



Original article

# “Save lives” arguments might not be as effective as you think: A randomized field experiment on blood donation

« Sauvez des vies » pourrait être moins efficace que vous le pensiez : une étude de terrain randomisée sur le don du sang

L.S. Moussaoui<sup>a,\*</sup>, D. Naef<sup>b</sup>, J.-D. Tissot<sup>b</sup>, O. Desrichard<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Health Psychology Research Group, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, University of Geneva, boulevard du Pont-d'Arve, 40, 1211 Genève 4, Switzerland

<sup>b</sup> Blood Transfusion Service SRC Vaud, route de la Corniche 2, 1066 Epalinges, Switzerland

Available online 8 April 2016

---

## Abstract

**Objectives.** – Many communication campaigns to encourage people to give blood rely on “save lives” messages, even though there is no experimental evidence as to the effectiveness of this kind of argument with respect to blood donation. The objective of this study is to test experimentally if it is indeed an effective way to prompt people to give blood, in order for communication campaigns to be evidenced-based.

**Methods.** – One thousand and twenty-two lapsed blood donors were sent, at random, either a standard letter or the same letter containing an additional “save lives” message. The blood donation center measured intention to donate and actual donor return rate (3%) after 10 months.

**Results.** – Although fewer people in the “save lives” condition said they had no intention to give blood again, the “save lives” letter did not lead to more donor returns than the standard letter.

**Conclusions.** – Our results suggest that contrary to intuition, campaigns to promote blood donation should not rely blindly on “save lives” arguments. © 2016 Elsevier Masson SAS. All rights reserved.

**Keywords:** Blood donation; Communication campaigns; Lapsed donors

## Résumé

**Objectifs.** – Beaucoup de campagnes de communication visant à encourager les gens à donner leur sang utilisent des messages du type « Sauvez des vies », malgré le fait qu'il n'y ait pas d'évidence expérimentale confirmant l'efficacité de ce type d'argument par rapport au don du sang. L'objectif de cette étude est de tester expérimentalement s'il s'agit effectivement d'une manière efficace d'encourager les gens à donner leur sang, afin que les campagnes de communication soient fondées sur des données probantes.

**Méthodes.** – Mille vingt-deux donneurs inactifs ont reçu de manière aléatoire soit une lettre standard, soit la même lettre contenant en plus une phrase faisant appel à l'argument « sauvez des vies ». Le centre de transfusion sanguine a mesuré l'intention des donneurs à revenir, et le taux de retour réel (3 %) après 10 mois.

**Résultats.** – Bien que moins de gens dans la condition « sauvez des vies » aient répondu qu'ils n'avaient pas l'intention de donner leur sang à nouveau, le courrier contenant le message « sauvez des vies » n'a pas entraîné un nombre plus important de dons que le courrier standard ne contenant pas ce message.

**Conclusions.** – Nos résultats suggèrent que contrairement à ce que l'on pourrait penser de manière intuitive, les campagnes de promotion du don du sang ne devraient pas se reposer en toute confiance sur des arguments du type « sauvez des vies ».

© 2016 Elsevier Masson SAS. Tous droits réservés.

**Mots clés :** Don du sang ; Campagnes de communication ; Donneurs inactifs

---

\* Corresponding author. University of Geneva/FAPSE, boulevard du Pont-d'Arve, 40, 1211 Genève 4, Switzerland.  
E-mail address: [lisa.moussaoui@unige.ch](mailto:lisa.moussaoui@unige.ch) (L.S. Moussaoui).

## 1. Introduction

Human donors are essential to modern medicine, as they are the only source of the blood needed for transfusions. Recruiting and retaining donors is generally done through communication campaigns, many of which include persuasive messages based on “save lives” arguments, such as “Give blood, save a life”. However, to the best of our knowledge, there is no empirical data that such arguments are effective in promoting blood donation. If abstract messages about saving lives are not effective, blood donation campaigns based on such messages would be a waste of resources. Moreover, overly optimistic beliefs about the effectiveness of “save lives” arguments in prompting people to give blood is likely to lead practitioners to continue using such arguments, rather than looking for better and more effective messages. In addition, devising campaigns that are not grounded on reliable data goes against recent calls for behavioral interventions to be based on scientific evidence [1–3].

