Understanding the Effectiveness of Social Influence Appeals in Charitable Giving: The Roles of Affinity with the Cause, and Past Giving Behavior

Ana Minguez[a] (Corresponding author)

[a]Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Zaragoza, Gran Vía 2, 50005 Zaragoza, Spain

E-mail address: aminguez@unizar.es

ORCID: 0000-0002-4565-6746

+34 653 266 261

F. Javier Sese[b]

[b]Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Zaragoza, C/ Maria de Luna s/n, 50018 Zaragoza, Spain

E-mail address: javisese@unizar.es

Abstract

Nonprofit organizations today face the challenges in terms of not only attracting the largest number of donors, but also developing effective strategies capable of targeting the right audience. To do so, social fundraising campaigns increasingly rely on social influence to motivate individuals to donate. This study aims to analyze the impact of social influence by using descriptive and injunctive social norms on the intention to donate, considering also the central roles that two personal characteristics—i.e., affinity with the social cause and past giving behavior—can play as moderators. The study findings enable us to provide both theoretical and practical implications.

Introduction

One of the most important challenges facing nonprofit organizations today is the complexity of the third sector (Arvidson, 2018; Siemens et al., 2020), which is composed largely of multiple organizations providing similar services (Helmig & Thaler, 2010). The strong competition among them increases the need to develop effective communication strategies that help attract the greatest number of donors (Das et al., 2008; Krupka & Croson, 2016). Some of these organizations have realized the importance of spreading successful social fundraising messages by creating favorable environments in which potential donors are exposed to social influence (American Red Cross, 2020; Charity: water, 2020). Social influence has been approached from different fields of science (Collins et al., 2010) and has been shown to influence both the judgment and behavior of individuals through its impact on decision-making, since this influence involves both to conform with other's expectations and to accept information obtained from them (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). As a fundamental part of social interactions and the objectives of people, social influence has also been also considered a relevant element capable of contributing positively to the efficiency of organizations (Cialdini & Trost, 1998) and the success of social marketing campaigns. This psychological factor has taken an important role in marketing and behavioral science literature, which is mainly focused on bringing about a change in people's behavior. For example, facilitating the formation of a habit, engaging individuals in a particular responsible behavior, or even discouraging anti-social behavior (Frey & Meier, 2004; Shang & Croson, 2009; Siemens et al., 2020; White et al., 2019).

Although is undeniable that social influence has a considerable impact on the responsible behavior of individuals (White et al., 2019), identifying situations in which this influence has a greater impact and therefore becomes more persuasive is still partially unexplored within the

context of charitable giving. Some research has argued that information that contain social influence, showing the decision of others about charitable donations, positively influence people to act in a similar way (Frey & Meier, 2004; Sasaki, 2019; Shang & Croson, 2009). For example, Sasaki (2019) found that social influence through the exposure of charitable contributions from previous donors encourages the participation of other donors, by studying the causal effect of majority size on a donor's conformity behavior in charitable giving. Findings revealed this "majority effect" increases the likelihood that a new donor matches the amount donated. On the other hand, there is also some research that has shown that despite the powerful impact of social influence, some individuals are reluctant to donate, as they may feel that their contribution may not be necessary (Klinowski, 2015). Similarly, the results of the Jackson's (2016) study reveal that knowing about the donation made by another donor does not always lead to increased participation rates of certain donors (lapsed donors). There is additional evidence pointing to the detrimental effects that social influence can have on some individuals and their giving behavior (DellaVigna et al., 2012). These authors have suggested that social pressure can have adverse effects on the welfare of donors, leading some individuals to act contrary to future fundraising requests. The previous discussion suggests that social influence does not always lead to more charitable giving, and thus, identifying those situations in which social influence exerts more influence has become an important topic in this domain. In particular, an important part of the literature has failed to consider the role played by some interesting individual factors and have frequently applied the effects of social influence by treating all potential donors similarly (Klinowski, 2015; Krupka & Croson, 2016).

In this study, we consider two personal characteristics that have been acknowledge by previous research as central aspects within charitable giving: affinity for a cause, and previous donation behaviors (Grace & Griffin, 2009; Kristofferson et al., 2014; Shang & Croson, 2009). Given that one of the desires of individuals is to maintain consistency between their own values and

behaviors (Festinger, 1957), we suggest that affinity with the cause as well as past giving behavior are relevant factors in this study. As described by previous studies these two individual characteristics are considered to influence the way in which communication strategies involve people to provide support to charities (Adena & Huck, 2019; DellaVigna et al., 2012; Kristofferson et al., 2014). Feeling a strong affinity with the social cause is one of the reasons individuals may want to make a contribution (Kristofferson et al., 2014), and committing to a donation may involve similar behaviors in the future, such as continuing to donate to the same or different organizations (Adena & Huck, 2019; Festinger, 1957; Kristofferson et al., 2014). However, there is not enough evidence to suggest that affinity with the cause has a positive effect on charitable behavior when social influence is present in the donation request. Shang and Croson (2009) found that social information can positively influence donations when donors are new (it is the first time they have contributed to the organization), compared with members who have previously contributed to the same organization. Although similar, these results have not been considered when people have contributed previously to other organizations.

