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Snowballing Smiles: A case for positive messaging to raise funds for non-profits

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## ABSTRACT

Charity appeals are a key part of raising funds for non-profits and charities. There are two dominant approaches - one features a positive, empowering tone for the appeal, and the other features a negative, urgent tone. Both these tones evoke different emotions. This study aims to explore which approach is more effective in increasing the intention of the viewer to donate. This is done through a survey with 90 respondents where their messaging preference is evaluated alongside their feelings and a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews of 5 professionals working with non-profits. Individuals seem to prefer a negatively framed appeal to a positively framed one. There is a growing trend among non-profits to shift towards a consistently empowering narrative. The final recommendation is for non-profits to segment the audience, tailor messages and alternate between both approaches to evaluate effectiveness.

Keywords:

Nonprofit, Marketing, Messaging Tone, Donor Intention, Framing

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Rationale

Non-profits and charities often seek donations to help the ones in need. These donations can be sought in various ways, of which one approach is to issue charity appeals. These appeals often feature carefully drafted copy and visuals to trigger the emotions and behaviour of the individual viewing it. Charity appeals also act as a regular communication update from non-profits, influencing how donors perceive the organisation, evaluate its efficacy and feel a sense of belongingness.

Previous research has established that emotions are powerful and drive how an individual intends to act. The tone is essential in these appeals, which can influence how the audience perceives the message.

While there is substantial research on the framing of these messages, the research findings are conflicting. This dissertation aims to gain clarity on this subject area while exploring the views of two stakeholders – the marketers at non-profits and the audience that is targeted with the communication. Understanding this dynamic can be valuable to (1) non-profits, to craft effective appeals and maximise the impact of their communication. (2) audience, to raise an approach that is comfortable and effective

In earlier times, charity appeals focussed on the unpleasant circumstances of those in need and requested donations directly. However, consistent use of this method can cause donor fatigue and helplessness. Recently, with the advent of technology, the sophistication of charity appeals has grown multifold. Further, there is an increasing shift towards empowering messages that trigger optimism and hope – driven by recent studies on the psychology of giving and the need for donor engagement.

### *1.1.1 Overview of charitable giving and its importance (Charities Aid Foundation, 2022).*

Giving to the needy is widely considered a basic act of decency. In 2022, 72% of the world's population had donated money or time or helped a stranger. The top 3 countries in giving are Indonesia, Ukraine and Kenya.

The public of the United Kingdom hit a record in charitable donations of 13.9 Billion GBP in 2023. The donations rose monthly by 40% up to 65 GBP. Another trend observed was that the poorest areas seem to make the most donations. It was observed that immigrants tend to donate more. The diaspora giving was at its highest at 271 million GBP in 2022. (Reporter, 2024).

Organizations vary in size and scale. Large, international organizations are well-experienced in crisis response and are essential in the initial stages of crisis management. However, local charities have deep networks with the affected communities and can clearly articulate the support needed to recover in the long term.

### ***1.1.2 The role of marketing in non-profits***

Considering the dramatic increase in the setting up of charities and non-profits (Schmitz, J., 2021), the competition for donations from the same audience is high. An over-fragmentation of non-profits catering to the same causes has led to an uncertain marketplace. Marketing activities such as brand identification elements are being adopted (Baghi & Gabrielli, 2012). Marketing and communication play an important role in engaging donors. Charities can gain attention and persuade donors through marketing activities (Bennett & Barkensjo, 2005), and influence perceptions and behaviours (Havard et al., 2019).

Most of the non-profit fundraising activities involving inviting, mobilizing and collecting money are adapted from the marketing domain (Kumar & Bhat, 2014). While the literature in this field grows, there are ample opportunities for further research as the sector is complex (Sepulcri et al., 2020). In competitive spaces, marketing can provide an edge. However, non-profits and charitable organizations lack expertise, budgets and a comprehensive approach to integrating marketing with their fundraising efforts (Kchin, 2001). Strategic messaging can influence donors (Fleming et al., 2022). Even in extreme cases, such as when scandals involving charities are publicised and lead to regular donors reducing their donations, e-mails from charities can counteract the negative spillover effect (Minguez & Sese, 2023b). However, communication is just one aspect of relationship building.

## 1.2 Research Problem and Significance

This study investigates prevalent negative message-centric marketing employed by non-profit organizations, characterized by appeals to that trigger negative emotions such as guilt, shame, and sadness, strategically employed to solicit donations. The research endeavours to explore alternative marketing approaches within the non-profit sector, with a deliberate shift towards cultivating positive emotions, including generosity, a sense of community, and the joy of giving. By examining the potential impact of this paradigm shift, the study aims to contribute insights into the efficacy of fostering positive emotional connections in the context of non-profit marketing. The investigation delves into the nuanced dynamics of donor motivations, engagement and advocacy, seeking to discern the viability and implications of an alternative marketing strategy centred on uplifting and affirmative emotional appeals. This scholarly pursuit aligns with the overarching goal of advancing strategic frameworks that promote sustainable and effective communication strategies for non-profit entities.

Marketing helps drive sales in most existing sectors- varying in levels of sophistication. Currently, non-profits create marketing communication with messaging to instigate negative emotions instead of a positive approach.

Social causes are often used to capture consumers' attention and are leveraged effectively by consumer-facing brands. However, such causes promoted by for-profits are met with scepticism, while the same causes by non-profit brands are considered credible (Baghi & Gabrielli, 2012). There is an opportunity for non-profit brands to build credible brands.

People are willing to pay more if they recognize brands irrespective of profit motive (Baghi & Gabrielli, 2012). Coupling that with the need for income for non-profits to fulfil their mission, the principles and practices of marketing are increasingly applicable (Andreasen et al., 2008).

For charities, their image primarily drives community awareness. A strong image drives higher local support. Non-profit organizations should define their target markets, identify their customers and maintain consistent communication with them (Blery et al., 2010). Firms compete to communicate the noneconomic benefits from exchange relationships (Arnett et al., 2003) in line with the broader concept of transaction (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971). By associating

with non-profits, donors can gain economic advantages such as tax breaks and social rewards such as satisfaction and compassion.

Recent qualitative research concluded that brand orientation in charities leads to higher awareness and trust. This leads to higher donations due to research-based tailored messages. (Hankinson, 2000)

Donors can be categorised into four market categories: motivated by social ties, tax advantages, family tradition, and benefited personally from the charity (Cermak et al.,1994). The question explored is how to create a fifth group motivated by the joy of giving and humanity.

This novel approach to marketing for an established sector such as non-profits will open up new communication strategies. This question has not yet been investigated and will lead to a practical methodology non-profits can adopt.

### **1.3 Research Gap**

Research in the field of nonprofits and charities has made significant strides toward understanding their growth patterns, drivers, and impacts. However, several notable research gaps persist, presenting opportunities for further research and scholarly exploration.

A prominent gap is the need for more comprehensive and comparative studies across different regions and sectors. While there is ample literature on the effectiveness of nonprofit marketing in developed countries (Werke & Bogale, 2023), research focusing on developing countries remains limited. Understanding how the economic, social, and political contexts influence the formation and sustainability of nonprofits in these diverse settings is crucial for developing marketing and fundraising strategies. This study provides insight into individuals across various countries - both in case of birth and residence, with a healthy representation of developing countries

Furthermore, social marketing studies tend to lack quantitative and mixed methods (Truong 2014). This study used a mixed-methods approach to bridge this gap. Furthermore, it incorporates the views of both non-profit employees and the target audience of these appeals. While some previous studies have been experimental in nature to gauge donor intent and

behaviour, this study employs a holistic approach by deploying a survey, questionnaire, and an experimental section. Understanding the implications that the tone of the messaging can have on both the audience and the employees working for the non-profit, the study provides a refreshing view of how communication can change the perception of all stakeholders involved.

Additionally, there is a gap in the research on the intersections of for-profit and non-profit marketing (Werke & Bogale, 2023 ). In a world where advertising 'noise' is everywhere, it is important to acknowledge that even non-profit marketing adds to this and can be perceived negatively due to the 'pushy' nature of advertisements. However, the important part is to analyse and understand how effective advertising can capture a donor's attention.

#### **1.4 Research Questions and Objectives**

The research question posed is: “Is positive messaging more effective in driving higher donor intention than negative messaging?”

The research objectives are as follows:

1. To understand if donors have a preference while viewing differently framed appeals
2. To understand if donors display a favourable intent while viewing differently framed appeals
3. To understand if there are differences in preference in individuals of each gender when they view differently framed appeals
4. To understand if there are differences in preference in individuals of each age group when they view differently framed appeals
5. To understand if there are differences in preference in individuals of each Country of Origin when they view differently framed appeals
6. To understand if there are differences in preference in individuals of each Country of Residence when they view differently framed appeals
7. To understand if there are differences in preference in individuals of each education level when they view differently framed appeals

8. To understand if there are differences in preference in individuals of each income level when they view differently framed appeals

9. To understand if individuals find emotional charity appeals manipulative

### **1.5 Hypothesis**

H1: Donors exhibit higher preference and intent when they view positive messaging in charity appeals

H2: Each gender responds differently in their preference and intention when they view positive messaging in charity appeals

H3: Each age bracket responds differently in their preference and intention when they view positive messaging in charity appeals

H4: The individual's country of origin influences how they respond when they view positive messaging in charity appeals

H5: The individual's country of residence influences how they respond when they view positive messaging in charity appeals

H6: The individual's educational level influences how they respond when they view positive messaging in charity appeals

H7: The individual's income influences how they respond when they view positive messaging in charity appeals

H8: Individuals view emotional charity appeals as manipulative.

### **1.6 Scope and Limitations**

- Social welfare

The study focuses on social welfare as a cause - which usually covers food, water, education and shelter. These are basic human needs and remain constant. There is little variation in terms of scale and location through time. The reason for this was that individuals react to causes differently. In cases where refugees of war or patients requiring immediate

medical care request donations, the urgency is high, just as when the donation is requested for immediate surgery to save a life. This urgency may change the perception and actions of the donor.

- Charities vs. non-profits

The study assumes that charities and non-profits operate fairly similarly. There is little distinction between these organizations and these terms are used interchangeably, except while quoting previous research.

- Donations from the general public

The study aimed to reach the general public- consisting of students, employed and unemployed individuals. There was no restriction based on age, as youngsters donate money that they receive to charities as well. This helps us understand how different age brackets respond to the appeals as a demographic. Other factors explored are gender, the highest level of education completed, income level and country of origin as well as residence. The aim is to understand how demographic factors influence donations.

- Advertising - social media

The study explored visual appeals present with and without text. It is quoted that 'A picture speaks a thousand words'. Also, most appeals feature pictures as the main focal point. Hence, a similar approach has been adopted.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Social Marketing

#### 2.1.1 History of social marketing

Traditionally, marketing as a discipline was developed for products and services. This developed further when social causes adopted marketing principles that were primarily created for commercial use. Lee, N. (2009).

At its core, marketing requires at least two parties that have goods or services to exchange by leveraging communication and distribution. This exchange process can be taken advantage of by meticulous planning by a party. In social changes, a client interacts with a change agent and an exchange process takes place. It helps bridge the gap between human behaviour and the implementation of socially useful information (Zaltman & Kotler, 1971)

The term ‘social marketing’ was coined in 1971 by Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman. Used widely in non-profits, social marketing uses marketing techniques to drive acceptance and adoption of behaviour that can help achieve social benefits for society. It adapts marketing principles to drive the acceptance of social ideas (Kumar & Bhat, 2014). Systematically planning this process to drive the message to the target audience is essential. (Kotler & R. Lee, 2011)

Social marketing is a broad term that includes social advertising, besides program design, program implementation, program control and considerations of pricing, product planning, communication, distribution and market research. (Zaltman & Kotler, 1971)

Social marketing as a field is yet to reach the point of saturation (Truong, 2014)

#### 2.1.2 4Ps of Social Marketing (Zaltman & Kotler, 1971)

The marketing mix comprises of tools for promotion:

1. Product: Social marketers must study the target audience and create products that desirably package the social idea to the audience. In charitable giving, ‘other person’s well-being’(core product) is possible for which the donor must ‘make a financial donation’(desired behaviour)

2. Promotion: Social marketer determines the budget, choice of appeals, media planning, media buying and measurement of results. Broadly, there is “hard marketing” is more aggressive and may be suitable for some causes, while “soft marketing” is an alternate approach that attracts donors by employing persuasion. While non-profits today struggle with marketing budget and allocation, most of it is utilised for social media marketing. A larger budget can help with specific targeting of the audience, leading to higher conversion rates.

3. Place: Referring to response channels, most charities and non-profits use websites to gain donations. There is usually a payment page featuring most debit and credit cards.

4. Price: Humans are not extremely rational while analysing costs, and may take into account the psychological and social cost of participating or donating to a non-profit.

### ***2.1.3 Social Marketing Techniques (French & Russell-Bennett, 2015)***

Segmentation of consumers should be driven by insights and hypotheses on what can draw them towards a desired behaviour. Competitive analysis can help reduce negative competition. Segmentation, competitive and feasibility analysis can be used to create an integrated intervention mix of ‘communication assets’ for the target audience. A systematic planning process consisting of pretesting, monitoring and learning can be implemented, with a focus on co-creation and goal achievement with partners.

### ***2.1.4 Ethical Dilemmas in Social Marketing***

Social marketers face ethical challenges due to the nature of their profession.

It was concluded that their main concern is how power works within organizations and who gets to define the problem- adversely impacting the social marketer’s ability to conduct high-quality marketing. This was followed by fairness in targeting, honest communication and respecting autonomy by avoiding manipulation. Additional concerns involve maintaining an acceptable and practical standard, balancing the influence of corporates, research- centred ethical challenges, working across different income countries, the importance of an evidence-based, and potential unintended harms.

Developing a code of ethics and strong advocacy for a just and transparent environment could help elevate social marketing standards. (Eagle, L. et al., 2015).

### ***2.1.5 Social Marketing in Practise***

Social marketing is practised by public sector employees, non-profits, charities and for-profit employees who work in Corporate Social Responsibility departments. Lee, N. (2009)

Most campaigns conducted within the realm of social marketing use fear-based messages. However, this approach needs to be evaluated for effectiveness and ethical reasons. The framing of the message must evaluate the nature of the desired behaviour and highlight the positive consequences of the desired behaviour (Harris, Fiona and Harrison, Paul, 2012).

