The impact of social norms and pressures on donation habits

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Introduction

Why do people donate money? Out of the goodness of their heart? Maybe they donate because "that's what everyone else is doing." This study is on how people react differently to social pressures in face-to-face communication and computer mediated communication when faced with the opportunity to donate money to a cause. It aims to analyze the overall effectiveness of online and offline interaction regarding donation, properties of CMC features that influence donation habits, and the role of social norms, group identity or peer pressure on donation.

- **H1**: People are more likely to donate to a cause F2F than in CMC because of subjective norms and emotional appeals.
- RQ1: Are people more likely to donate F2F because they cannot say no?
- **H2**: When donating online people are more likely to use smart phones due to high amounts of usage.
- RQ2: What properties of a website make people more likely to donate?
- **H3**: Positive emotional appeals are more effective when it comes to persuading people to donate.
- RQ3: How much do the effects of emotional appeals decrease when one becomes desensitized to the image/message?

Figure 4: Images used to determine feelings of likeliness to donate based on positive and negative emotional appeals

Methods

- Six-question survey asking questions regarding subjects' current donation habits
- Eighteen-question survey with hypothetical scenarios to determine the impact of social influences and emotional appeals on donation practices
- Posted on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter
- In-depth interviews were conducted to determine specific properties of online donation sites and the impact of emotional appeals in order to collect information about what exactly makes one more likely to offer money to a cause, five participants interviewed
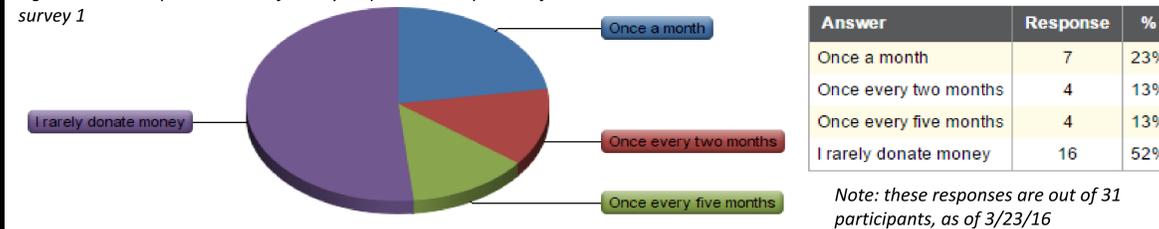- Average age: 18-25

Figure 1: A question featured in Survey 1

Results

Data is still in the analysis stage, especially regarding the in-depth interviews. The surveys are still open to the public, therefore results are subject to change. Certain questions and their results are being presented due to their indicative nature and the ability to draw conclusions based on their data.

Survey 1 Question: How often do you donate money to a cause/organization? See Figure 2.

Figure 2: visual representation of survey responses to a question featured in survey 1

Answer	Response	%
Once a month	7	23%
Once every two months	4	13%
Once every five months	4	13%
I rarely donate money	16	52%

Note: these responses are out of 31 participants, as of 3/23/16

Results from Survey 1 indicate that 19 (61%) out of 31 participants do not donate money because they have a low income/want to save money. 4 out of 31 participants agreed with the statement, "I can find the cause I'd like to donate to online, but am hesitant to donate money through the internet." 6 out of 31 participants said that nothing stops them from donating, and that they donate often/when they can.

Results from Survey 2 show that **125 out of 205 survey participants do not seek out ways to donate to a cause,** and when presented with the opportunity to donate but do not have the means (e.g. facing a donation booth without having cash) only 40 out of 205 participants would seek out a way to donate to the cause at a later time.

Results of a question in Survey 2 asking what device they use to surf the internet most often showed that 49 (58%) out of 205 survey participants surf the internet primarily on their smart phone. When asked if they prefer to donate online or in person, **95 (46%) of the 205 participants selected in person**, 86 (42%) selected online, and 24 (12%) participants selected they do not prefer to donate money at all.

In Survey 2, when asked whether they would be likely to donate more money if someone were watching, 59 (29%) out of 205 participants selected yes. The other **145 (71%) participants selected no**.

Results in Survey 2 consisted of data based on questions involving the use of a positive (+) and negative (-) emotional appeal and how likely people would be to donate based on the feelings the images evoked.
- 58 out of 205 participants selected they would be not be any more likely to donate to the cause based on their feelings about the negative image. 10 out of 205 participants indicated they would be much more likely to donate to the cause.
- 47 out of 205 participants indicated they would not be any more likely to donate to the cause based on their feelings about the positive image. 7 out of 205 participants indicated they would be much more likely to donate to the cause. See Figure 4.

In Survey 2, when participants were given a hypothetical situation involving giving a man in ragged clothing asking them for a dollar, 52 (25%) out of 205 participants said they would give him the change in their pocket, 41 (20%) would give him a dollar, 47 (23%) would give him more than a dollar, and **65 (32%) would not give him anything**. In the same survey with a similar question in which they were with a friend who gave the man two dollars, results were split. Please see Figure 3.
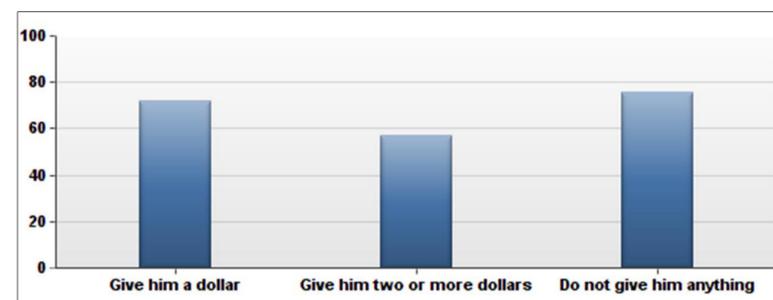

Figure 3: Responses recorded in Survey 2. Number of participants located on the Y-axis, responses on the X-axis

Literature cited

Greenhow, C., & Robelia, B. (2009). Old communication, new literacies: Social network sites as social learning resources. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 14*(4), 1130-1161.

Mitesh, K., Regner, T. (2015). Honestly, why are you donating money to charity? An experimental study about self-awareness in status-seeking behavior. *Theory and Decision,79*(3), 493-515.

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Conclusions

From current data analysis, it can be concluded that donations are not necessarily made simply out of goodwill. Donations are often correlated with convenience and chance. Due to the low amount of those who seek out ways to donate money, it seems that donations are made because someone happened to have cash at the right moment. On the contrary, people are more likely to donate to a cause that involves them personally.

The article *Old communication, new literacies: Social network sites as social learning resources* work examines the role of social networking sites in the lives of teenagers. Results showed that the sites offer emotional support and aid in self-presentation. It is not illogical to conclude that donating money, especially when others on social networking sites do so, could be a part of the self-presentation. However, based on the current results, it also can be concluded that social pressures and norms have minimal impact on donation habits, and if so then they would be primarily subconscious.

Additionally, motivation to donate seems to be low across the board. If the sample reflects the feelings of the general public, it can be concluded that very few people will seek out ways to donate. Restrictions include those who have a low income and those who desire to save their money. It can be concluded that a hesitancy to donate money through the internet is also a demotivating factor, due to 4 out of 31 participants being able to find a cause to donate to but declining because they do not wish to donate money through the internet.

It can be concluded that due to the high amounts of internet surfing that takes place on smart phones, they are the electronic platform used most commonly by those who donate online.

Additional research on these topics could prove beneficial to the marketing industry and for non-profit organizations that are built by donations. More thorough research regarding why people donate online and what makes them more likely to donate online would be beneficial to web designers and the entire field of Communication.

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