To enhance knowledge on the use of social influence in nonprofit organizations, this study considers the role played by affinity with the cause and past giving behavior in explaining the effectiveness of social influence campaigns on charitable giving. To this end, we conducted an experiment in which social influence was considered through social norms (i.e., descriptive norms, those referring to previous donor's contributions; and injunctive norms, those that refer to contributions that organizations consider as appropriate for the campaign) within a social fundraising campaign, also taking into account the individuals' affinity to the cause and their previous donation behavior. The study seeks to contribute to the literature in several ways. First, attending to the previous research findings (Klinowski, 2015; Sasaki, 2019), the study helps to explain why the effectiveness of social influence in fundraising campaigns does not

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affect all individuals equally, by enhancing knowledge on the moderating role of two relevant individual characteristics—i.e., affinity with the social cause (Kristofferson et al., 2014) and past giving behavior (Shang & Croson, 2009)—on the relationship between social influence appeals and charitable giving. Second, this study provides novel insights into the development of effective communication strategies by nonprofit organizations by identifying potential donor profiles and suggesting ways to adapt the messages accordingly (Das et al., 2008). This will result in higher returns on investment as a result of targeting the messages to individuals who are most likely to respond, and thus avoiding spending resources on those who will not respond. Finally, this is one of the first studies to test the impact of social influence while considering both descriptive and injunctive norms in the context of charitable giving, as most previous literature has investigated the consequences of these norms for responsible behavior (e.g., recycling, consumption, or energy conservation). By looking at these two types of social norms separately, we offer additional insights into how to best design social fundraising messages to improve their effectiveness.

Conceptual framework

As suggested above, the impact of social influence on giving behavior can vary when it interacts with other personal characteristics and attitudes (Lascu & Zinkhan, 1999; Wiepking & Heijnen, 2011). Therefore, we develop a conceptual model aimed at exploring the effectiveness of social influence in social fundraising campaigns, considering the role played by affinity with the cause and past giving behavior (see Figure 1). This model is based on literature focused on demonstrating the explanatory potential of social influence over people's decision making. A large number of previous studies demonstrate how this influence significantly affects values, and determines the judgement, as well as the responsible behaviors of individuals (Frey & Meier, 2004; Klinowski, 2015; Krupka & Croson, 2016; Sasaki, 2019;

Shang & Croson, 2009; Siemens et al., 2020; White et al., 2019). First, to consider the effect of social influence we include social information by appealing to two social norms, descriptive and injunctive, within messages requesting contributions to a social cause. Broadly, research interested in better understanding the impact of social influence on people's behavior reveals how individuals tend to conform to social norms (Frey & Meier, 2004; Shang & Croson, 2009; White & Simpson; 2013). This can be attributed to the need for humans to be in line with social norms and to belong to social groups, since they represent a fundamental role in the formation of a social identity (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Furthermore, the effect of these norms has been validated in relation to a wide variety of social behaviors such as recycling, energy conservation, responsible consumption, or other practices that benefit the welfare of society (White & Simpson, 2013; White et al., 2019).

Second, we shed light on which individuals are most impacted by social influence by including the moderating role of two relevant personal characteristics in the decision to donate: affinity with the cause, and past giving behavior. In this framework, we first analyze the direct effect of social norms and both personal characteristics on donation intentions, determining the highest participation rates according to different messages, which may include norms or not, and to different types of individuals. We then analyze the moderating effects of affinity and past giving behavior by providing information about the individuals for whom the use of social norms is most necessary to increase their intention to donate.

[Figure 1 near here]

Marsden and Friedkin (1994) stated that "the only precondition for social influence is information about the attitudes or behaviors of other actors" (p. 4). This implies the presence of a certain type of social interaction through the provision of social information. Research in this area suggests that social information affects behavior and does so by influencing perceived

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social norms (Croson et al., 2009). Based on this, the current study considers social norms within the messages of fundraising campaigns as a way of providing information to potential donors in order to exert positive social influence on donation behavior. Previous research has considered the existence of two social norms, as mentioned by Cialdini et al. (1990), in the context of responsible behavior. On the one hand, descriptive norms inform about the majority behavior of a group (Cialdini et al., 1990), which can provoke in the individual a need to adjust to the behavior and expectations of that group (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). On the other, injunctive norms inform about the behavior that is really considered appropriate (Cialdini et al., 1990), thereby providing greater security to the individual who performs it (Soule & Madrigal, 2015). Although injunctive norms, as well as descriptive ones, exert influence on individuals, each has its own specificities with respect to the feelings it arouses in individuals. They refer to a distinct source of human motivation, in other words, each norm influences differently the way in which it promotes the conformity of individuals with the positive expectations of others or the acceptance of information obtained from another as evidence of reality (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955).