Recently, there has been a growing inclination towards ‘nudge’ techniques. This refers to practices that do not inform the consumer of the change taking place – almost by eliminating choices such as in ‘choice’ editing, where a vending machine is removed from the corridor leading to the lecture hall to reduce the consumption of junk food. While this is a socially preferable good, the means of achieving it is questionable due to the college student playing no role in this decision. (Spotswood et al., 2012)

Some techniques employed such as aggressive door-to-door solicitation for donations, misuse of social norms of reciprocity etc. seem to tend more towards manipulation than persuasion. This is a far cry from customer-centricity. (Spotswood et al., 2012)

Social marketing is a deeply democratic process that non-profits will continue to increasingly adopt. (French, Jeff 2017)

### ***2.1.6 Social Marketing – A Case for Poverty (Kotler, P. T., & Lee, N. R., 2009).***

Poverty is an issue that is usually caused due to low access to education, healthcare and employment. This compounds the ill effects on the individual by leading to poor health and a lack of basic amenities.

A broad approach or partnering with the communities, installing basic facilities and promoting the use of these facilities can be helpful. Collaboration with the local government and related non-profits can accelerate the process.

It is important to empower the communities to lead the development for the progress to be sustainable and collaborative. Transparency regarding the resources and regular reporting utilised can build trust and accountability

Insightful segmentation of donors can precede tailored messages, which enhance fundraising effectiveness. Employing a multi-channel approach of utilizing social media, websites, newsletters etc. can reinforce the message while widening the reach. Non-profits must continuously monitor and evaluate their campaigns, refining the campaign iteratively to achieve the end goal.

Regular updates are appreciated by donors, as they build a sense of engagement. These updates need not necessarily be the impact, but they can also acknowledge honestly the challenges faced through clear language. Acknowledging the donor's actions can help build long-term relationships while encouraging others to donate as well.

Emotional appeals are powerful to move the audience – stories and testimonials from the beneficiaries can be highly impactful as well. A compassionate and empathetic tone is required to connect with the audience and influence motivation.

The problems being solved can be framed in serious tones. However, the messages should be framed in a positive light with highlights on the work done, impact and success. The difference made by their donations can be clarified to encourage the audience. The tone must be always respectful and sensitive to the nuances of language and culture. The tone should be consistent and reflective of the value of the non-profits to foster brand recognition

## **2.2 Non-profit marketing**

Marketing for non-profits is an interesting research area. There are many opportunities to research in the complex sector of non-profit marketing (Sepulcri et al., 2020).

Non-profits recognise the importance of marketing to complement their fundraising activities, but lack expertise, budgets and a comprehensive approach to implement the same. (Kchin, 2001)

Charities and non-profits are often considered the opposite of for-profit and large corporations. This leads to a unique challenge as all organizations compete for the same pool of talent and attention. Highly skilled workers demand higher compensation. When non-profits offer high compensation, they are criticised for using donor funds that should reach the beneficiary. Further, advertising by non-profits is perceived as a 'waste of donations' as well. While donating, individuals often evaluate the decision based on how their donation will benefit the beneficiary. In such cases, the donation being utilised for employees or advertising by the non-profit will adversely impact the probability of receiving the fund.

### ***2.2.1 Lack of expertise***

Non-profit organizations lack expertise in marketing (Liston-Heyes & Liu, 2013b). Only 20% of the marketing staff was professionally trained (Dolnicar, S. & Lazarevski, K., 2009).

Many employees performing marketing in non-profits have no formal training, and rate their knowledge highly but show little interest in learning new marketing technology and techniques. Low salary may be a reason, coupled with nonprofit leaders who are yet to understand the advantages of a marketing strategy created around organizational goals and vision (Kchin, 2001)

### ***2.2.2 Attitudes of non-profits towards marketing***

Non-profits have a sceptical attitude towards adopting marketing activities due to their lack of relevance of the marketing concept to their sector (Modi & Mishra, 2010)

Non-profits perceive marketing as a negative manipulative tool that endangers the reputed work they engage in. (Dolnicar, S. & Lazarevski, K., 2009).

While larger charities have adopted more direct marketing techniques, their marketing efforts focus on the most responsive donors. This approach leads to the exclusion of other donor segments and under-utilization of the potential donor pool (Abdy, 1997)

### ***2.2.3 Adapting marketing principles***

Non-profit organizations largely focus on sales and promotional activities, with very few engaging in strategic marketing. (Dolnicar, S. & Lazarevski, K., 2009).

Charities tend to use campaigns to raise their donations. The framing of these campaigns differs based on organization, context, and urgency. Seeking individual donors is one of the most commonly used fundraising strategies. (Kumar & Bhat, 2014)

The marketing mix of price, product, channel and place are considered the 4Ps of marketing. Non-profits tend to interpret this as an inapplicable framework as they do not get to decide the variables. (Dolnicar, S. & Lazarevski, K., 2009).

#### ***2.2.4 Donor orientation***

Customer orientation can be equated to beneficiary and donor orientation in the non-profit sector. Donor orientation comprises of knowledge of existing and possible donors, regular communication and meeting all expectations (Modi & Mishra, 2010). These activities can boost accountability.

Further, market-orientated non-profits effectively achieve the organizational mission, beneficiary satisfaction and peer reputation (Modi & Mishra, 2010).

Advertising by non-profits that are crafted to create a relationship with donors is effective in driving larger donations (Bennett & Barkensjo, 2005).

#### ***2.2.5 Consumer Perception and Trust***

The consumer tends to trust non-profits. In Cause Related Marketing, for-profits and non-profits team up to sell co-branded products to raise money for a cause. Studies show the presence of the non-profit alone increases positive attitude, willingness to purchase and willingness to pay the expected price. This is because consumers evaluate the functional and social welfare components of the product. (Baghi & Gabrielli, 2012). Further, non-profits are vulnerable to non-performance, and hence, the non-profits' claims are rated as credible. (Baghi & Gabrielli, 2012)

However, this trust comes in as a double-edged sword. In a consumer's mind. Non-profits are the opposite of for-profit. Due to this binary understanding, the consumer has a few unrealistic expectations from non-profits. The reputation that non-profits possess is fragile and is easily at risk when non-profits pursue innovation. Although non-profits deal with large-scale

issues, the risk of reputation damage leads to a smaller scale of operations. Further, non-profits have to prioritize frugality over results. (TED, 2013)

There exists a perception that non-profits must be efficient in ensuring that all donations reach the end beneficiary. This led to the rise of organizations such as ‘The Life That You Can Save’. By evaluating the issue, solution and the charity - ‘The Life You Can Save’ recommends the donations an individual can make to create the highest impact. (The Life You Can Save - Nonprofit - High Impact Charities, 2024)

However, this view is narrow and disregards the fact that non-profits are organizations with employees, legal processes and administrative costs. Further, non-profits must invest in advertising to raise more funds by reaching a wider audience.

There is also a disturbing perspective from donors that volunteers reaching out from charities to elicit donations are often aggressive in their pitches and resort to inducing guilt if the person is not interested in donating right away. These experiences can lead to a highly negative perception of non-profits and may convert a donor to a non-donor.

Yet another problematic perception is that charities and non-profits are set up to take advantage of tax benefits and social capital, and not for welfare. This negative perception may turn many individuals away from donations, making the pool smaller.

### **2.3 Regulatory Focus Theory**

Each individual has two independent systems co-existing within – a promotion focus and a prevention focus. One of these tends to dominate in each individual, based on which an individual is classified as either promotion-focused or prevention-focused. Promotion focus originates from nurturing, pursuing hopes and striving for pleasure. Meanwhile, the prevention system originates from the need for security, ensuring duties are fulfilled and threats are avoided. (Higgins, 1997).

Within charitable giving, promotion-focused individuals weigh the advantages and disadvantages while focusing on the end beneficiary. Meanwhile, prevention-focused individuals focus on their own resources and trade-offs required for the donation.

Any communication message can be framed to emphasize gains or prevent negative outcomes. In donation appeals, prevention framing is more effective at persuasion than promotion framing with a condition to the "persuasion through regulatory fit" concept.

Philanthropy involves two sets of goals: the donor's goals and the beneficiary's goals.

Donors guided by their promotion focus are motivated to make an impact, so prevention-framed appeals, which maximize perceived impact, are more attractive.

Nonprofit managers can enhance donation drives' effectiveness by emphasizing the evasion of negative consequences in their appeals and focussing on promotion -focused individuals. (Bullard, O., & Penner, S., 2017)

#### **2.4 Role of empathy and compassion**

An individual's motivation to join charity programmes is influenced generally by positive emotions and empathy (Dwidienawati et al., 2018)

Charities often use emotionally charged visuals and messaging to elicit donations. Most charitable organizations use sad emotions to attract the attention of viewers. Empathy is the key emotion being evoked.

#### **2.5 Conflicting findings across the years**

There is a clear variation in the results obtained over time. This may be reflective of the shift in society's perspectives and interpretation as development changes the landscape we inhabit.

An early study exploring the usage of photographs in charity appeals concluded that appeals with no photographs received the highest number of responses, but appeals with positive photographs received the highest contribution on average. Interestingly, the appeal with the negative photograph yielded the lowest response rate and average contribution (Dyck & Coldevin, 1992)

Effective appeals to raise funds appeal to the benefits others would reap over the benefits the self would reap. Further, negative emotions trigger action as compared to positive emotions.(Fisher et al., 2008)

Individuals express more sadness when viewing a sad-faced victim and show a higher tendency to donate (Small, D. A., & Verrochi, N. M., 2009). A between-subject study concluded that positive framing is less effective. (Chang & Lee, 2010)

Charitable appeals aimed at the public should be gain-framed as individuals are more likely to be seeking rewards than avoiding threats. However, if further research into the donor pool is possible, their motivation to donate should be studied to craft the most effective appeal.(Jeong et al., 2011)

Another study researching the difference between loss-framed and gain-framed messages in influencing donor intention concluded donation intention can be increased by a loss-framed advertisement than a gain-framed advertisement. (Cao, 2015).

An experimental cross-sectional study exposed individuals to shocking, neutral and positive emotional appeal for charity. A key finding is that surprise, interest and compassion are key emotions when it comes to engagement and donor intentions. (Cockrill & Parsonage, 2016)

Negative emotional charity appeals are more effective as they evoke sympathy. However, due to an increase in loneliness, an individual's ability to sympathise reduces. Based on grounded cognition research, loneliness can be perceived highly when feelings of physical coldness are present. This leads to lesser effectiveness of cold images when compared to neutral or warm images in charity appeals. (Choi et al., 2016)

A conceptual model in social media marketing concludes that sympathy and empathy responses are positively related to the persuasiveness of the message (Keskin et al., 2017). Charities tend to rely on attitudes towards the appeal or organization while designing their appeals - but must evaluate the effectiveness based on actual donation behaviour.(Erlandsson et al., 2018b).

Negative appeals may be more effective at eliciting donations despite the negative emotions they cause (Erlandsson et al., 2018b). In a related field of crowdfunding, it was concluded that entrepreneurs conveying hope and optimism had higher success in raising funds(Anglin et al., 2018)

A target audience with high levels of public service motivation may not be persuaded with positive emotions to make donations (Best & Costello, 2019). A pro-cause audience is highly sensitized and triggered to act by reports of failure to achieve the objective (Pinazo, Daniel et al, 2019).

A between-subjects experimental study explored the impact when individuals are exposed to varying charity appeals and concluded that a negative appeal followed by a positive appeal was the most effective (Gebreselassie & Bougie, 2019)

Sadness is a powerful emotion to be leveraged for low-budget and education-type campaigns, with a human face compounding the effect. Positive contentment emotion is most effective for high-budget and community or environment-type campaigns (Hou, Jian et al. 2020)

Besides causing discomfort, negative images reduces the motivation to help if the suffering is perceived as irremediable. (Bae, 2021). A longitudinal research study in Europe revealed that positive appeals employed higher proportional use as rhetoric, music and voice tonality. (Casais & Proença, 2021)

Many charities have shifted to empowering and positive narratives on social media marketing without evaluating its effectiveness. On investigating 3066 charity posts, it was concluded that sadness is more effective in images and textual content. Happier images increased engagement only when an image and the supporting text were happy (Kwon et al., 2022). Negatively framed messages can lead to more donors and more engagement on social media. However, positively framed messages led to higher average donation amounts (Jang & Chu, 2022)

In a study exploring effective advertisements that raise the most funds for political causes, it was concluded that a direct appeal from money using negative framing is the most effective (Wintersieck & Keena, 2023)

Hope appeals produced higher message elaboration and likes on social media, but guilt appeals produced higher donation intentions. (Lee, 2023)

## **2.6 Factors influencing responses**

### ***2.6.1 Demographic Differences in Response***

In recent research, women tended to donate more generously when faced with negative advertisements (Erlandsson et al., 2018b).

Women tend to display higher altruistic traits and donor intentions. Further, women react more positively to advertising by charities (Chang & Lee, 2010)

Countries that tend to avoid uncertainty and experience higher incidence of epidemics favour negative appeals (Casais & Proença, 2021). When verified against the UN World Happiness Report, the countries ranking high on happiness displayed a higher correlation with having gifted a charity recently (Charities Aid Foundation, 2022).

### ***2.6.2 Socioeconomic status and education levels***

Donation levels increase with age and educational level (Bennett, 2003).

### ***2.6.3 Psychological Factors Influencing Donation Behavior***

Individuals who spend more of their income on others experienced greater happiness in a cross-sectional and longitudinal windfall study (Dunn et al., 2008)

Individuals randomly assigned to spend on others scored higher happiness levels as compared to individuals who were assigned to spend it on themselves (Dunn et al., 2008). Donation levels increase with empathetic inclination (Bennett, 2003).

An individual's perception of their current life situation directly influences charitable donations. (Charities Aid Foundation, 2022).

