versus minimize) public self-image concerns. Public accountability, a manipulation of public self-awareness, and individual differences in public self-consciousness all moderate the effect of appeal type on donor support. In particular, self-benefit appeals are more effective when consumers' responses are private in nature; in contrast, other-benefit appeals are more effective when consumers are publicly accountable for their responses. This effect is moderated by norm salience and is related to a desire to manage impressions by behaving in a manner consistent with normative expectations. The results have important managerial implications, suggesting that rather than simply relying on one type of marketing appeal across situations, marketers should tailor their marketing message to the situation or differentially activate public self-image concerns to match the appeal type.

*Keywords:* charity, self-benefit, other-benefit, altruism, egoism, public self-image, norms

It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try and help another without helping himself.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

If we give with the underlying motive of inflating the image others have of us... we defile the act. In this instance, what we are practicing is not generosity but self-aggrandizement.

—Dalai Lama

The self-serving benefits of helping others have long been recognized by those who promote and engage in prosocial behavior. The Emerson quotation suggests that even though people can help others, their underlying reasons for helping are often egoistic or self-serving. However, the Dalai Lama quotation suggests that people should help others for more altruistic, other-focused reasons. These different points of view highlight the two ways that marketers commonly appeal for charitable support—positioning charitable giving either egoistically (i.e., by highlighting the benefits for the donor) or altruistically (i.e., by highlighting the benefits for others). Following Fisher, Vanden-

bosch, and Antia (2008), we refer to the former as “self-benefit” appeals and define these as appeals that highlight that the main beneficiary of support is the donor. We refer to the latter as “other-benefit” appeals and define these as appeals that highlight that the main beneficiary of support is some other individual or organization.<sup>1</sup> This research investigates the conditions under which other-benefit (self-benefit) appeals are more effective than self-benefit (other-benefit) appeals in influencing donation intentions and behaviors by examining the moderating role of public self-image concerns.

Exploring the conditions under which people are inclined to donate to charity is becoming increasingly important (Bendapudi, Singh, and Bendapudi 1996; Reed, Aquino, and Levy 2007). Despite growing competition for resources, government assistance, and consumer support, charities continue to provide numerous vital services, ranging from health care to housing to disaster relief. Increased need for charitable support has necessitated that nonprofit organizations seek out the most effective ways to communicate their causes to consumers. Indeed, charities have adopted many of the sophisticated marketing techniques—

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<sup>1</sup>Self-benefit appeals can vary in terms of the types of benefits they offer. Sometimes self-benefits are tangible (e.g., a tax receipt or a gift), but sometimes they are more intangible (e.g., feeling good about oneself). We view appeals that promote any benefit to the donor as self-benefit appeals. It is also possible for charities to simultaneously highlight benefits to both the donor and the recipient. However, consistent with previous research, we separate the two appeal types to examine when each appeal is more effective than the other.