However, behavior does not always have to be influenced by social information, since the desire to act according to one's own formed identity, and the relevance of behaving in line therewith (Berger, 2012; Berger & Heath, 2007; Festinger, 1957; Lascu & Zinkhan, 1999), may be conditions of greater weight in upcoming actions. There are, therefore, some personal factors to consider related to identity, some of which are linked to preferences (Berger, 2012), or even to previously performed behaviors (Gneezy et al., 2012). Supporting this idea, and to highlight the benefits of segmenting potential donors into nonprofit organizations, previous literature has identified relevant factors that can influence charitable giving (Boenigk & Helmig 2013). First, among the most relevant determinants are donor preferences for supporting a cause. Attitudes towards aid as well as support for social projects or problems depend

significantly on a donor's predilection for the social cause in question (Bachke et al., 2014; Kristofferson et al, 2014). In this regard, it is pertinent to mention affinity with the social cause as an interesting and predictive antecedent of participation (Kristofferson et al., 2014). These authors note that such affinity pertains to the identification and affection that an individual experiences towards a social cause with respect to its purpose.

Second, past giving behavior is also closely related to attitudes and identity, and to the maintenance of consistency according to these when individuals perform subsequent behaviors (Berger, 2012; Festinger, 1957; Reed et al., 2007). Donors' experiences can help to determine their tendency to be concerned about social problems and their interest in continuing this type of behavior (Becker, 1974; Sargeant & Woodliffe, 2005). The current study is based on research which has suggested that previous contributions predict subsequent ones, and that preferences for social causes promote the decision to donate. Furthermore, we posit that the impact that social influence has on charitable giving could be moderated by both important individual characteristics, the affinity with the social cause and past giving behavior.

Hypothesis development

Effects of social influence on intention to donate

The tool of providing individuals with social information has been used by organizations either to bring about a change in people's behavior or to facilitate the formation of a habit (White et al., 2019). Cialdini and Goldstein (2004) suggested that people attend to social influence mainly because they need to form an idea of reality as accurate as possible, develop relationships with others, and maintain a favorable self-concept. Thus, individuals seek some form of compensation when they act in accordance with established social guidelines (Frey & Meier, 2004; Shang & Croson, 2009). Previous research has addressed the effects of social

influence through some of its dimensions, highlighting the relevance of social norms given their strong impact on responsible behavior (White et al., 2019). In the context of charitable giving, the research has only addressed the effect of messages that include descriptive norms (appeals of contributions of others), which has been shown to result in a positive influence by encouraging donations (Shang & Croson, 2009). However, messages that contain suggestions about what behavior is considered appropriate (injunctive norms) could also have a positive influence, as these suggestions would serve to satisfy some of the needs mentioned above, such as maintaining a favorable self-concept. Therefore, we expect that both types of social norm will positively impact intention to donate. Formally:

H1. *Social influence through descriptive norms will positively impact intention to donate.*

H2. *Social influence through injunctive norms will positively impact intention to donate.*

Main effect of affinity with the social cause on intention to donate

Preferences for, or divergence from, a social cause serve as explanations for why individuals can differ in their helping behavior (Das et al., 2008; Grace & Griffin, 2009; Mainardes et al., 2017). In line with Kristofferson et al. (2014), the affinity that individuals hold for a social cause is relevant to the reasoning that they develop in the search for motives to contribute for the benefit of that social cause. Therefore, greater participation rates in donation campaigns are expected when affinity with the social cause is high. Correspondingly, when individuals' affinity is low, it is expected that their intentions to donate will also be lower. Thus:

H3. Intentions to donate will be greater when individuals show higher affinity with the social cause as compared to those who show low affinity.