### ***2.6.4 Other variables in appeals that influence perception***

#### **2.6.4.1 Order of content**

These advertisements have multiple variables. The order in which the content is communicated is important - as content that elicits negative emotions followed by positive emotions leads viewers to experience more positive emotions. (Bae, 2021)

#### **2.6.4.2 Colours used in appeal**

A study exploring the effect of colours on appeals concluded that individuals donated based on the attention the appeal received. The attention of an individual can be increased by using a blue background for positively framed appeals - as this is a counter-intuitive design. Blue is often associated with negative, and the superimposition of positive messaging leads to the viewer paying higher attention. (Choi et al., 2020)

#### **2.6.4.3 Consistent messaging**

Donors can be motivated through emotional arguments featuring a story and picture or through analytical arguments featuring statistics, scope and nature of the problem. However, if these arguments are mixed, the appeal becomes inconsistent and decreases donations (Erlandsson et al., 2016). Effective fundraising messages ensure congruence in the use of message framing and valence of the story (Chang & Lee, 2010)

#### **2.6.4.4 Specificity**

The campaign must specify the details, as consumers tend to respond favourably to specific messages than generic messages (Robinson & Eilert, 2018)

#### **2.6.4.5 Preference for groups**

When confronted with the choice of donating to an individual against a group, donors tend to donate to the group while not allocating a proportional amount for each member of the group (Kogut & Ritov, 2005a).

### ***2.6.5 Personal characteristics that influence donor intention and behaviour***

#### **2.6.5.1 Advertising avoidance**

In a world where individuals are constantly bombarded with intrusive advertising, individuals tend to block out advertising by all means possible. Advertising avoidance on social media can adversely impact a charity's campaign. Fewer people view the advertisement as it may be blocked by adblockers. Further, the reach of the campaign was significantly reduced. This makes it essential for charities to innovate through influencer partnerships, targeted advertising and authentic content. (Kelly et al., 2019)

### **2.6.5.2 Positive and negative empathy**

Positive empathy creates a need for the individual to maintain positive feelings by helping those in need - and encourages both happy and sad individuals to act. This is in contrast with negative empathy

The capacity to feel along with other's negative emotions is distinct from feeling other's positive emotions. This principle separates positive empathy from negative empathy - while both lead to helping behaviour. (Andreychik & Migliaccio, 2015b)

Individuals who possess positive empathy respond better to charity appeals that help others attain well-being, while those possessing negative empathy desire to help others avoid suffering and negative outcomes (Andreychik & Lewis, 2017).

### **2.6.5.3 Health**

Individuals who are in better health tend to donate more frequently and larger amounts, with specific donations to healthcare organizations.(Konrath et al., 2023)

### **2.6.5.4 Individual motivations**

Information about the efficiency of the charity in a positive light increases donor intentions. However, when this information is public, donors motivated by their social image reduce their contributions (Butera & Horn, 2014). Other motivations could be the individual experiences a warm glow while giving (Andreoni, 1990) or it could be the individual is susceptible (Cao, 2016).

### **2.6.6 Individual Orientation**

Promotional-based framing focuses on achieving a positive result (e.g., "providing access to drinking water"). Framing it as evading a negative result (e.g., "preventing drinking water shortages") is a prevention-framed charity goal. Recent research has demonstrated that promotional-based framing is more effective than prevention-based goals when evaluated based on donor perception, intention, and actual behaviour (Sekścińska et al., 2023).

Individuals with a prevention-based orientation tend to question the efficacy of the charity and donate lesser when informed that the campaign has raised much less than the target

(Le et al., 2020). To counteract this effect, charity campaigns are recommended to actively promote the upward potential of the campaign with promotion-focused language (Le et al., 2020). However, these findings are relatively new, and there is plenty of scope for research on the various factors associated with the effectiveness of framing.

Positive and coercive appeals receive the same actions from donors as these appeals produce hope for change rather than triggering an action. (Yousef et al., 2021)

Research on effective fundraising has also explored a mix of messaging. It was concluded that statistical data framed negatively and anecdotal information framed positively led to the highest effectiveness (Das et al., 2008). Anecdotal evidence is more effective than statistical evidence as a tool for persuasion (Das et al., 2008)

#### ***2.6.7 Short-Term vs. Long-Term Effects***

The framing of the message is important to influence the recipient's perception and consequently, action. There are two broad ways to frame - (1) loss-framed messages highlight the negative effects of not performing a promoted behaviour (2) gain-framed messages focus on the benefits resulting from performing a promoted behaviour (Cao, 2016).

To trigger immediate donation intentions, loss-framed messages alongside feasibility-framed messages are more effective. However, to trigger long-term donation intentions, gain-framed promotion messages alongside desirability-framed messages are more effective (Tugba Orten Tugrul & Eun-Mi Lee, 2018).

Further, how an individual imagines the charity functions, through visual and mental imagery affects their donation intention. (Cheng, 2024). For distant funds, charities are recommended to focus on outcomes and effective use while for near-future raising, charities should focus on how are funds used (Cheng, 2024)

#### ***2.6.8 Type of charity and cause***

A clear positive presentation of the efficiency and effectiveness of the charity is important to donors while evaluating their decisions to donate (Le et al., 2020). Messages addressing charity goal attainment as a highly probable event alongside transparency of the

money spent lead to higher intentions (Das et al., 2008). Efficacy is a driving factor for charitable donations (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2010)

### ***2.6.9 Media channels and platforms used***

Social media is harnessed by charities due to its high reach and low costs. Advertisers are recommended to use negative advertising appeals to drive engagement and behavioural actions as compared to positive and coactive appeals (Yousef et al., 2021).

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.1 The Expectancy-Contrast Model (ECM)**

This framework helps evaluate how expectations and experiences shape an individual's perception and response to persuasive messages, such as charity appeals. A donor's initial expectations of the charity appeal can influence their reaction.

**Expectancy formation:** An individual anticipates the message tone and content based on prior experiences, beliefs and contextual clues

**Contrast Effect:** A message deviating from these expectations can create a contrast effect, which can either enhance or diminish the persuasiveness of the message

The Expectancy-Contrast Model (ECM) offers a valuable framework for understanding how expectations and experiences shape individuals' responses to persuasive messages, including charity appeals with varying tones. In this dissertation, the ECM serves as a theoretical lens to explore how donors' initial expectations of a charity appeal (positive or negative) influence their subsequent evaluation and response to the message. (Skowronski, J. J., & Carlston, D. E., 1989).

If a donor expects a positive framed appeal, a charity appeal that conforms to this expectations will increase donor intention through optimism and upliftment. If a donor expects a negative tone, a charity appeal that evokes sympathy would be the most persuasive. However, if the degree of negativity in the appeal exceeds the expectation, the donor may feel manipulated and withdraw.

While this model is quite direct, there can be other mediating factors affecting the decision such as empathy, timing of the appeal, frequency of the appeal, cultural norms etc.

#### **3.2 The Recency Bias**

Individuals tend to weigh recent events and information heavily as compared to earlier ones. This is a cognitive phenomenon that influences how donors perceive and decide on charitable appeals.

An individual is disproportionately influenced by the last piece of communication witnessed that is related to charities, disregarding most previous communication prior to that.

The implications for non-profits include strategically timing charity appeals, sequencing related campaigns, reinforcing key messages and ensuring most communication highlights positive outcomes.

Recency bias may operate differently for individuals who have been engaged with charities for a long time and access different forms of media frequently. (Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D.,1974).

### **3.3 The Need, Solution, Response (NSR) Model**

This structured framework examines how persuasive messages address the individual's perceptions of need, present solutions and trigger a response.

1. Need: The problem that the non-profit is addressing must be clearly outlined with supporting figures, possibly with an emotional tone to highlight the human impact of the need.
2. Solution: The non-profit must communicate how the donation will either help achieve positive outcomes to evoke empathy or how not helping will cause negative outcomes to evoke responsibility.
3. Response: The communication should specify the ask from the individual and how the individual can donate. (Von Hippel & Von Krogh, 2016)

### **3.4 Cognitive Dissonance Theory**

Individuals strive for consistency between their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. If there is a disconnect, individuals experience discomfort. Knowledge of this can help non-profits design their appeals to align with the values of the target audience. (Festinger, L. ,1957)

### **3.5 Social desirability of helping**

Individuals respond better to appeals that communicate the benefits the other person would reap than to appeals that communicate benefits to the self. This could be due to the social desirability of helping, where individuals are expected to help others for noble reasons

and not self-interest. However, individuals derive social approval and higher self-esteem from helping others. (Fisher et al., 2008)

### **3.6 Behavioural Systems**

Individuals respond better to charitable appeals aligned with their motivational orientation. The two distinct systems in regulating behaviour can be split into (1) Behavioural Action System, which are approach-oriented individuals responding to rewards and avoidance of pain. (2) Behavioural Inhibition System, which are avoidance-oriented individuals responding to threats

Individuals with higher BAS are more responsive to appeals that are gain-framed and individuals with higher BIS are more responsive to appeals that are loss-framed. (Jeong et al., 2011)

### **3.7 Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)**

There are two routes to persuading an individual, and the route influences how the individual processes the information. (Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T., 2012).

**Central Route :** If the individual is highly motivated, the individual tends to use the Central Route for processing the information through deep and thoughtful analysis of the content, leading to a lasting impact on the individual's perspective. If a negative tone is employed, it must be accompanied by detailed statistics and evidence of impact. If a positive tone is employed, it must be accompanied by successful testimonials, long-term benefits and evidence of success.

**Peripheral Route:** If the individual is not highly motivated, the individual tends to use the Peripheral Route for processing the information through superficial cues, leading to immediate action. If a negative tone is employed, it must be emotional appeals to trigger empathy, guilt or urgency. Powerful imagery of suffering and celebrity endorsements can prompt immediate donations. If a positive tone is employed, it must feature happy faces, positive reinforcement and uplifting imagery.

Effective appeals can also combine both elements and alternate between two tones.

### **3.8 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)**

Human behaviour can be explained through three components:

1. Attitude toward behaviour: The individual has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of performing the behaviour. A favourable attitude increases the probability of the behaviour.
2. Subjective norms: The individual has perceived social pressures to either perform or not perform the behaviours. If an act is considered important by others, the individual is most likely to behave in the desired manner
3. Perceived Behaviour Control: The individual has a perceived ease or lack of ease for performing the behaviour based on past experience and judgement. Higher control enhances the probability of the behaviour.

Both positive and negative tones can (1) create a favourable attitude by evoking congruent emotions (2) influence subjective norms by showcasing public figures and leveraging social pressure (3) enhance behavioural control by simplifying the donation process and communicating impact (Ajzen, I.,1991).

### **3.9 Cognitive and Emotional Impact**

An individual's beliefs about the controllability and usefulness of emotions influence their emotional regulation. Individuals who strongly believe that emotions are uncontrollable and useless struggle with regulating their emotions to highly emotional charity appeals (Preece et al., 2022).

## **4. Research Methodology**

### **4.1 Overview of Research Design**

Most studies tend to use a fictional non-profit while designing their experiment such as (Sekścińska et al., 2023) and (Fleming et al., 2022). Few such as those (Bae, 2021) feature a real non-profit.

In this study, there is a healthy mix, where messaging from real non-profits is featured alongside fictional ones. This is to ensure authenticity is retained as the purpose of the study is a practical evaluation of the effectiveness of messaging samples.

Most of the earlier research focused on a specific geographic region (Poland for Sekścińska et al., 2023) or had a White-majority (Fleming et al., 2022). This study explores individuals across a wide range of Countries of Origin and Countries of Residence.

There is a wide scope for testing whether people are motivated to avoid negative charity appeals due to the discomfort caused (Erlandsson et al., 2018b). This is captured in the qualitative section where an open-ended question asks the respondent their feelings or thoughts on the advertisements.

### **4.2 Survey**

An online questionnaire was designed to capture the messaging tone preferences of 90 anonymous respondents. A complete copy of the survey can be accessed at Appendix 1

#### ***4.2.1 Considerations***

While designing the questionnaire, several factors were considered.

##### **4.2.1.1 Demographic data**

Collected to understand variance across age, gender, country of origin, country of residence and highest education completed.

##### **4.2.1.2 Charitable donations**

Questions were posed to study the perceptions and actions of the respondents toward charities.

#### **4.2.1.3 Experiment**

After that, it was important to understand the respondent's immediate reaction to donation-seeking advertisements. 3 pairs of advertisements were presented, totalling 6 images - and the respondent was asked to select 1 of the campaigns to donate to in each pair. Caution was exercised while selecting these images - any recognisable signs such as branding and logos were removed. Each pair featured an advertisement seeking donations for the same cause - hunger, water and shelter. The marked difference between the 2 images of the same pair was the smiling or sad faces featured in the advertisement. Attention was paid to ensure the images were comparable, and that the approximate age group and ethnicity of the persons featured were similar - to eliminate biases.

By requesting the respondent to pick one of the two appeals in all three instances, the method employed was forced choice. This method requires respondents to provide an answer for each instance while encouraging an elaborate thought process (Jolene D. Smyth et al., 2006)

#### **4.2.1.4 Feelings**

Respondents are asked to rate how they felt after viewing the appeals across emotions - positive, negative, guilty, inspired, and lucky. A 5-point Likert scale is administered as it helps quantify subjective preferences.(Joshi, Ankur et al,2015)

A 5-item Likert scale is also considered to be an instrument that has strong internal consistency. (Croasmun, J.T. & Ostrom, Lee.,2011).

#### **4.2.1.5 Other factors**

Through intensive research, it is clear that charitable donations are impacted by multiple variables - and not just marketing. To gauge the impact, other factors were presented - such as the impact of branding, emotional response, financial situation and other factors.

#### **4.2.2 Initial draft**

In the primary phase of the research, a draft version of the questionnaire was prepared. This draft version was shared with a few respondents and also with the supervisors of the research. All modifications made were based on inputs received from both parties.

The draft version included a demographic data section which is retained in the final copy. Other sections included the engagement with charities - including if the respondent had donated over the past year, and which charities have donated to.

Another section evaluated the respondent's responses to appeals by charities. This included responses to viewing ads seeking donations for charitable courses, the effectiveness of marketing channels employed among social media, newsletters, print, radio, and events and how much the respondent is influenced by marketing campaigns. There were also questions on which aspects of the current charity marketing strategies the respondent found least effective along with a question on how to identify the tone of current messages by charitable organizations. An interpretation from the respondents on whether they found current marketing messages from charitable organizations effective in conveying the mission and values were recorded.

The respondent was requested to state their preference for a negative message or a positive message from charities.

Other factors to influence the donation were also posed as questions alongside a question on the motivation to donate

While these questions would have been essential in understanding the predisposition of the respondent to charities, their marketing messaging and donations in general - it would have led to the questionnaire being extremely lengthy. Further, it was clear that the survey should be made simpler and use less technical terms.