The present research was designed to determine the effectiveness of adding a “save lives” argument to a message designed to promote blood donation. We begin by discussing theoretical considerations suggesting that such arguments should be effective and then review experimental results suggesting they may not be. In order to resolve this disparity between theoretical and experimental evidence, we conducted a study to test the effectiveness of the “save lives” argument.

The statement “give blood, save a life” is both true and intuitively appealing. Few people are likely to feel comfortable saying “I don’t want to save lives”. According to Baron and Spranca [4], people have a certain number of “protected values” that cannot be traded off. The need to protect human life is one of these values. Referring to work by Turiel [5], Baron and Spranca maintain that these values are associated with a universal “moral obligation” that does not depend on personal preferences. A possible source of protected values discussed by Baron and Spranca is self-identity and impression management. Leary and Kowalski [6] comprehensive review of impression management led them to suggest that people usually attempt to control their image (more or less consciously) in order to present themselves in a way that is congruent with their goals and to avoid giving an undesired image of themselves. Consequently, most people would find it hard to ignore a message, such as “give blood, save a life”, because doing so would give the impression, both to themselves and to others, that they are not a “good person”.

But are the moral obligation to respect human life and the discomfort most people would feel with saying “No, I don’t want to save lives” enough to persuade people to give blood? In fact, moral values have been found to have only a modest effect size when behaviors are measured by observation rather than self-report [7]. In addition, Evans and Ferguson [8] showed that, rather than being predicted by “pure altruism”, the processes underlying intention to donate blood involve a mix of motives, such as warm glow. They even postulated that “generic altruism-based slogans, such as ‘Do something amazing: save a life. Give blood’, do not reflect these processes, and therefore, the motivational focus of recruitment campaigns may not match

donor motives” (p. 118). If this supposition is true (Evans and Ferguson did not test their proposition), the effect of “save lives” messages on prospective blood donors is likely to be modest or null.

Other studies suggest that “save lives” messages may not be effective because saving lives is an abstract concept. According to construal level theory (CLT) [9], abstract concepts are associated with temporal distance; therefore, they are not optimal ways of triggering behaviors. In a study applying CLT to procrastination, participants led to perceive a task as having abstract features procrastinated more before performing it than participants presented with a more concrete version of the task [10]. The authors explained this result by proposing a mental association between abstraction and psychological distances, including temporal distance. Another study applied CLT to a pro-social behavior by asking people how much money they would be prepared to give to a charity in the next few days (i.e., near future condition). Participants presented with strong arguments for donating (all the money would be used for the cause) said they would give more when the cause was described as saving a particular killer whale with a name than when it was described as saving killer whales in general [11]. In the case of blood donation, this result suggests that specific arguments may be more effective than general arguments in persuading people to give blood now (campaigns tend to focus on recruiting donors immediately, rather than at a vague time in the future). In order to test how intention to donate blood varies with temporal distance, Choi et al. [12] asked participants to rate their intention to donate blood over four time frames: “in one week”, “in three months”, “in one year”, and no time frame. They found that intentions to donate were stronger with respect to future time frames (“one year” and no time frame) than with respect to more immediate time frames. Combining their results with the CLT-derived proposition of a link between abstract concepts and temporal distance [10], Choi et al. suggested that using an abstract argument, such as “save lives” may increase intentions to donate blood in the future, but more concrete arguments are needed to persuade people to give blood immediately.

Hence, CLT studies have shown that abstract notions can lead to procrastination, that specific arguments are more effective than general arguments in persuading people to give to charity in the immediate future, and that people consider it more likely that they will give blood in the more distant future than in the immediate future. In the light of these findings, we hypothesized that adding a “save lives” argument to a recruitment message for lapsed blood donors would increase intentions to donate at an indeterminate date in the future, but not in the next few days or weeks. We also conjectured that they would probably not follow up their intention with a concrete behavior. This supposition is echoed in Eyal and Liberman [13] rather provocative statement: “A true believer in altruism, for example, would plan to perform altruistic behaviors in the distant future, or would think that other people should perform altruistic behaviors, but unless pre-committed, the person him- or herself may fail to act on these beliefs when the actual opportunity presents itself” (p. 19).

The present study was designed to provide an experimental test of whether or not the “save lives” argument is effective in promoting blood donation in the near future. Our population is

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1104851>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1104851>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)