Moderating effect of affinity with the social cause on the relation between social influence and intention to donate

Nolan et al. (2008) stated that when people are faced with messages containing social information, social influence is strong. However, when a person feels a high affinity for a specific social cause, this is likely to increase their likelihood of supporting the organization, partly due to the intrinsic motivation it incites (Bennett, 2003; Kristofferson et al., 2014). Therefore, the effect of social information may be weaker on behavior in this case, since the effect of affinity seems to be sufficiently effective. On the other hand, for individuals with low affinity, social information can offer a frame of reference and a guide on which to base future behavior (Huh et al., 2014). When people know about others' contributions, they can feel more motivated to do so (Wiepking & Heijnen, 2011) by taking others' actions as a signal that they have confidence in the organization and in its efficacy through efficient resource allocation (Wiepking et al., 2012). Similarly, when it is the organization that suggests a particular behavior (as an adequate behavior that should be done), individuals may take this request as important and necessary (Das et al. 2008; Soule & Madrigal, 2015), as well as feeling the need to act correctly (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Therefore, social information messages that allow individuals to understand how people do and should behave (Cialdini et al., 1990) might influence the intention to donate, however, donors with high affinity for the cause will not be affected as strongly as those with lower affinity. Thus:

H4. The positive impact on intention to donate of solicitations that include social information, as opposed to those that do not include social information, will be greater in people with low affinity to the cause.

Main effect of past giving behavior on intention to donate

Another relevant antecedent of charitable donations is the giving behavior of individuals in previous situations (Adena & Huck 2019; De Oliveira et al., 2011). People who have previously contributed can be moved by their tendency to be concerned about social problems and the need to help more (Becker, 1974). While some research has noted that having previously contributed to an organization leads to subsequent contributions to the same organization (Adena & Huck, 2019), other studies have indicated that past giving behavior is a good driver for responding to requests from other organizations (Bennet, 2003; De Oliveira et al., 2011). On the other hand, individuals who do not have experience with donating will tend to act in line with this nonactive behavior, and therefore present low intention to donate in any case. Thus:

H5. *Intention to donate will be greater when individuals have engaged in past giving behavior, compared to those who have not engaged in past giving behavior.*

Moderating effect of past giving behavior on the relation between social influence and intention to donate

Social information, nevertheless, is also useful when people have no experience with something or when the task involves some difficulty or a more complex decision (Frey & Meier, 2004; Lascu & Zinkhan, 1999). Frey and Meier noted the significant positive effect that knowing how others behave has on people who experience uncertainty in unknown situations. It is interesting to consider that individuals who have not previously contributed have several reasons for not doing so (e.g., there has been no opportunity to donate, or not enough information to elicit a donation); therefore, social information could be particularly effective

with regard to inexperienced people (Uetake & Yang, 2019). Nevertheless, people who have engaged in past giving behavior might be more concerned about the benefits of giving to charities and helping others, and therefore participate again in donations, driven in particular by the need for consistency with their own identity, which is reinforced through new yet similar behaviors (Forehand et al., 2002). This idea could mean that in the face of social information messages, people with experience of donating are influenced by this information, but not as strongly compared to individuals who have not previously donated. Therefore:

H6. The positive impact on intention to donate of solicitations that include social information, as opposed to those that do not include social information, will be greater in people who have not engaged in past giving behavior.

Method

Data collection

To test the proposed hypotheses, we conducted an experimental design with an undergraduate student sample from a European university. Participants were randomly assigned to one type of solicitation of collaboration in a social fundraising campaign, based on messages that could either contain social norms (descriptive or injunctive) or no social information at all. A total of 318 students were offered voluntary collaboration in the study. To do this, they were given the information of the campaign, as well as the request for collaboration in a paper format. It should be noted that, in order to guarantee anonymity and avoid bias in the information provided to other students, they were asked not to share the information that each one visualized in their request. In addition, they were asked to treat such a request as if it were real, in order to obtain the most reliable results possible. The final sample was composed of 261 participants, who correctly completed the questionnaire we gave them following the exposure to the campaign

and the request for collaboration. The remainder of the questionnaires were removed, either because the respondent did not correctly answer the control question about the fictitious nature of the nongovernmental organization (NGO) used in the study "Did you know about this NGO?", or did not answer all questions in the questionnaire. Of the 261 participants, 62.7% were female, with a mean age of 20.80 years (SD = 2.64; range 18–49) and we did not find any significant differences in either gender (p = .52) or age (p = .20) among the three types of message.

Procedure and measurement

First, all participants received the same information about the NGO, For a Healthy World!, that wanted to raise funds through a new campaign to combat a dangerous disease that was currently affecting children in a small region of the southern Pacific Ocean. Second, we manipulated the solicitations as follows. For solicitations with messages that included social information we used two types of social norms—those appealing for donations made by previous donors in past similar campaigns (i.e., descriptive social norm), and those appealing for donations that the organization considered appropriate for the present campaign (i.e., injunctive social norm). Solicitations without social information messages did not include any type of social norm.