This posed an additional risk of non-completion or partial completion of the survey. Hence, the survey was edited to be shorter and with a completion time of three minutes.

#### ***4.2.3 Manipulation checks***

The survey was designed to be completed in 2-3 minutes. Hence, no attention checks were used. A perception check featuring a 5-point Likert scale encouraged respondents to rate the intensity of their various emotions after viewing the advertisements. A recall and debrief check was implemented in the end where the individual was asked to share their thoughts or

feelings after viewing the advertisements. This captured their perception of appeals they viewed during the survey.

#### ***4.2.4 Progress bar***

To transparently track the progress of the individual on the survey to encourage completion.

#### ***4.2.5 Neutral background***

White colour, represented by hexadecimal code #FFFFFF and the RGB code (255, 255, 255), is used in the background of the form to remove any bias or external effects. This was put in place to ensure the viewer was focussing on the image in the form.

In other studies exploring appeals, e-mails were often used. However, these studies did not take into account the impact on the images used in appeals based on the colour of the browser bar or e-mail homepage. Colour is significant in the highly dominant visual medium employed for appeals.

#### ***4.2.6 Description***

A clear outline of the field of study was disclosed to the respondent. Further, the respondent was informed that the survey is completely anonymous, and no additional data is collected besides their responses. This method implied that the survey respondents could not be contacted again for a follow-up or final report.

#### ***4.2.7 Sampling Strategy and Sample Selection***

The method employed was convenience sampling. A possible drawback of convenience sampling is the limited reach of networks leading to all participants being from the same geographical area or socioeconomic area. (Emerson, R. W. , 2015). However, a diverse set of respondents have completed the survey with undeniable concentration in some regions.

This method gathers data from available participants. As the idea was to capture an immediate reaction to the appeals, many were encouraged to participate to share diverse perspectives.

#### ***4.2.8 Tools used***

Google Forms was the platform used for the survey. That was due to the convenience of use and ease of exporting into an Excel sheet. Further, the real-time responses are depicted visually to track the reactions close to real-time.

However, this came with a few limitations.

1. Anonymous data has no restriction could be placed on the number of responses per viewer. However, the request was to fill out the form - so it is assumed in good faith that no respondent filled the survey more than once.

2. Pictures displayed on the laptop looked larger than on a smartphone. This could impact the results as the survey was designed for the pictures to be the focal point. A smaller size could significantly impact the emotional interpretation of the images. However, there was no option to ensure uniformity across devices on Google Forms

### **4.3 Qualitative Thematic Analysis of Interviews with Non-Profit Stakeholders**

Interview marketing directors, communication officers, and individuals responsible for donor relations, from non-profit organizations. Use qualitative data analysis techniques, such as thematic analysis, to identify recurring themes and patterns in the interview responses.

The interviews with 5 experts were conducted to understand the perceptions and workings of the industry and main actors.

#### ***4.3.1 Selection Criteria for Interviewees***

Professionals working with non-profits were scouted for on the professional networking platform LinkedIn. The research faced significant delay due to the low rate of response from the professionals, leading to reaching out to a large number to finalise the interviews.

#### ***4.3.2 Interview Methodology***

The interviews were arranged as per the availability of the professional. After the time was confirmed, a Google Meet/ Zoom invite for the call was shared alongside the Consent

Form. The Consent Form outlined details of the project, expectations, roles, benefits and liabilities. The Consent form was signed by the interviewee and returned before the interview.

The interviews were scheduled for 30 minutes and employed Otter AI for transcription. Once the interview was completed, the interviewee received a thank-you mail along with the main takeaways. Further, the interviewees expressed an interest in receiving the final report as well.

A complete copy of the Consent Form can be accessed in Appendix 2.

A complete copy of the Semi-Structured Interview Questionnaire can be accessed in Appendix 3.

### ***4.3.3 Profiles of Interviewed Professionals***

A diverse group of professionals were interviewed. They play various roles across the non-profits they work for or partner with. P1 was the Director of a Marketing and PR firm in Europe that works with non-profits to create campaigns to create branding and raise funds. P2 is a researcher who has extensively worked with Non-Profit Marketing and offered in-depth analysis and current trends in the field. P3 is a non-profit organisation's founder and has extensive experience in for-profit marketing. P4 is a programme manager in a reputed non-profit and handles the strategy, execution and marketing of the programme to the target audience. P5 is a marketer at a non-profit that actively works on campaigns to spread awareness. The entire set has an average of professional work experience of 15 years, denoting the depth of experience captured in the insights.

### ***4.3.4 Method - Thematic Analysis***

Thematic Analysis (TA) was used to identify, analyse and interpret the meanings of the interviews conducted with 5 experts. The approach allows for the organic development of codes and themes from the transcripts. The transcripts are processed iteratively to generate codes - which are units of data relevant to the research. These codes are organized into larger themes. (Clarke & Braun, 2016)

The Thematic Analysis was conducted as a six-step process as in Braun and Clarke (2006).

As the researcher conducted these interviews directly, she had prior knowledge and initial interests. The research involved immersive, repeated reading of the data actively to seek meanings, patterns and trends.

#### ***4.3.5 Tools used***

Otter AI was used for the transcription process. During the research, the transcript was cross-checked against the audio recording for accuracy. The ‘true nature’ of the discussions has been captured.

Microsoft Excel was employed for the first coding process. This involved coding systematically and organizing data relevant to each code. Through the multiple readings – data familiarization and initial codes were allotted.

MAXQDA was used for the analysis of the codes and, generation of visuals and themes.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1 Results and Discussion of the Survey

The final survey was completed by 90 respondents. As all questions were mandatory, the answers for each question were received. This can be viewed as a success in terms of the design of the questionnaire due to its brevity.

Further, to understand the preferences of each individual – a mechanism was created. As there were three pairs of options, each choice was 33.3% of the total preference. For example, if an individual chose two positive images and one negative image to donate to, the individual shows a preference of 66.6% for positively framed messages and 33.3% for negatively framed messages. If a person chooses to donate only to negative appeals, their preference is 100% for negatively framed messages.

The following table clarifies the logic of how the final preference was arrived at, alongside the identifying labels for each preference.

**Table 1**

*Logic of code assigned to each individual*

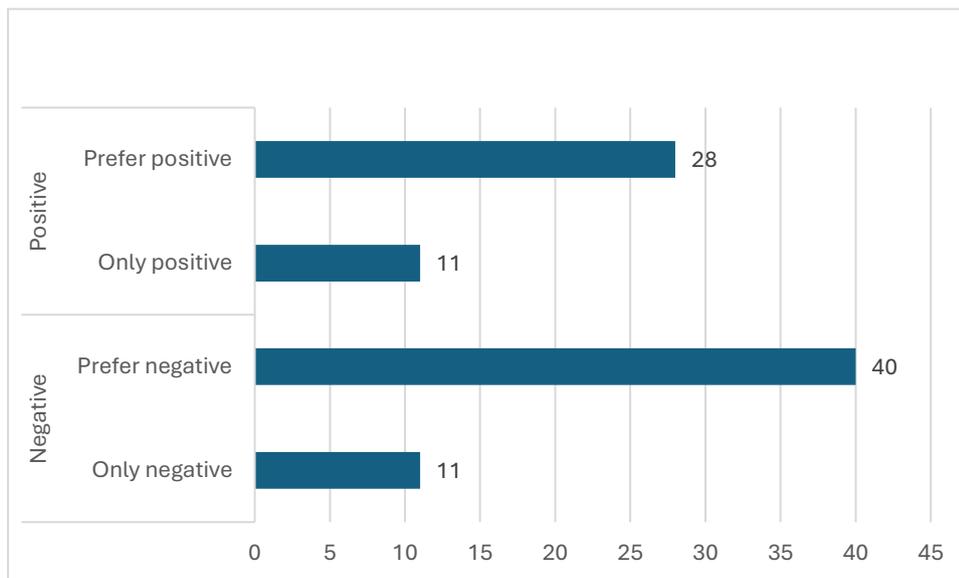
Positive preferred	Negative preferred	Label for final preference
100%	0%	Only positive
66.6%	33.3%	Prefer positive
33.3%	66.6%	Prefer negative
0%	100%	Only negative

H1: Donors exhibit higher preference and intent when they view positive messaging in charity appeals

Based on the survey results, 51 of the 90 respondents preferred negative messaging to positive messaging. This results in 56.6% of the respondents opting for negative messaging as compared to the 43.3% intending to donate to positive charity appeals. The results lean towards negative messaging being more effective.

### Chart 1

*Summary of tone preferences*



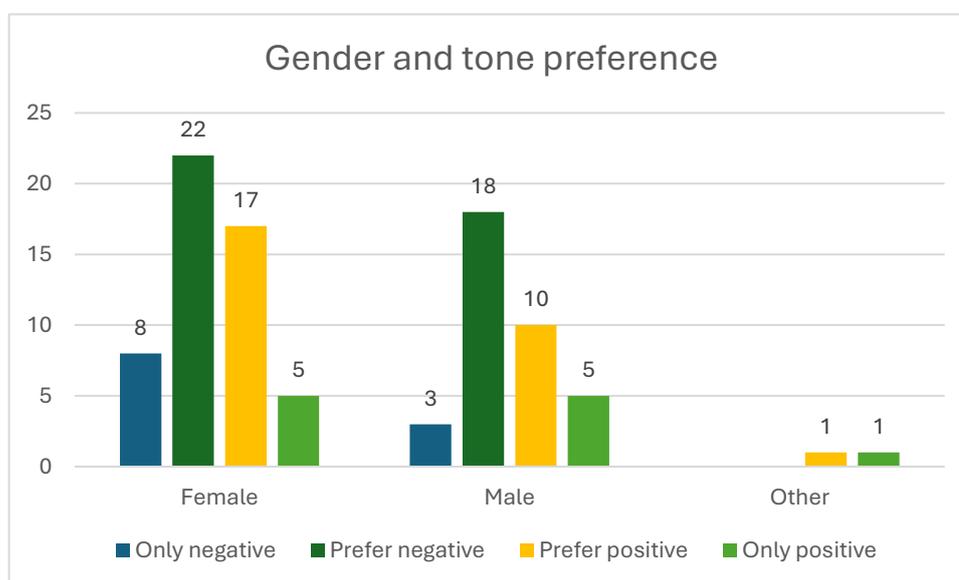
H2: Each gender responds differently in their preference and intention when they view positive messaging in charity appeals

This hypothesis is based on recent research which concluded that women tend to donate more generously when faced with negative advertisements (Erlandsson et al., 2018b).

The survey indicates that women (57.7%) and men (58.3%) prefer negative messaging when confronted with a positive appeal and a negative appeal. Individuals identifying as 'other' have indicated a clear preference for positive messaging. The difference between genders seems negligible.

**Table 2***Gender*

Age	Total Participants	Prefer positive	Prefer negative
Female	52	42.3%	57.7%
Male	36	41.7%	58.3%
Other	2	100%	0%

**Chart 2***The gender split of preferred tone*

H3: Each age bracket responds differently in their preference and intention when they view positive messaging in charity appeals

The results indicate, there is a difference between the age brackets and how they react to charity appeals of different tones. The younger individuals showed a 53.8% preference for positive appeals. However, individuals aged between 25 to 34 exhibited a 64.1% preference for negative appeals. Individuals aged 25 and above seemed to prefer positive messaging with variations.

Age seems to influence how the messaging is perceived, with older individuals preferring positively framed messages. However, the interesting observation is that the age group with the most representation seemed more inclined to negatively frame appeals.

Earlier research indicates that individuals are more generous later in life due to a sharper awareness of mortality. This is reflected in older adults donating more to various causes. (Roberts & Maxfield, 2019)

The results agree with past research concluding that positivity bias that older adults demonstrate, influencing how they process information and make decisions (Bjälkebring et al., 2016)

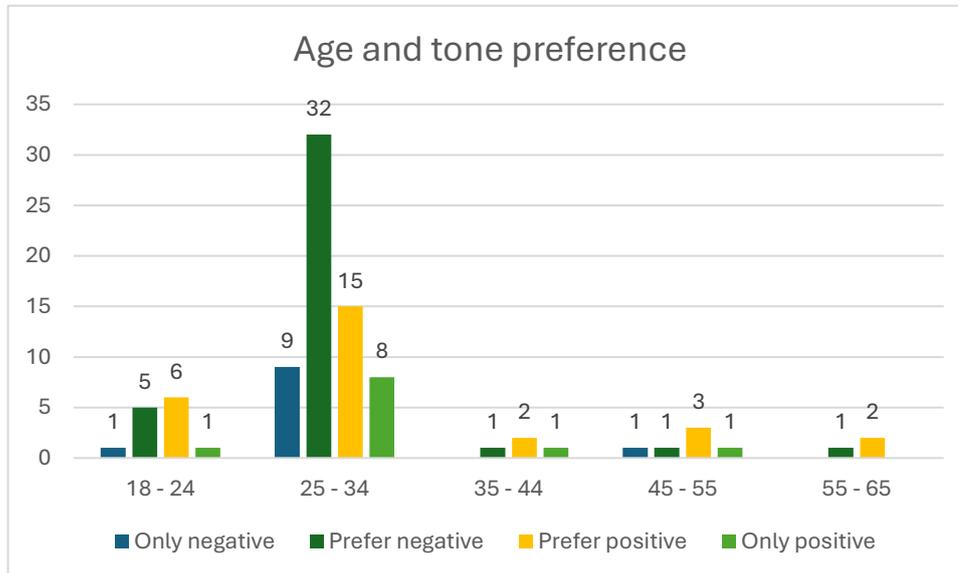
**Table 3**

*Age*

Age	Total	Prefer positive	Prefer negative
18 - 24	13	53.8 %	46.2 %
25 - 34	64	35.9 %	64.1 %
35 - 44	4	75.0 %	25.0 %
45 - 55	6	66.7 %	33.3 %
55 - 65	3	66.7 %	33.3 %

### Chart 3

#### *Age split of preferred tone*



H4: The individual's country of origin influences how they respond when they view positive messaging in charity appeals

Respondents from 24 different countries of origin completed the survey - with one stating it as 'unknown'. The largest number of respondents are from India which displayed a 57.5% preference for negative appeals. The second largest country in terms of representation was Portugal - with 13 respondents displaying a 61.5% preference for negatively framed appeals. The third-largest representation is Indonesia with 7 respondents, exhibiting 57.1% preference for positively framed appeals.

