

The New Zealand Asia Institute (NZAI) undertakes research focusing on engagement with Asia, provides a forum for informed debates, and offers a bridge to Asia-related expertise and research within the University of Auckland.

Advertising to leverage positive emotions and past performance: Evidence from Indonesia and the US

Would you be likely to give to a charity if its advertising played on a negative emotion like sadness or guilt? Such negative appeals, such as the controversial image Barnardo's once used of a baby injecting heroin, can backfire or go too far for donors. Moreover, most charities' beneficiaries prefer not to be portrayed as helpless victims. Advertising that appeals to positive emotions is now more favoured, but questions remain about how specific emotional appeals work in different contexts.

Recent research in Indonesia explores questions around how positive emotions can stimulate pro-social behaviours like charitable giving, the conditions under which they will occur, and other drivers of charitable behaviour.* Using two successive experiments, the authors investigated how charities can target appeals to one of two positive emotions – pride or compassion – by leveraging their own strengthening or weakening recent performance.

The first experiment involved some 300 adults around Bandung, a major city in the Indonesian province of West Java. The researchers worked in collaboration with a Bandung hospital. Participants were shown images with the alternative slogans: “Be proud of what you do” or “Be compassionate to those around you.” They were, in addition, told one of two different stories: that charitable support for the hospital in the last year had either doubled or fallen heavily. The experiment showed that viewers of the pride appeal gave more if told the charity's support had improved, while those shown the compassion appeal donated more if told it had fallen.

To test this association further, a second experiment recruited some 160 United States residents. Participants were informed that they could allocate a portion of the

fee they ‘earned’ through participating to the American Children's Cancer Foundation. As in the case with the Indonesian experiments, appeals to pride worked best when paired with an account of the charity's rising fundraising performance, while an appeal to compassion worked best when paired with a story of declining fundraising success for the charity. The results ruled out alternative plausible drivers including gender, collectivism and familiarity with the organisation.

This pair of studies show distinct performance situations when two discrete positive emotions, pride and compassion, activate socio-moral concerns for merit and need, respectively. Managerially, the findings let charities target their appeals, avoid the pitfalls of excessive negativity, and truthfully exploit both improving and declining performance.

The authors suggest future research could investigate when exactly negative appeals work, and the differential effects of negative and positive on different pro-social behaviours, such as volunteering. Unlocking the mysteries of both appeals might also confirm the existence of, and shed light on, an apparent conundrum: seemingly, fewer people are donating to charities but they are giving more. Perhaps most basically, the authors also ask: how could more people be encouraged to give more?

*The full study results are available in an article authored by Felix Septianto and Fandy Tjiptono: The interactive effect of emotional appeals and past performance of a charity on the effectiveness of charitable advertising. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 50, 189-198 (2019).