After reading the proposed campaign, participants had to complete a questionnaire indicating whether they would be willing to donate (1 = Yes; No = 0). They were then presented with questions about their level of affinity with the social cause (e.g., children's health in underdeveloped countries) and their past giving behavior. To measure the first aspect, we used an existing scale from the Kristofferson et al. (2014): "This cause reflects my values"; "My personal values are aligned with this organization's values"; and "I feel a personal connection to this cause." Here, participants had to indicate, on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = "Totally disagree"; 7 = "Totally agree"), their degree of agreement with these statements. This scale

was found to be reliable, with Cronbach's α = .834. Past giving behavior was determined through a dichotomous question, "Have you ever contributed to a similar campaign?" to which participants could answer "Yes" or "No."

Participants also completed manipulation checks for social information, where they were asked to indicate their degree of agreement, on a seven-point Likert scale, with the following statements regarding the information they thought they had received: "The NGO is suggesting to me an economic amount similar to what other donors usually give on average" and "The NGO is suggesting an economic amount that it considers adequate for this type of social cause."

Results

Before conducting the main analysis of the study, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to check that the information provided had been properly understood by the participants, and that the manipulations of social information worked as expected. With regard to the common information provided to all participants in the different conditions, no significant differences emerged with respect to either the purpose of the NGO ($F_{(2,257)}$ = 1,145, p = .320) or the objective of the campaign ($F_{(2,256)}$ = .097, p = .907). For the first social information message, using a descriptive social norm, participants who were exposed to this norm scored higher on the manipulation check item than did individuals in the other two conditions (M_{Desc} = 4.95, M_{Injuc} = 4.02, M_{NoNorm} = 2.58; SD = 1.786, $F_{(2,255)}$ = 42.619, p < .001). For the second social information solicitation, which used an injunctive social norm, participants in this condition scored higher on the manipulation check item than did individuals in the other two conditions (M_{Injuc} = 5.30, M_{Desc} = 4.07, M_{NoNorm} = 2.98; SD = 1.548, $F_{(2,256)}$ = 35.775, p < .001). Manipulations therefore worked as we expected.

Descriptive analyses showed that 66.7% (174) of the participants were willing to donate to the campaign. The proportion of individuals willing to donate as a function of each independent variable (social norms and personal characteristics) is shown in Table 1. To test the effects of affinity, we first segmented participants into two groups. Those who scored below the mean (M = 3.83, SD = 1.25, range 1–7) were classified as having low affinity and those who scored above the mean were classified as having high affinity.

[Table 1 near here]

Under the influence of messages that contained social information, participants showed greater intentions to donate compared to those who were exposed to messages with no social norm (χ^2 (2, N = 261) = 7.33; p < .05). Both descriptive and injunctive norms indicated a strong impact on intentions, since 70% and 73.6% of participants, respectively, showed intention to donate. Thus, H1 and H2 were supported. We conducted a general linear model for a factorial design of interacting factors, which allowed us to include in the same analysis the main and the moderation effects on intention donate. By analyzing the effects individually, we found that affinity with the cause considerably influenced participants' intention to donate (F(1, 260) = 28.214; p < .001). The results indicate that a high affinity leads to greater intentions to donate (Aff_{Low} = 52.6%; Aff_{High} = 81.8%; SE = .055; p < .001), in support of H3. Table 2 details the moderating role by showing the percentage of participants that were willing to donate under the different messages (descriptive or injunctive social norms, and messages without norms), and comparing people with high versus low affinity. The results indicate that the main effect of having previously contributed to other campaigns has strong impact on intention to contribute again (F(1, 257) = 12.518; p < .001), which supports H5. This intention was considerably lower when participants had not engaged in past giving behavior ($Past_{NoGiv}$ = 54.8%; $Past_{Giv}$ = 75.2%; SE = .058; p < .001).

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[Table 2 near here]

An additional chi-square analysis was performed by dividing the total sample between people with high affinity and people with low affinity. This analysis revealed that social information messages in solicitations work in a stronger way when participants feel low affinity with the cause, leading them to show greater intention to donate compared to when they see messages that do not contain social information (χ^2 (2, N = 261) 8.930, p < .05); this supports H4. As Figure 2 shows, this strong impact of social information only had a significant effect in that particular group of individuals, since those with high scores for affinity did not show differences in intention to donate, regardless of whether they were exposed to social information (χ^2 (2, N = 261) .061, p = .970).

[Figure 2 near here]

To obtain more details about the moderation effects of past giving behavior, an additional chi-square analysis was conducted by dividing all participants into two groups: people who have engaged in past giving behavior and people who have not. The analysis indicated that social information messages in solicitations could exert a greater impact on donations in participants who have never previously contributed to campaigns, as opposed to those solicitations without social information, which led to lower intentions to donate in these individuals (χ^2 (2, N = 261) 12.302, p < .01). Thus, H6 was supported. The results for those with past giving behavior do not show significant differences (χ^2 (2, N = 261) .567, p = .753); therefore, the use of social information has a strong effect only in those who have not engaged in past giving behavior. These interacting effects can be seen in Figure 3.