**Table 4***Country of Origin*

No.	Country of Origin	Total	Prefer positive	Prefer negative
1	Angola	1	0 %	100 %
2	Australia	1	100 %	0 %
3	Bolivia	1	0 %	100 %
4	Brazil	4	50 %	50 %
5	China	1	100 %	0 %
6	Colombia	1	0 %	100 %
7	Ecuador	1	100 %	0 %
8	England	1	100 %	0 %
9	France	1	100 %	0 %
10	Germany	2	0 %	100 %
11	Ghana	1	0 %	100 %
12	India	40	42.5 %	57.5 %
13	Indonesia	7	57.1 %	42.9 %
14	Ireland	1	100 %	0 %

15	Italy	3	0 %	100 %
16	Kazakhstan	1	0 %	100 %
17	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	1	100 %	0 %
18	Mexico	2	100 %	0 %
19	Nepal	1	100 %	0 %
20	Not known	1	0 %	100 %
21	Portugal	13	38.5 %	61.5 %
22	Spain	1	0 %	100 %
23	Syria	1	0 %	100 %
24	UK	2	0 %	100 %
25	USA	1	100 %	0 %

H5: The individual's country of residence influences how they respond when they view positive messaging in charity appeals

Respondents in 16 different countries of residence completed the survey. This indicates that the survey respondents are largely expatriate populations, residing in countries different from their country of origin. The largest number of respondents reside in India (20 participants) with a 70% preference for negative appeals. 17 participants reside in Portugal and have a 52.9% preference for negative appeals. 53.5% of the 15 residents of the United Kingdom preferred positively framed appeals, while 53.8% of the 13 residents in Austria preferred negatively framed appeals.

This information is relevant as it explores the impact the current resident country has on the individual.

Research suggests a declining radius of altruism: where individuals prefer to support charities in their area and support father charities to a lesser extent (Grimson et al., 2020). However, research also suggests that individuals with internationalist tendencies choose to support international charities. (Hart & Robson, 2019)

Another cultural dimension is uncertainty avoidance. This score reflects how society deals with uncertainty about the future and the consequent anxiety. Nations with higher uncertainty avoidance are less likely to donate when compared to nations with a lower uncertainty avoidance score. (Stojcic et al., 2016). Further, individuals living in countries with higher inequality tend to be more actively involved in charitable work.

It was observed that immigrants tend to donate more. This led to the importance of evaluating the Country of Origin and Country of Residence. The diaspora giving was at its highest at 271 million GBP in 2022. (Charities Aid Foundation, 2022)

The relationship between immigration and participation is unclear as immigrants experience higher cultural distance but may be more sympathetic towards similar ethnic or cultural roots and inclined to help them. (Mastromatteo & Russo, 2017)

Giving behaviour of long-term immigrants becomes closer to that of an individual originating from the country they migrated to. (Wang, 2014)

**Table 5**

*Country of Residence*

No.	Country of Residence	Total	Prefer positive	Prefer negative
1	Austria	13	46.2 %	53.8 %

2	England	4	50 %	50 %
3	France	3	66.7 %	33.3 %
4	Germany	4	50 %	50 %
5	India	20	30 %	70 %
6	Indonesia	1	0 %	100 %
7	Ireland	2	100 %	0 %
8	Italy	3	0 %	100 %
9	Portugal	17	47.1 %	52.9 %
10	Qatar	2	50 %	50 %
11	Saudi Arabia	1	0 %	100 %
12	Singapore	1	0 %	100 %
13	Spain	1	0 %	100 %
14	Sweden	1	0 %	100 %
15	United Kingdom	15	53.3 %	46.7 %
16	United States	2	100 %	0 %

H6: The individual's educational level influences how they respond when they view positive messaging in charity appeals

The survey has 51 respondents who have a Master's Degree of which 52.9% prefer negative appeals. An even split occurs in preference for participants who have completed High School. Individuals with a Bachelor's degree preferred negatively framed appeals by 67.7% while PhD holders preferred positively framed appeals by 75%.

The level of donations made tends to increase when the donor attains higher education levels (Bennett, 2003).

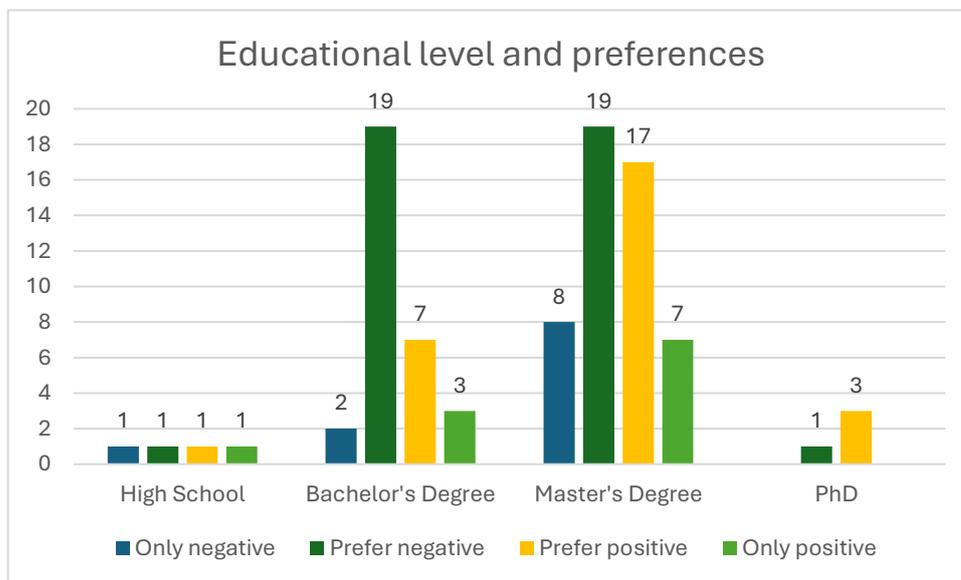
**Table 6**

*Education level*

Education level	Total	Prefer positive	Prefer negative
High School	4	50 %	50 %
Bachelor's Degree	31	32.3 %	67.7%
Master's Degree	51	47.1 %	52.9 %
PhD	4	75 %	25 %

**Chart 4**

*Education Level and preference*



H7: The individual's income influences how they respond when they view positive messaging in charity appeals

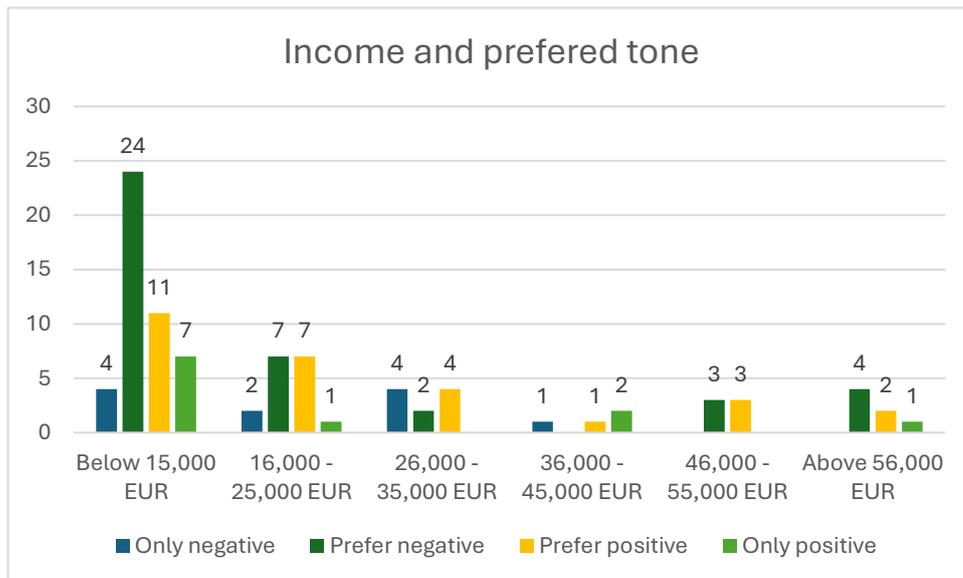
The highest representation is from individuals who earn less than 15,000 EUR per year – 46 participants of which 60.9% prefer negative appeals.

There is a preference for negative appeals by individuals earning less than 35,000 euros per year. On earning 36,000-45,000 per year, participants prefer a positively framed message. On earning more than 46,000 EUR annually, the preference is equally split. For individuals earning above 56,000 EUR, negatively framed appeals were more effective.

**Table 7**

*Income Level*

Income	Total	Prefer positive	Prefer negative
Below 15,000 EUR	46	39.1 %	60.9 %
16,000 - 25,000 EUR	17	47.1 %	52.9 %
26,000 - 35,000 EUR	10	40 %	60 %
36,000 - 45,000 EUR	4	75 %	25 %
46,000 - 55,000 EUR	6	50 %	50 %
Above 56,000 EUR	7	42.9 %	57.1 %

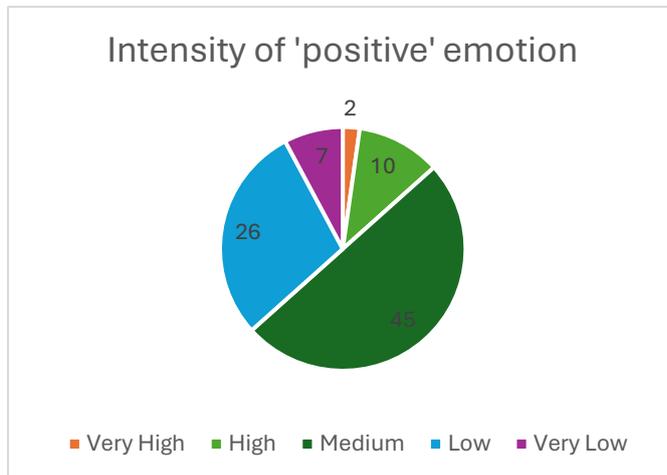
**Chart 5***Income Level and preference*

H8: Individuals view emotional charity appeals as manipulative.

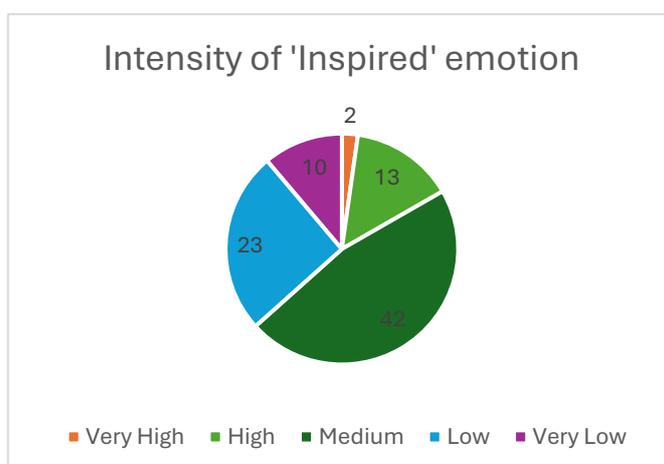
The respondents were exposed to 3 positive and 3 negative images during the course of the survey. They were asked to rate how they felt on a 5-point Likert scale along the feelings of 'positive', 'negative', 'guilt', 'lucky' and 'inspired'. Further, they were asked to share their thoughts on the appeals they witnessed.

Negative appeals are viewed as manipulative and give rise to unintended negative emotions such as sadness, anger, and disgust (Coulter, R. H et al., 1999)

The following charts summarise the feelings with the number of respondents

**Chart 6***Intensity of 'positive emotion'*

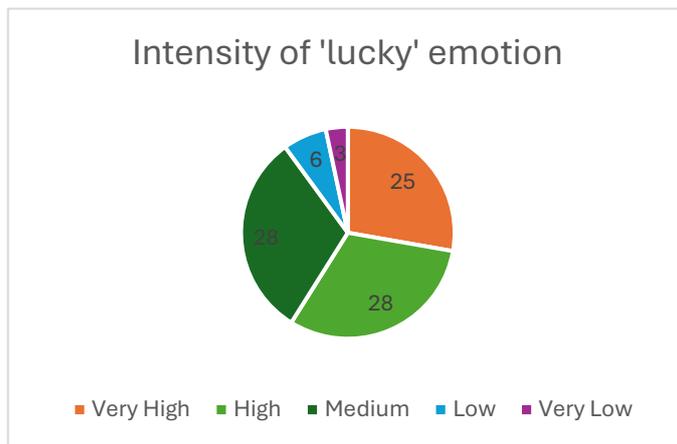
An in-depth analysis of the responses from the participants displayed a clear variation in the emotion and intensity experienced. 45 participants experienced a medium level of 'positive' emotion, 12 participants indicated a high level of 'positive' emotion and 33 participants had a low level of 'positive' emotion. More participants felt lower intensity of 'positive' emotions than high-intensity.

**Chart 7***Intensity of 'inspired emotion'*

42 participants experienced a medium level of 'inspired' emotion, 15 participants indicated a high level of 'inspired' emotion and 33 participants had a low level of 'inspired' emotion. More participants felt lower intensity of 'inspired' emotion than high-intensity.

### Chart 8

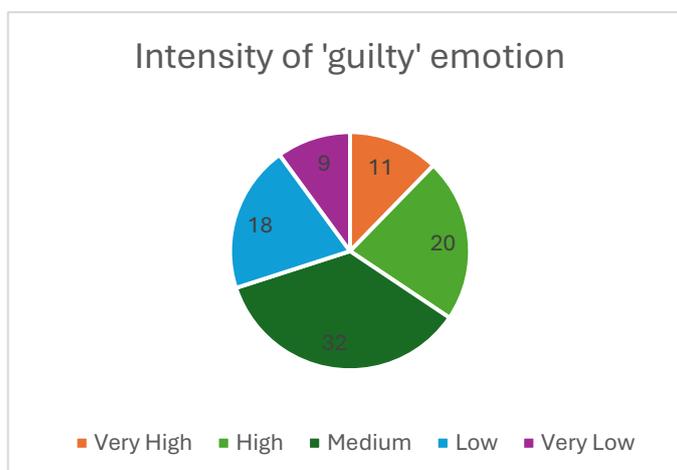
*Intensity of 'lucky' emotion*



28 participants experienced a medium level of 'lucky' emotion, 53 participants indicated a high level of 'lucky' emotion and 9 participants had a low level of 'lucky' emotion. More participants felt a higher intensity of 'lucky' emotion than low-intensity.