[Figure 3 near here]

Discussion

This paper investigates when social influence exerts a greater effect on potential donors in encouraging their participation in campaigns through donations. The results indicate that social norms included in the messages of charitable giving campaigns have a positive impact on individuals' intentions to donate. Both descriptive and injunctive norms are considered a strong mechanism of social influence per se. In order to understand for which individuals this influence is strongest, this study analyzed the moderating role of two personal characteristics of individuals—affinity with the cause and past giving behavior. The results show that providing social information by using social norms significantly affects those with low affinity to the cause, as well as those who have not previously donated, regarding their predisposition to contribute to the cause in question. Consequently, this study contributes to the social influence literature by considering two personal characteristics as moderators between the effects of descriptive and injunctive norms and charitable giving behavior. The study also has a number of implications for nonprofit organizations as it demonstrates how those responsible for developing campaigns can use social information in their messages, and highlights the need to define the different types of donors targeted through these messages.

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the previous literature on understanding the effects of social influence on charitable giving (Helmig & Thaler, 2010; Shang & Croson, 2009) and to the research on the tendency of individuals to conform to norms (Siemens et al., 2020). First, the findings reveal that both descriptive and injunctive social norms are effective at increasing people's willingness to donate. This study may help expand current knowledge on the influence of social information that includes not only the behavior of others but also recommends or suggests behaviors (Croson et al., 2009). Although existing research has addressed the effect of social

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influence on giving behavior, most such studies have failed to consider that the strength of its impact may depend on certain factors that are inherent to each individual (Bennett, 2003). In accordance with the above, this study reveals that, although social influence has a considerable impact on the behavior of most potential donors (by increasing their intention to donate), the strength with which messages that provide information about the behavior of previous donors, or suggest appropriate behaviors influence the willingness to donate depending on the level of affinity that individuals feel towards the social cause. Those with a high affinity are hardly affected by social influence, though their intention to contribute remains, given their personal interest in the social cause (Kristofferson et al., 2014). On the other hand, the use of both norms on those who feel low affinity with the cause leads them to increase their predisposition to contribute. The effect of information about the majority behavior among a group of people, as well as the knowledge about the most appropriate behavior in a given situation, can help individuals to become aware that there is really a need to help (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011). Furthermore, acting in line with social norms by donating resources to a social cause can provide a feeling of well-being and the sensation of "warm glow" (Andreoni, 1989).

Having given in the past is also a determinant factor that moderates the relationship between social influence and charitable giving. This study contributes to the literature in this regard by showing that people who have donated in the past to other social fundraising campaigns are more likely to donate again to other campaigns. These findings are in line with previous research, which has indicated that individuals who have previously donated to one organization are quite likely to do so to others (De Oliveira et al., 2011). Our findings also reveal that those who have never donated show low intentions to contribute. There may be various reasons for not doing so (e.g., there has been no opportunity to donate, or not enough information to elicit a donation). In addition, this behavior may be due in part to the need to maintain consistency between past and future actions, as individuals tend to maintain similar behaviors over time

(De Oliveira et al., 2011; Festinger, 1957). However, this study contributes to the research in donations to charity that attempt to study moderating effects of personal factors (Urbonavicius et al., 2019), by demonstrating that social influence can promote greater participation in these individuals. These findings are contrary to Frey and Meier's (2004) results, which suggested that individuals may be insensitive to the behavior of others because individuals tend to keep their behavior fixed.

This study also provides some explanations for this strong positive impact on these individuals. First, providing social information to them can provide a point of reference on which to base future behaviors (Uetake & Yang, 2019), given that these individuals have no experience with donating. Second, according to Bekkers and Wiepking (2011), feeling socially included may also be a factor in the development of donor behaviors, which may wish to be in line with the behavior of other donor groups. Finally, this increased willingness to contribute may be motivated by the individual's concern to avoid feeling guilty, which could damage the social image he or she projects to others, or even to him-/herself (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Croson & Shang, 2008).

Managerial implications

This study also has some implications for nonprofit organizations and for the managerial practices of those responsible for developing effective communication strategies. First, our findings reveal the need to include motivational elements in the messages of social fundraising campaigns. As previous research has suggested in relation to encouraging individuals to perform prosocial behaviors (White et al., 2009), this study recommends that social influence through social information can be used as a mechanism to promote charitable donations. Since a request is normally the precedent for most donations (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011), this type of demand, which appeals to social norms, can considerably increase participation rates among

potential donors. Individuals must perceive that tackling a social problem is necessary (Bendapudi et al., 1996), and that, importantly, the participation of citizens is essential for that.