### Chart 9

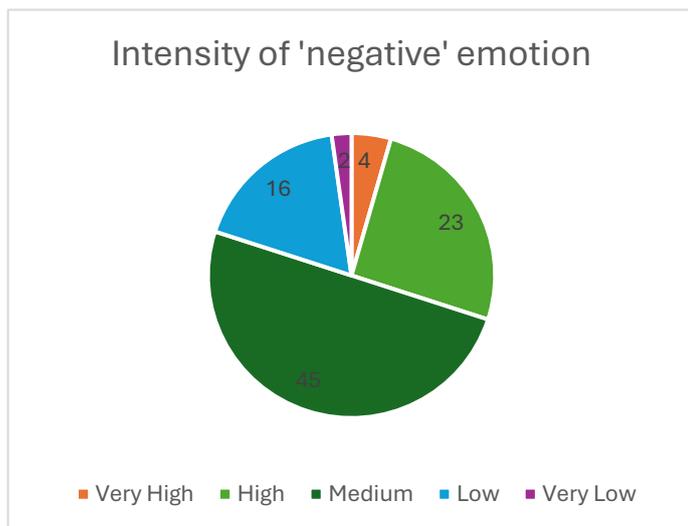
*Intensity of 'guilty' emotion*



32 participants experienced a medium level of 'guilty' emotion, 31 participants indicated a high level of 'guilty' emotion and 27 participants had a low level of 'guilty' emotion. More participants felt a higher intensity of 'guilty' emotion than low-intensity.

**Chart 10**

*Intensity of 'negative emotion'*



45 participants experienced a medium level of 'negative' emotion, 27 participants indicated a high level of 'negative' emotion and 18 participants had a low level of 'negative' emotion. More participants felt higher intensity of 'negative' emotion than low-intensity.

Other responses from the participants that clarify their feelings about the appeals are listed below

**Table 8**

*Comments by participants about sadness*

No.	Individual	Comment
1	45 - 55-year-old Female	Upset
2	25 - 34-year-old Male	Even though one of the pictures is positive, the negative variant of it paints a overall negative picture of a given situation or a region

3	25 - 34-year-old Male	Sad
4	55 - 65 year old Male; regular donor	In your face annoying. Manipulative.
5	25 - 34-year-old Male	the last image reminded me of gaza and made sad
6	25 - 34 year old Female; regular donor	Feel privileged and sad at the disparity
7	25 - 34 year old Female	Guilt is a factor.Sometimes I skip viewing such advertisements thinking about the guilt I would have as I might not donate thinking about its genuiness.
8	25 - 34 year old Female	Some of the ADS seemed a Little bit stereotypical and fake (the AI generated image), some others were more real (the One about homeless people). In generale showing a smiling child does not move me as much as seeing a sad/crying one
9	25 - 34 year old Female	Sad
10	25 - 34-year-old Male	They are effective because doesn't matter your situation, there would be people in a worst position than you, and you can help to improve their lives
11	25 - 34 year old Female	The world is unfair.
12	45 - 55 year old Female; regular donor	somewhat angry that so little gets actually done.

13	25 - 34 year old Female	The causes/fundraisers I donate to, I usually find on social media. Given the constant information overload, disturbing/sad images catch me off guard - there are few instances where I engage or contribute in a meaningful way. Understanding the impact of my contribution often encourages me to donate. I also use a platform called abillion - where I can generate contributions for animal sanctuaries by leaving reviews of food, products and restaurants - therefore costing my nothing but a few minutes!
14	25 - 34 year old Female; regular donor	Sadness
15	18 - 24 year old Female; regular donor	I feel angry seeing people around me waste their resources while there are people severely lacking those. As for myself, I have been taking a conscious effort to not let the resources offered to me go to waste..
16	18 - 24-year-old Female	Responsibiliy
17	25 - 34-year-old Male	Negative images creates a desire to donate
18	25 - 34-year-old Male	Advertisements does not convey the real message
19	25 - 34 year old Female	This was kind of a reminder

20	35 - 44 year old Female; regular donor	I feel that most people in the world , especially children deserve a better life. I also feel that the mafia, politics and injustice have a bigger role to play in their poverty. Instead of psychologically destroying people with such images, the campaign should be directed towards people who can actually make a difference. For eg: political leaders and policy makers.
21	25 - 34 year old Female	Some pictures are emphasising the image of the "unfortunate other". I am not sure if this is supposed to be how it is.
22	25 - 34 year old Female; regular donor	Discomfort, some skepticism, empathy, curiosity on the issue(s). Depends on how the campaign is advertised and its causes.
23	25 - 34-year-old Male	It is sad that I need to be sad to donate money
24	25 - 34-year-old Other	Manipulated
25	25 - 34 year old Female	Sadness, frustration, anger (towards governments)

### ***5.1.1 Other insights and observations***

#### **5.1.1.1 AI-generated charity appeals are distrusted by individuals**

While creating the survey, it was important to have at least one pair of images which had no variation among them except the emotion of the person. To achieve the same, an AI-generated image was used. This was intended for the convenience of the research only.

Although no specific question was asked to capture this, the following 7 responses were received in the final section of the survey which contained an open-ended question. An

interesting trend is that all the following respondents marked that they felt more negative after the survey, and less positive. This may be indicative of the strong dislike the respondents experience due to the AI-generated image.

**Table 9**

*Comments by participants about AI*

No.	Individual	Comment
1	25-34 year old female, regular donor	“I despise the AI ad”
2	18-24 year old female, regular donor	<p>“Third picture: This one confuses me the most perhaps because of the AI-generated picture. In my opinion, donation encouragement through AI will work less than the others. At least for me, it looks fake. How can I know that this picture can really be donated to those people who are needed the most? And it becomes worse when seeing the first option, as the girl cries but she has better clothing than the girl in the second picture. There are many cases in my country where they just act out to be sad or cry begging for pity. But in the end, some of them are receiving more than the manual labourers (receive less than minimum wages). While the girl in the second picture does proper clothing (with some holes in it) shows their (perhaps) actual condition. At least in my understanding, beggars are less likely to smile if they are faking it because they will think that it will not work that way or at least they will not achieve the maximum money that they can receive compared to when they show fake sad emotions.”</p>
3	18-24-year-old other	“The AI one is horrible”
4	25-34-year-old male, regular donor	“The third advertising is clearly AI-made”

5	25-34 year old female	“Some of the ADS seemed a Little bit stereotypical and fake (the AI-generated image), and some others were more real (the One about homeless people). In general, showing a smiling child does not move me as much as seeing a sad/crying one ”
6	25-34-year-old male	“AI-generated picture is not the best to get an emotional attachment ”
7	25-34-year-old male	“ I disliked the AI-generated image of the child with the bowl. It felt forced/fake.”

In the 2023 study, charities were recommended to use synthetic (AI-generated) images cautiously. This was because potential donors' awareness of the falsity of the face featured in the image negatively impacted donor intentions. Charities employing synthetic images must make their ethical motives clear and only under extraordinary circumstances are AI images considered acceptable (Arango et al., 2023).

#### 5.1.1.2 Analysis of regular donors

Of the 90 participants, 28 identified themselves as regular donors. These participants were studied and various parameters were analysed.

On analysis of the data, the following patterns emerged

#### 1. Income

**Table 10**

*Income levels of regular donors*

Annual income	Regular donors	Total Participants	Regular donors as a percentage
Below 15,000 EUR	14	46	30.4 %

16,000 - 25,000 EUR	3	17	17.6 %
26,000 - 35,000 EUR	3	10	30 %
36,000 - 45,000 EUR	2	4	50 %
46,000 - 55,000 EUR	2	6	33.3 %
Above 56,000 EUR	4	7	57.1 %

Except for the dip to 17.6% in the income level of 16,000-25,000 EUR, in all income levels at least 30% of the participants regularly donated. The participants cross 50% for two income groups above 36,000 EUR. This agrees with previous research that concluded that participants with higher household incomes were significantly more likely to donate and reported giving more overall. (Konrath et al., 2023)

## 2. Age

**Table 11**

*Age of regular donors*

Age	Regular donors	Total Participants	Regular donors as a percentage
18 - 24	4	13	30.8 %
25 - 34	17	64	26.6 %
35 - 44	2	4	50 %
45 - 55	4	6	66.7 %
55 - 65	1	3	33.3 %

Out of the participants aged between 35 to 55, 6 out of 10 participants are regular donors. Further, of participants aged between 55-65, 1 of 3 participants is a regular donor. This aligns with previous research that states that donation levels increase with age (Bennett, 2003).

### 3. Gender

**Table 12**

*Genders of regular donors*

Gender	Regular donors	Total Participants	Regular donors as a percentage
Female	16	52	30.8 %
Male	12	36	33.3 %

Both males and females have at least 30% of the total participants of the gender donating regularly. Males have 33.3% donating, which is higher than females. This is a notable departure from the conclusions of related studies where women donate more generously (Erlandsson et al., 2018b), and tend to display higher altruistic traits and donor intentions (Chang & Lee, 2010).

### 4. Educational Level

**Table 13**

*Education levels of regular donors*

Educational Level	Regular donors	Total Participants	Regular donors as a percentage
High School	1	4	25 %
Bachelor's Degree	10	31	32.3 %
Master's Degree	15	51	29.4 %
PhD	2	4	50 %

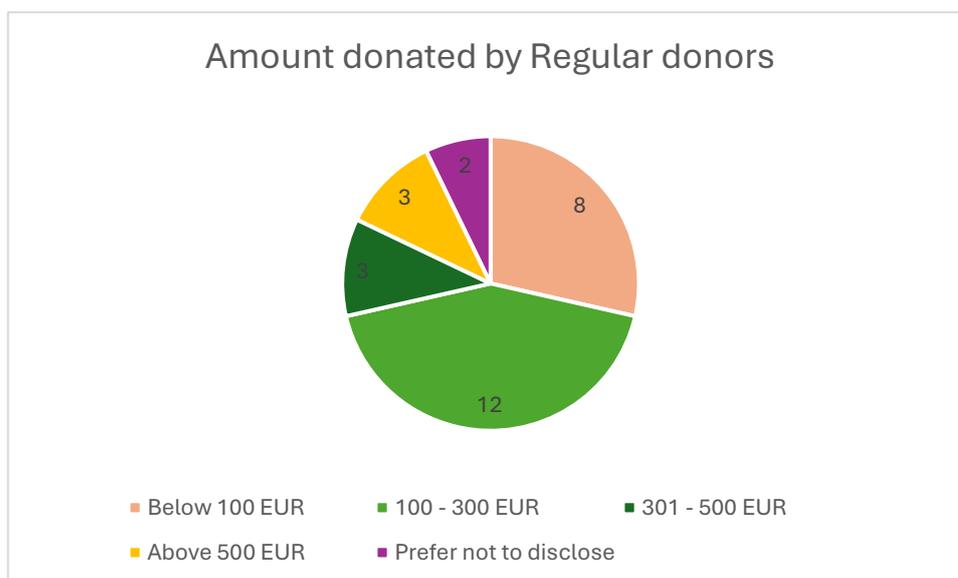
Individuals who have completed higher studies tend to donate more. This is a broad trend that can be noted here, with the individuals holding a Master's degree being an outlier and donating less than individuals who hold a Bachelor's Degree. This agrees with previous research that concludes the level of donation increased with the educational levels of the donor (Bennett, 2003).

#### 5. Annual donation amounts

Most regular donors donate an annual amount below 300 EUR. Only 6 of the 28 participants donated more than 300 EUR – of which 3 are male and 3 are female; are of various ages and income groups; and mostly prefer negative appeals. 2 of the participants chose not to disclose their annual donation amounts.

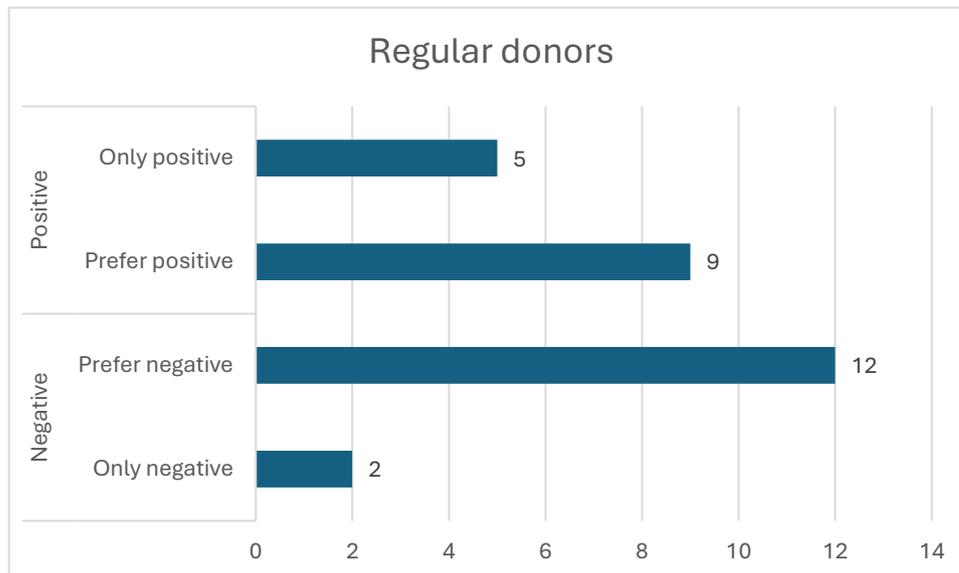
#### Chart 11

*Amount donated by regular donors*



#### 6. Tone preferences of regular donors

Interestingly, the regular donors have a 50% preference for both tones broadly. This indicates both approaches are effective.

**Chart 12***Tone preference of regular donors*

### ***5.1.2 Limitations***

The study used strong and explicitly negative and positive appeals to understand the relative differences, with no neutral or mixed conditions. A control advertisement may have helped with sharper results (Erlandsson et al., 2018b)

When an individual must decide between self-interest and that of the collective - the individual faces a social dilemma. However, charitable donations act as a social fence where the short-term negative consequences keep the individuals from donating for long-term collective benefits. (Das et al., 2008). In this survey, participants were asked to donate fictional money, thus, freeing them from the social fence (Erlandsson et al., 2018b).