Second, it is important for the organization to understand its potential donors better in order to create an effective message that is capable of positively influencing the behavior of each donor. Our study contributes to this issue by revealing important findings that can help the organization to develop appropriate and specific actions for the different types of people it targets. For this reason, and given the moderating effect found via affinity with the social cause, those responsible for managing communication strategies should introduce social information in their campaign messages, since in this way they can increase intention to contribute, especially in those who may not feel greatly attracted to the social cause. On the other hand, for those individuals whose preference for the cause is high, this may be one of the main reasons to donate. However, organizations may also motivate them including other incentives such as promising to make their contributions public, awakening the need to present a positive self-image to others (White & Peloza, 2009). These type of public recognition messages could even strengthen the motivation to donate, as individuals may be tempted to influence others in order to motivate their donations (Karlan & McConnell, 2014) and communicate the relevance of the cause and the need to support it (Festinger, 1957; Kristofferson et al., 2014).

To carry out donor segmentation, the identification of potential donors could be driven by observing their preferences—e.g., the type of cause in which they participate most, or the comments they post on social networks. Those who have, at some point, already collaborated with the organization—and thereby form part of the donors' database—by participating in previous campaigns or taking part in other actions, such as volunteering, can be segmented according to their preferences. Periodic follow-up through surveys on preferences, satisfaction

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with the organization, or expected personal benefits (Woodyard & Grable, 2014) could provide very useful information that would contribute to the development of effective campaigns.

Finally, and in a similar vein, organizations could consider ensuring that their messages inform about the donation behavior of others when they approach potential donors who have never contributed before to a social cause. This could help to develop in these potential donors a sense of concern and empathy for helping others (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011). In addition, as our results reveal, using the organization as an entity that suggests enacting a specific behavior is an element that, although hardly used in practice, could also drive an increase in the participation rates of new donors. With this type of solicitation, individuals may feel they must give because they perceive greater responsibility to collaborate with the organization (Klinowski, 2015), and will experience negative emotions if they do not collaborate. If organizations are able to encourage these behaviors, the social impact will be considerably greater given that the increase in funds raised, and the organization's reach will be wider. On the other hand, for those individuals who have some donation experience, the organization should emphasize other information more related to the individual's own donation behavior. With the decisions that are made, people can make inferences about themselves. Through their subsequent donations, donors can feel that the altruistic image they project on themselves and others is reinforced (Fajardo et al., 2018). As these authors suggest, social fundraising messages should appeal principally to a donor's intrinsic characteristics. Taking into account their contributions, we recommend organizations to use messages that focus on the primary role of the donor, the results achieved in previous campaigns, or even the number of participants as an indicator of the relevance of the social campaign (Croson et al., 2009).

Limitations and further research

This study has a number of limitations. First, prosocial behaviors such as charitable giving lack the tangibility component (White et al., 2019). The social outcomes of these prosocial behaviors are thus often imperceptible, adding complexity to the role played by organizations and the way they communicate with individuals. Furthermore, perception of these problems by most of society is somewhat weak, as individuals' knowledge of different social problems and causes is often quite limited (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Forgas, 2001). However, our study tries to shed some light on this point and suggests using powerful mechanisms of influence that allow individuals to be provided with a certain level of information, which is often enough to increase participation rates. Second, our study uses a sample that, while including an adequate number of individuals, comprises characteristics (student sample) that call for future studies to confirm our findings. Nevertheless, the findings support our hypotheses and emphasize the need to include personal factors (such as affinity with the social cause or past giving behavior) when measuring the real effectiveness of the communication messages of nonprofit organizations. In addition, our study shows a clear trend of the positive effect of social influence on members of the public who are potentially more sensitive to this information.

Finally, considering the effect that each type of social norm has on behavior, this study shows that both descriptive and injunctive norms exert a positive social influence on potential donors, particularly on those who do not feel great affinity with the cause or who do not have experience with donating. However, which norm has the greatest effect on behavior remains unclear. Although injunctive norms have a greater impact, this effect is not excessively superior. Future work could try to identify differences between the two types of norms and find out which type promotes greater participation depending on the types of individuals being targeted.

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Declaration of interest statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Tables

Table 1: Summary statistics: Percentage of individuals willing to donate

		Percent
Social influence	Descriptive norm	70
		(62)
	Injunctive norm	73.6
		(66)
	No norm	57.9
		(46)
Affinity with the cause	High	81.8
		(104)
	Low	52.6
		(70)
Past giving behavior	Yes	75.2
		(118)
	No	54.8
		(55)

Note: Figures shown in parentheses are frequencies.