The participants were asked to observe and respond to the appeals while in real life, these appeals can be easily ignored (Erlandsson et al., 2018b)

The study did not include processing measures due to which assumptions remain untested. (Das et al., 2008)



**Table 14***Themes and codes*

Themes	Codes	Frequency
Marketing Strategy	Organizational Goal and Culture	6
	Customer Relationship Management	1
	Ethics	2
	Community	3
Positive and negative messaging	Case Study	2
	Different Tones	10
Internal challenges	Talent	2
	Budget	5
Other factors	Cultural Factors	2
	Context	2
Donor Perception	Non-profits vs. for-profits	4
	Donor intention and action	1
Individual variables	Professional background	5

**5.2.1 Approaches adopted**

Although there is a clear research question, the semi-structured format of the interview led to deep insights into various related variables. Hence, an inductive approach was adopted – where the data was approached with an open mind and the themes and code emerged according to the patterns.

For interpreting the data, a semantic approach was adopted where clear meanings were extracted and no underlying reasons or meanings were investigated. The experts interviewed

were experts in the field and the tone was highly professional, removing the need for other interpretations of underlying assumptions.

The approach was more realistic than constructionist, as languages carry straightforward meanings and there was little scope for new meanings to emerge through social and cultural lenses.

### ***5.2.2 Key Themes and Codes***

#### **5.2.2.1 Positive and Negative Messaging - Different Tones**

All participants prefer positive and empowering messaging personally. This was due to previous work experience, ethics and values. On further research, it was clear that the work conducted by their organizations reflects a similar attitude.

The interviewees viewed authenticity in messaging as essential, especially when individuals who make large donations are potential viewers. The content must be honest and free of manipulative intent.

A popular strategy is showcasing images that capture the impact of the work being done by the organization. This approach helps in building a compelling narrative that resonates with donors on an emotional level.

Every communication piece by the non-profit must be customized to the audience. One approach is to segment the audience based on engagement. A highly engaged audience is keen on the cause and the charity and requires a detailed comprehensive understanding to donate. This can be triggered by the use of statistics to clarify the scale of the issue with details, followed by the impact the organization has in mitigating the issue. An audience that is low on engagement, or possibly first-time viewers of the charity's communication, should be exposed to short and positive details of the charity.

In the visuals used for communication, the aim must be to create a connection with the viewer. If too much distress occurs, the viewer may disengage and question the impact of their donation

Happy beneficiaries are crucial to communicate the narrative of the organization, and its ethical standpoint. The respectful portrayal of the beneficiaries fosters trust in the organization. While the promotion of an idealistic world is difficult without coming across as patronizing, non-profits must strive to approach communities collaboratively. Active advocacy within the non-profits for ethical decisions can help navigate these complexities in communication.

While negatively framed messages may be impactful for certain individuals due to other factors, the non-profit stays consistent with the positive narrative it represents.

In short, tailoring messages to different audience segments, maintaining positive and authentic representations, and engaging in ethical communication practices are key to navigating the complex landscape of donor engagement.

#### **5.2.2.2 Marketing Strategy - Organizational culture and goals**

Most organizations prioritize the portrayal of the community they work with – the content published must not offend or show the community in poor light. The organizations seem to recognise that the community must feel empowered through the initiative. Further, most communication that is published uses statistics to set the context and justify the need for the non-profit's existence. While the statistics paint a dismal picture, the effect is neutralised by ensuring the accompanying image is not a negative one.

The non-profits seem to be highly impact-oriented, with a clear tracking mechanism for progress and numbers. This seems to be contradictory to the general perception that non-profits are usually slow and inefficient.

The marketing and communication strategy is specific to an organization and flows from its vision, mission and goals. An organization with a clear vision will have consistent messaging. The strategy also takes into account the various segments of stakeholders- all with varying needs and expectations.

Beneficiaries would be interested in how the non-profit can help and other case studies. Existing supporters would be interested in regular updates, details on the allocation of funds and the impact created. New donors would need information on the issue addressed, past work by the non-profit and details on how to make a donation.

An analysis followed by customised, diverse communication is the best approach to effectively reach a multi-audience. This can be ensured by multiple internal reviews where critical discussions take place on aligning with organizational goals and honouring consistency.

The impact is the most persuasive element. It demonstrates the non-profit's effectiveness and the difference it makes. While communicating social issues in a positive light is difficult, it can be done by tailoring the narrative for each audience. Testimonials are effective in demonstrating impact. Another strategy is acknowledging funders and their contributions publicly.

### **5.2.2.3 Marketing Strategy - Spotlight on the community**

Ensuring that the team members are passionate about the cause can help build stronger connections with the beneficiaries. These beneficiaries can feel more empowered after viewing the communication from the non-profit, in which their progress is reported with optimism and with an emphasis on their strength.

The non-profit is a facilitator or agent of change and not the solution to an issue – hence, the portrayal must focus on the collective effort with transparent procedures. This fosters a spirit of collaboration and reinforces trust. 3 of the non-profits represented reach out to the community after previous research and then work with them collaboratively.

### **5.2.3 Social media and grassroots marketing**

Social media has made marketing accessible for all. If done right, it can have a powerful impact in terms of raising funds. Different categories of content featured on social media include inspirational anecdotes, statistics on the problem, activities conducted by the non-profits etc.

For certain significant days, campaigns are pre-planned and executed. These campaigns feature clear Call-To-Action and the messaging is consistent throughout the campaign to meet the objectives.

Social media helps reach out to larger networks. However, this may be adversely impacted by budgetary challenges. (Abedin et al., 2019)

## ***5.2.4 Challenges Faced by Industry Professionals***

### **5.2.4.1 Budgetary constraints**

Non-profits may experience a disadvantage while allocating budgets for marketing spend. This includes the cost of creating marketing assets, paid advertising on social media, hiring external marketing agencies and/ or partnerships with influencers.

Non-profits should recognise the essential nature of marketing and allocate larger funds. Marketing helps attract and retain donors, and investing would reap benefits. The funds allocated for marketing seem to be less than 10% for the initiative.

### **5.2.4.2 Talent constraints**

The interviewees expressed diverse views on this subject. One of the participants, who also works as a professor, clarified that they see more of their young students leaning towards careers in non-profits. Another one clarified that hiring marketing talent is not a feature of the top priorities for a non-profit, as a non-profit is always keen to recruit field workers first. Another insight received is that many highly-skilled individuals often switch to careers in non-profits to 'give back' and do meaningful, fulfilling work. Hence, there does not seem to be a dearth in talent.

### **5.2.4.3 Donor perception**

Donors do not favour non-profits that spend a lot on their campaigns. This is true for any non-profit that incurs non-programmatic expenses. Further, donors demand that all their donations reach the beneficiary, but this is an unrealistic view that disregards the expenses non-profits incur. Further, the other marketing strategies employed by non-profits such as door-to-door direct solicitations for donations may damage the view of non-profits held by donors. Donors may feel that their personal space has been violated and develop ill feelings towards non-profits.

### **5.2.4.4 Professional Development and Training**

“Never stop testing, and your advertising will never stop improving” - David Ogilvy

While there is a general understanding of marketing, there was no mention of specific frameworks or tools employed. Marketing success is measured in terms of awareness, rather than engagement or donations. Further, there was no A/B testing done on various assets to determine the best final fit. Instead, there seems to be ample discussions within teams on which image fits the campaign the best with critical evaluation of each element in the image and what it represents. This indicates that marketing is practised quite differently where all opinions of the team members are prioritized.

However, based on the previous insight, if highly skilled individuals switch career paths, ideally they must bring with them the technical expertise and disperse the same to marketing teams. This seems contradictory and may indicate a lack of knowledge transfer processes within non-profits.

### ***5.2.5 Future Trends and Predictions***

#### **5.2.5.1 Shift Toward Empowering Narratives**

More nonprofits are moving towards empowering narratives. This shift from vulnerability to community represents a shift in the organizational strategy. Highlighting the strengths, resilience, and agency of these communities fosters dignity, respect, and a sense of collaboration, ensuring that the individuals and groups being assisted are seen as active participants in their own development rather than passive recipients of aid.

#### **5.2.5.2 Marketing Integration Challenges in Nonprofits**

Nonprofits have yet to fully integrate it into their core operations due to low priority and poor perception. As a result, marketing efforts are often ad hoc and reactive, rather than being part of a comprehensive, forward-thinking strategy. This mindset overlooks the potential of strategic marketing to enhance visibility, increase donor engagement, and ultimately drive the mission forward.

#### **5.2.5.3 Budget Constraints**

While financial limitations may hinder marketing activities, optimising the spending would help achieve good results. Meanwhile, talent issues in the sector may disappear with a

large portion of the younger generation expressing explicit interest in working for non-profits. They will bring with them fresh perspectives and innovative strategies.

### ***5.2.6 Limitations***

While thematic analysis is widely used due to its flexibility and simplicity it does have a few drawbacks. The researcher's interpretation of data brings in some subjectivity and impacts the difficulty of replicating the results. As all data is coded, there is a risk of losing the context in which specific statements were made and a risk of oversimplification.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1 Summary of Findings

This thesis has dived deeply into the multifaceted landscape of non-profit marketing alongside charity marketing. There has been an exploration of crafting effective messaging, the feelings of donors when they view the messages, and the thought process of most non-profit employees while crafting the message.

The growing number of non-profits worldwide reflects an increasing recognition of their important role in addressing multiple issues. This chapter encapsulates the key findings of the study along with significant recommendations to non-profits so that they can craft more effective messages in appeals.

There is a high number of marketing activities in which non-profits and charities actively participate in. This can be attributed to the rise of social media, which provides an accessible and less expensive marketing channel for most of these organizations to start engaging their target audience. However, there seems to be a lack of technical understanding of how most marketing campaigns are run. Through this study, it was concluded that while marketing is important to non-profits, it is not as important as fundraising and field activities. This insight explains the lack of technical skills and testing by most organizations.

This research aimed to conclude whether positive messaging, which creates feelings of hope and optimism and has an empowering narrative, is more effective in creating higher intentions to donate. This is in comparison to negative messaging, which creates feelings of guilt, sadness, and helplessness. While the sample size was small, most results seem to indicate that negative messaging is slightly more effective than positive messaging. However, there seems to be an increasing inclination from non-profit equal to an empowering narrative. This is an interesting phenomenon in which negative feelings are more effective, while most organizations are moving towards positive appeals. It is also indicative of a shift in society, where empowerment becomes the tone of most organizations that work with communities in a collaborative manner.

Charities and non-profits employ a balanced approach to messaging, in which they alternate between different tones to ensure donor engagement. This can also help to reach a

wider base by working on different emotions. It is essential for the organization to track, evaluate, and refine these appeals, as per the results of previous campaigns.

It is important to acknowledge that donors' actions are not dependent on messaging alone, and there are many other factors at play, including cultural contexts, individual characteristics perception of marketing, and the efficacy of charity. However, it is undeniable that messaging is a crucial part that triggers the thought process of donation. Owing to this important step, appeals must be given due consideration while being designed.

## **6.2 Results**

There was also a deep dive into demographic factors and their influence on how appeals were perceived.

Among the different genders, men seem to show a higher preference for negatively framed messages than women, although both men and women prefer negatively framed messages as a whole.

Within the different age groups, the younger generation below the age of 25, alongside the generation above 35 and above, seem to prefer positively framed messages. The Only outlier was the group aged 25–34 years, which showed a significant preference for negatively framed messages.

While the participants originated from 24 different countries, the most representative countries in the survey were India, Portugal, and Indonesia, with only Indonesia displaying a positive preference.

Participants living in 16 different countries completed the survey- in which India, Portugal and Austria showed a preference for negative appeals and the United Kingdom showed a reference for positive appeals

Across different educational levels, participants who held a bachelor's degree and a master's degree preferred negative appeals, as compared to those who completed a PhD preferred a positive appeal.

Across different income levels, all income brackets seem to prefer negatively framed appeals except for those earning between 36,000 and to 55,000.

Furthermore, there were qualitative details regarding how respondents perceived various appeals in the survey.

More participants felt a lower intensity of 'positive' and 'inspired' emotions while experiencing a high intensity of 'lucky', 'guilty' and 'negative' emotions. The participant comments on the survey also captured their feelings of manipulation, sadness, and guilt after viewing the appeals. This is relevant because many individuals tend to avoid such appeals because of the negative emotions caused as a consequence.

There is a clear dislike for AI-generated charity appeals. Non-profits are recommended not to use this tool until acceptance increases, which is a possibility with due time.

Less than half of the participants identified as regular donors. Regular donors seem to be older, richer, and more highly educated, with an average annual donation of less than 300 to non-profits and charities.

In the interviews with professionals, many themes arose, the most important of which were related to organizational goals, culture, and marketing strategy.

All the participants in the semi-structured interview first preferred positive and empowering narratives, which was in line with their organizational approach as well. Marketing strategies stem from organizational goals and visions. Organizations that recognize the importance of collaborating with the communities they are trying to support employ an empowering narrative for both the donors to view as well as in internal communications.

Statistics are employed by these organizations to justify their existence and paint a picture of the current situation. However, only factual tones were used in this study.

There is a focus on the community that they are working with, and the organization views itself as an agent of change, working with the people to reach an end goal.

Nonprofits suffer from budget constraints for marketing as they have to prioritize meeting their end goals. However, there are mixed opinions on talent constraints that non-profits may suffer from.

Donors have various perceptions that can antagonize non-profit marketing. This is true for all the administrative costs. This perception can be overcome through the effective segmentation of the target audience, where their motivation and thoughts are analyzed and understood before any messaging is crafted for them.

An alternating narrative builds trust, shows its impact, and creates engagement. This ensures that the donors are loyal and continue to donate. It can also attract diverse donor profiles while enhancing the perception and efficacy of non-profits. Regular marketing contributes to a higher recall effect among donors.

### **6.3 Discussion**

The study contributes to a growing body of non-profit literature with limited experiments. It offers insight into donor attitudes and perceptions of various marketing messaging approaches.

However, it must be acknowledged that donations are multilayered decisions - and may be influenced by multiple factors ranging from religiosity, political ideology and trust in non-profits (Fleming et al., 2022). Donations to good causes are influenced by economics and the social code of conduct (Das et al., 2008). Information regarding the number of donors for a campaign can influence donor decisions (Le et al., 2020)

Charitable giving is also influenced by awareness of need, altruism, reputation and values (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2010)

Further, the study explores an existing research gap in how personal characteristics amplify the effectiveness of charity communications (Bae, 2021)

The context explored is online fundraising - as most of these advertisements are featured on social media. The charity's focus is on social welfare, which provides basic human needs for survival. (Das et al., 2008).

## **6.4 Practical Recommendations for Non-Profit Organizations**

The stakeholders interviewed from non-profits unanimously support a positive and empowering narrative in all communication published. The reasons were that the non-profits adopt a community-focused approach where the portrayal of their beneficiaries is of utmost importance as the efforts are collaborative. There is a risk of misrepresentation of the community or region through negative messaging, which the non-profits would like to avoid.

However, there seems to be a slight preference within the donors surveyed to donate for appeals that instigate negative feelings rather than positive feelings. However, it must be noted that the preference is slight and not very significant.

### ***6.4.1 Strategic Recommendations for Marketing***

Non-profits seem to demonstrate the understanding that marketing and communication are essential for raising funds. However, most non-profits lack a strategic understanding of marketing, including a lack of understanding of the target audience and positioning of the non-profit. The lack of investment in marketing is yet another significant component.

### ***6.4.2 Balancing Positive and Negative Messaging***

For non-profits, the best way to move forward is to use an overall empowering narrative. Within an appeal, internal consistency is of utmost importance and non-profits can craft either positive images coupled with positive text or negative images coupled with negative text.

An additional recommendation is to test various approaches to appeals and evaluate their effectiveness. This thought emerges from the lack of testing by non-profits amongst their target audience. This is a large gap that needs to be addressed. Further, this is the recommended approach due to the variation of donor reaction to causes impacting the generalizability of the conclusion.

An advertising variation strategy, where positive and negative framed appeals are published alternatively, is more effective than an advertising repetition strategy where the same framing is used consistently. (Gebreselassie & Bougie, 2019)

### ***6.4.3 Personalised Messages to Specific Donor Segments***

Personalised marketing displaying emotive messaging is highly effective in terms of memorability for donors (Bennett & Barkensjo, 2005). A deeper understanding of the target audience and crafting a marketing strategy would help this process. As individuals differ in motivations, it is important to identify the donors who respond best to a gain-framed or a loss-framed approach. On completing this identification through data analysis, the messaging can be crafted separately for the various segments.

### ***6.4.4 Challenges and Considerations***

A possible challenge is data privacy. All data analysed to understand the customer segments must be anonymised and in line with the data privacy rules of the region of operation.

**Ethical Considerations :** All subjects featured in photographs by non-profits must give explicit consent for the usage of that image. While non-profits seem to attempt this, the time-consuming process can be a challenge.

**Avoiding Donor Manipulation :** Donors detest being manipulated to make donations. To overcome this, the messaging of the non-profit must always include factual information.

**Ensuring Transparency and Authenticity :** Non-profits must attempt to always share information on the work being done and the impact each donation makes. This signals the efficiency of the charity and may lead to more donations. Further, authentic stories connect better with audiences (Kelly et al., 2019)

## **6.5 Future Trends and Research**

There seems to be an increasing shift of non-profits prioritizing marketing communication. However, it is important that all activities undertaken are ethical. Non-profits are inextricably linked to their fragile reputations, and no activity risking it.

As the fields of non-profit marketing, behavioural economics and psychology continue to evolve, there are several opportunities for practical and theoretical research in the future:

Current research did not explore donor engagement due to difficulty in finding donors who have been associated for a long time with certain charities. This would have further

narrowed the sample set, and hence, was not explored. Long-term engagement with charities could stem from various factors such as familial connections, self-interest, fulfilment etc.

Efficacy expectancies influenced behavioural intentions, but not actual behaviour. (Terry & O'Leary, 1995)

Cause-related marketing is widely studied due to its direct link with for-profits. Different strategies of cause-related marketing (Baghi & Gabrielli, 2012), and NPO from a stakeholder perspective (Liston-Heyes & Liu, 2013b) - are evaluated. Cause-related marketing involves firms tying up with Non-Profit Organizations to enhance their brand image by advocating social value.

Donors are a diverse group of individuals donating to charity. Due to this diversity, not many who display favourable attitudes and intentions necessarily act on the same and donate (Sekścińska et al., 2023)(Erlandsson et al., 2018b). Conversely, it is acceptable that intentions lead to behaviour.

The gap between intention to donate and action to donate can be bridged by the charity communicating the benefits of donating money. (Das et al., 2008)

As new forms of media continue to evolve, with Instagram and Tiktok capturing a large part of the younger audience, it will be interesting to explore how different social media channels can be leveraged effectively to build a wider donor base. Specifically, there could be a study on which tone is most effective for which social media channel

Cross-cultural studies to understand how cultural context and interpretation can influence an individual's perception of charity appeals.

Longitudinal studies to track donor behaviour of long-term donors, with a deep-dive into their motivations, reaction to various tones and correlation between sense of identity to the charity.

All these are directions that can be explored.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1 – Survey form

### Survey for Master Thesis

amal.ashraf@ucdconnect.ie [Switch accounts](#)

🔒 Not shared

\* Indicates required question

This survey aims to study the response of respondents to various messages by charities and non-profits. \*

The information you provide will be used for academic purposes only. Data will be analyzed in an aggregated and anonymous way. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

By clicking "I agree" and completing this survey, you confirm that you have read and understood the information provided above, that you are eligible for this survey, and that the information you provide is accurate.

I agree

---

**Please read carefully before completing the survey**

**Country of origin** - the country where the individual was born

**Country of residence** - the country where the individual currently resides

**Causes/charities/non-profits** - organisations that work for social good as the main goal and usually raise funds/resources for people in need. The scale may vary from local to international.

---

How old are you? \*

Under 18

18 - 24

25 - 34

35 - 44

45 - 55

55 - 65

Above 65

---

What gender do you identify as? \*

Male

Female

Other

What is your country of origin? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

What is your country of residence? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

What is your gross annual income? \*

- Below 15,000 EUR
- 16,000 - 25,000 EUR
- 26,000 - 35,000 EUR
- 36,000 - 45,000 EUR
- 46,000 - 55,000 EUR
- Above 56,000 EUR

What is the highest level of education you have completed? \*

- High School
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- PhD
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

How much do you donate to causes/ charities/ non profits annually? \*

- Below 100 EUR
- 100 - 300 EUR
- 301 - 500 EUR
- Above 500 EUR
- Prefer not to disclose

Do you consider yourself a regular donor? \*

- Yes
- No

1. If you had 10 euros to donate to a charity/non-profit - which campaign would you donate to? \*



**Option 1**

**Option 2**

Actual campaign pictures used by reputed charities

Option 1

Option 2

2. If you had 10 euros to donate to a charity/non-profit - which campaign would you donate to? \*



**Option 1**

**Option 2**

Actual campaign pictures used by reputed non-profits

Option 1

Option 2

3. If you had 10 euros to donate to a charity/non-profit - which campaign would you donate to? \*



**Option 1**

**Option 2**

AI generated images for research purposes. These images are used only for the sake of convenience and are not intended to cause any other impact.

How do you feel after seeing the advertisements above? \*

	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low
Positive	<input type="radio"/>				
Negative	<input type="radio"/>				
Inspired	<input type="radio"/>				
Guilty	<input type="radio"/>				
Lucky	<input type="radio"/>				

Please capture any other thoughts/feelings after viewing the advertisements in this survey. \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Submit

Page 1 of 1

Clear form

## **Appendix 2 – Informed Consent Form**

*Title of the Study:* *Snowballing Smiles: A case for positive messaging to raise funds for Non-profits*

### ***Researcher details***

Amal Ashraf, Participant of Joint Master's Degree in Transition, Innovation, and Sustainability Environment, preparing her Master's thesis across 4 Universities:

1. Donau University, Dr.-Karl-Dorrek-Straße 30, 3500 Krems, Austria <https://www.donau-uni.ac.at/en/>
2. University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland <https://www.ucd.ie/>
3. Poznan University of Economics and Business, al. Niepodleglosci 10, 61-875 Poznan, Poland; <https://ue.poznan.pl/en/university/>
4. Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Av de Berna, 26 C 1069-061 Lisboa <https://www.fcsh.unl.pt/en/>

### ***Purpose of the Study***

You are invited to take part in a research study. Before deciding to participate in this study, the participant must understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please reach out to Amal Ashraf for any clarification or further information.

The purpose of the study is to critically analyze the current communication approach adopted by non-profits to raise donations. By employing a mixed-method approach involving surveys, interviews, and representative samples, this study aims to answer the primary question: “How does marketing messaging influence donor actions for non-profits?” The research seeks to understand the current approach of non-profits towards marketing and the various reactions by donors to marketing campaigns aimed at fundraising.

### ***Study Procedures***

As a participant, you are expected to participate in an individual interview (30 minutes). The interview will be conducted virtually via Google Meet or Zoom. Otter AI will help record

and transcribe the meeting in real-time. The transcripts from the interview will be saved on Google Drive, password-protected, and secured for safekeeping.

### ***Risks***

Minimal risk or harm is expected for a participant in this study. You may decline to answer any or all questions and terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

### ***Benefits***

Participating in this study offers valuable insights into non-profit marketing approaches, donor motivations, and behaviors. Your involvement will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the current and future state of the system by integrating perspectives from practitioners and scientists. This research aims to uncover possibilities of an alternative marketing approach grounded in positive psychology by evaluating it. Your involvement is highly valued in developing a robust and practical case for the alternative approach.

### ***Confidentiality***

Your participation in the research will be disclosed as an anonymous member of your institution. All personal information will be kept entirely confidential, and your specific responses to this interview will be kept anonymous and only used for this research. The researcher will make every effort to preserve your confidentiality, including the following:

- All information received will be kept strictly confidential and will be safeguarded.
- Pseudonyms will be assigned to participants and used on all research notes and documents.
- Our universities might publish the results of the study. It is possible that what you share with us will be included in these publications. You will only be identified by pseudonyms, and your identity will not be revealed.
- Notes, transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information will be saved on Google Drive, kept inside for one year, and destroyed at the end of this period.

Participant data will be kept confidential, except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk.

### ***Contact Information***

If you have questions at any time about this study or if you experience adverse effects from participating in it, you may contact Amal Ashraf, whose contact information is provided on the first page. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant or if problems arise, please contact her.

### ***Voluntary Participation***

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether to participate in this study. If you participate in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect your relationship with the researcher, if any. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

### ***Consent***

I have read and understood the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



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### **Appendix 3 – Semi-Structured Interview Protocol and Questions**

#### **Topic**

Snowballing Smiles: A case for positive messaging to raise funds for Non-profits

#### **Introductory Information**

Researcher: Let me walk you through some basic details of the study.

The interview is divided into two parts: professional experience in marketing/ non-profits, followed by subject matter questions. The interview is expected to take 30 minutes. Participation in this research study is strictly voluntary. This interview will be recorded for future review and analysis. In this manner, we ask you not to use your name or the specific names of others during this interview to maintain confidentiality throughout the study. You may skip any question that you do not feel comfortable with and/or terminate your participation at any time. Do you have any questions about this process before we begin?

Participant: No - Proceed with the study / Yes - Answer and resolve any questions.

#### **Transcript Outline**

Researcher: As this interview is valuable in my study, I will be recording and transcribing it with the help of an AI-based tool - OtterAI. Are you comfortable with the tool being used?

Begin recording via OtterAI

#### **Introduction to Interview**

Researcher: Hello! I am Amal Ashraf, and I am a participant in the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree Programme. I am working on a Master's Thesis focussing on marketing by non-profits. The purpose of the study is to critically analyse the current communication approach adopted by non-profits to raise donations. By employing a mixed-method approach - involving surveys, interviews and representative samples, the research seeks to understand the current approach of non-profits towards marketing, and the various reactions by donors to marketing

campaigns aimed at fundraising. This session is being conducted by Zoom/Google Meet at (time) (timezone) on (date).

To protect the identity of the participant, no names or personal identification information will be requested during this interview unless voluntarily provided by the participant. The participant will be identified by the researcher only as “Participant.”

Participant, have you previously been given and agreed to consent information to accept the requirements of this research study?

Participant: [Yes/No]. (If yes, continue. If not, complete a statement of consent.)

Researcher: As we have an official record of consent, let us move on to the interview. All questions are voluntary and may be skipped by the participant.

The questions are open-ended and relate to the key concepts of this research. They will allow you to express any information you believe can be used to answer our research question. If any question is unclear, please ask for clarification. Are you ready to continue?

Participant: [Yes/No] If not, please let me know when you are ready to continue.

Researcher: How are you associated with non-profits?

Participant: [Answer]

Researcher: How are you associated with marketing, communication or PR?

Participant: [Answer]

Researcher: Could you walk me through a recent/important campaign you worked on? A detailed description would be very helpful.

Participant: [Answer]

Researcher: How do non-profits approach marketing differently than corporates?

Participant: [Answer]

Researcher: Could you walk me through a recent/important campaign you worked on?

Participant: [Answer]

Researcher: I will now display some images of recent campaigns. What is your opinion on the visuals and messaging used?

Participant: [Answer]

Researcher: Any changes you would like to see in the communication? Why/why not?

Participant: [Answer]

### **Research Question Validation**

Researcher: What is your opinion about our guiding question? *“How does marketing messaging influence donor actions for non-profits?”*

Participant: [Answer]

Researcher: How do you perceive the importance or relevance of this research question?

Participant: [Answer]

Researcher: What potential outcomes or implications do you foresee arising from addressing this research question?

Participant: [Answer]

Researcher: Do you think this approach is practical?

Participant: [Answer]

Researcher: Are there any questions you feel should be asked related to this research?

Participant: [Answer]

**Conclusion**

Researcher: That is the end of the scheduled session questions. Do you have any comments or questions for me now that we have concluded?

Participant: [Yes/No]. If yes, [Answer].

Researcher: Okay. I want to thank you again for your participation in this session. I will now stop the recording of this interview.

Turn off the recorder

I will now review the information provided to ensure clarity of the data and proper interpretation. [Conduct review; provide clarification in field notes.]

**Wrap-Up**

This concludes this portion of the research study. Thank you for assisting in better understanding of how marketing in non-profits functions.

Please contact me at [amal.ashraf@ucdconnect.ie](mailto:amal.ashraf@ucdconnect.ie) if you have any questions or concerns that may arise. Thank you again. Your participation is greatly appreciated!