Table 2: Intention to donate (%) as a function of social information messages, and the moderating personal characteristics

	Affinity with the cause				**Past giving behavior**			
	Low (%)	High (%)	p-value	SE	No (%)	Yes (%)	p-value	SE
Descriptive social norm	58.7	81.4	.016	.094	64.5	73.2	.389	.101
Injunctive social norm	64.3	83	.048	.094	69.4	78.8	.337	.098
No social norm	34.8	81.1	.000	.098	30.3	73.5	.000	.101

Figures

Figure 1: Conceptual Model
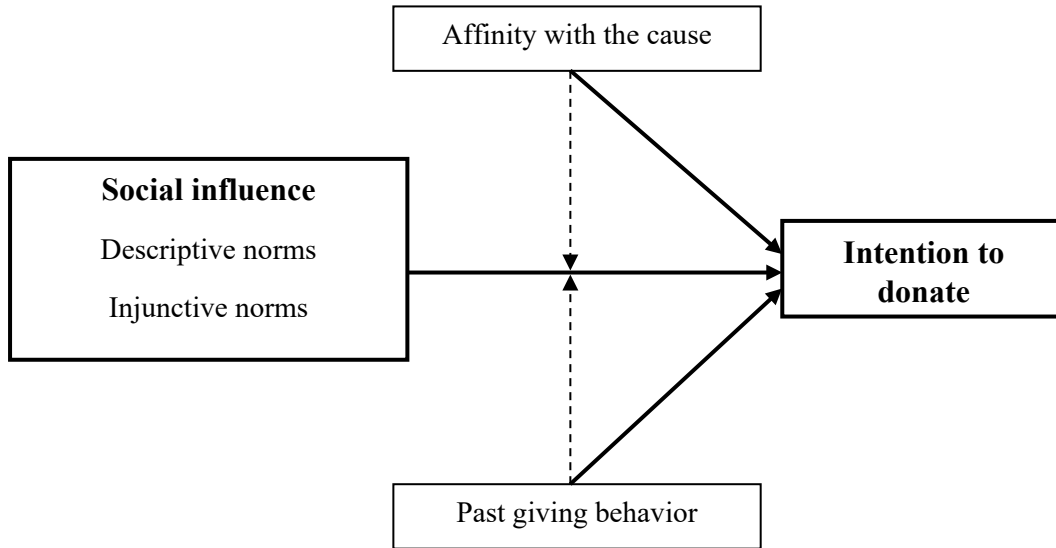
Figure 1: Intention to donate as a function of social information messages
and affinity with the cause
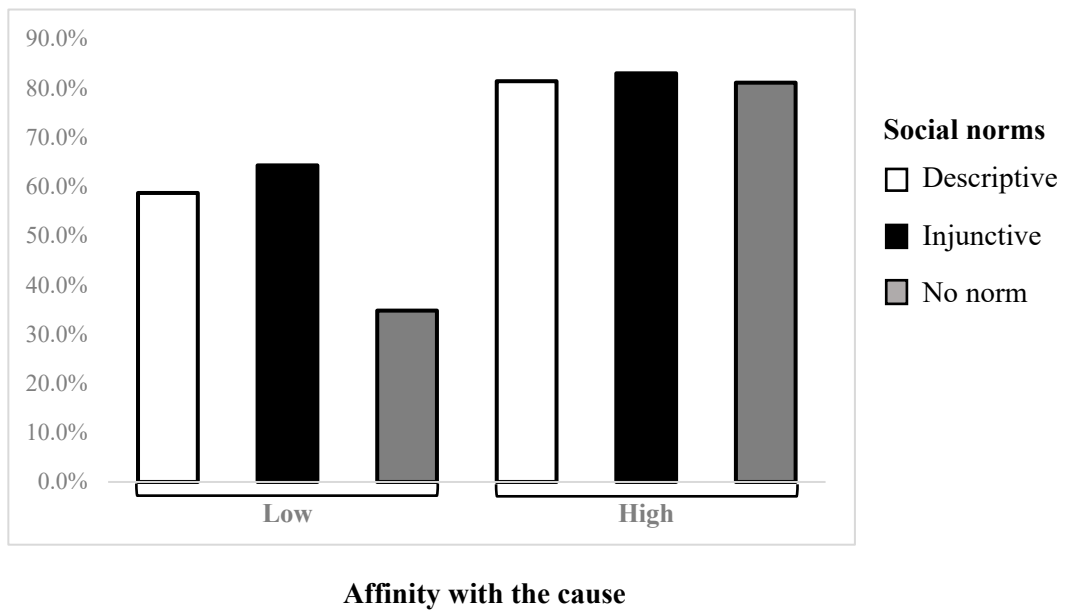

Affinity with the cause

Figure 2: Intention to donate as a function of social information messages and past giving behavior