



Who gives what and when? A scenario study of intentions to give time and money

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ABSTRACT

Effects of material, social, and psychological incentives for giving and volunteering as well as socio-demographic and personality characteristics are studied in a factorial survey ($n = 1248$). Social incentives for giving strongly increase intentions to give money and time. Requests for more efficient ways of contributing as well as requests for contributions to local as opposed to (inter)national organizations are also more likely to be honored. More highly educated and more empathic respondents were more likely to intend giving and volunteering.

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1. Introduction

Which principles govern the donation of money and time? Experiments in social psychology, sociology, and economics have shown that prosocial behavior varies with the material, social and psychological costs and benefits (for a review, see Dovidio et al., 2006). Survey research has uncovered a large number of socio-demographic and personality correlates of giving and volunteering (for reviews, see Bekkers and Wiepking, 2007; Penner et al., 2005; Piliavin and Charng, 1990; Smith, 1994; Wilson, 2000). Both types of studies have their own advantages and shortcomings. The key advantage of experiments is that they allow for causal inferences because researchers have control over the situation in which participants decide on contributions of time and money. A common shortcoming of experimental studies is that they rely on convenience samples of students that are fairly homogeneous. Student populations typically contain limited variance in age, level of education and income, which are important correlates of giving and volunteering. Another common shortcoming of experimental studies is that the number of participants is small, limiting the number of conditions that can be manipulated at the same time. Survey studies among random population samples, on the other hand, represent the full variance in relevant characteristics, but typically do not allow for manipulation of relevant situation characteristics.

However, the lack of control over participants is not a defining characteristic of survey studies. Experiments may be included in survey studies, and in fact, the large number of participants in population surveys allow for a much larger number of conditions than the typical experiment. The factorial survey (Rossi and Anderson, 1982) is a type of experiment that can easily be included in surveys, thus combining the advantage of experimental control over subjects with the advantage of having a natural variation in personality and socio-demographic characteristics in a large sample of respondents. The present article reports on a factorial survey study of the effects of material, social and psychological incentives on contributions of time and money to non-profit organizations and charitable causes, simultaneously with the effects of socio-demographic and personality characteristics. In the experiment, participants reported their willingness to give and volunteer in hypothetical

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scenarios in which contributions of money and time were requested for specific types of non-profit organizations by specific types of solicitors. The results reveal not only which types of situations facilitate giving and volunteering, but also which characteristics of persons are associated with the willingness to give and volunteer.

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1. Social incentives

Contributions to collective goods are often made in response to requests by others (Bryant et al., 2003; Piliavin and Charng, 1990; Schervish and Havens, 1997). In most social contexts, contributions are rewarded with approval while refusing to contribute will damage one's reputation as a good citizen. The act of contributing money or time will thus yield some social reward (Barclay, 2004; Hoffman et al., 1996; Long, 1976; Satow, 1975). The higher the social rewards for giving and volunteering (or the higher the social costs for not giving and volunteering), the more likely that a person will spend some of her resources to comply with a request to give and volunteer. In an important survey study of intentions to give money, time and blood (Lee et al., 1999), perceived expectations – expecting others to reward giving – were a consistent positive predictor of intentions to give. The influence of perceived expectations on volunteering intentions was stronger than on intentions to give money or blood. This finding can be explained by the more public nature of volunteering, such that 'sanctions can be applied more easily on those who do not behave as they are expected to behave' (Lee et al., 1999, p. 286).

The magnitude of the effect of social incentives depends most strongly on the relationship with people who are in the position to (dis)approve of the observed behavior. The higher the social distance, the lower the likelihood of giving and volunteering. Schervish and Havens (1997) find that people who are asked to give by a relative or a friend donate a larger percentage of their income. This effect is partly the result of self-interest: friends are more likely to reciprocate favors than strangers because they are more likely to be encountered in the future. Repeated interaction creates an incentive for helping others through expectations of reciprocity (Axelrod, 1984; Cialdini et al., 1997; Shapiro, 1975). However, social distance also decreases giving and volunteering for other reasons. When a friend acts as an intermediary on behalf of a charitable cause, and asks for a contribution, it is much harder to refuse than when a stranger makes the same request because we fear disapproval from friends more than from strangers. Thus, one would expect requests to volunteer by friends to be more effective than requests by strangers. Experimental studies of charitable giving show that expectation of repeated interaction in the future with an intermediary person making the request increase the likelihood of a contribution, as well as the amount contributed (Hoffman et al., 1996; Long, 1976). Social incentives even increase giving and volunteering when donors can expect social approval from third parties outside the dilemma, who are not able to reciprocate, because there is no prospect of future interaction with them (Deutsch and Lamberti, 1986; Eckel and Grossman, 1996; Eichenberger and Oberholzer-Gee, 1998).

2.2. Psychological incentives

People who give money or time for the benefit of others experience a number of psychological rewards. In the economic literature on philanthropy, the 'warm glow' from giving is assumed to be an important ingredient in donor motivation (Andreoni, 1989, 1990; Ribar and Wilhelm, 2002). Experimental studies in psychology suggest which characteristics of philanthropic acts make people feel good about themselves (Penner et al., 2005). In the present study, two different types of psychological rewards of giving are investigated: the efficacy of the contribution for relieving the need of the beneficiary, and the psychological distance to the beneficiary. More efficient contributions and contributions to causes that are psychologically closer are more rewarding, and generate a 'warmer glow'.

Distance: For many forms of prosocial behavior, it is unclear to the actor what the exact consequences are of his contribution to a collective good. People will be more strongly attracted to collective goods in the local community than to the problems of a third world country or to global issues because they are more able to monitor and influence the provision of local collective goods such as schools or leisure clubs than global collective goods such as 'the environment'. As a result, people tend to have more confidence in local charities than in national charities (Zalpa van Berkel and WWAV, 2005). In addition, the benefits of contributions to local collective goods can be observed more easily, reducing uncertainty on the quality of the public good. Finally, biological evolution has equipped humans with a general tendency to be more emotionally responsive to the well being of persons who are closer to them (Davis, 1994). In sum, I assume that the closer a person feels towards the beneficiary (or beneficiaries), the higher the degree of psychological satisfaction of a contribution to the well being of this (group of) person(s).

Efficacy: The efficacy of the contribution for relieving the need of the beneficiary generates a second type of psychological reward. When it is uncertain whether the contribution actually relieves the need of the beneficiary, people are less inclined to give. When charities are said to be inefficient in spending their resources, e.g., by paying large salaries for CEOs, corruption or other misgivings, public support declines rapidly (Arumi et al., 2005; Bowman, 2006). It can be expected that the same holds for differences between types of activities as contributions to charitable causes. The less certain that a type of contribution yields a benefit for a group in need, the less likely people will help in this way. Experimental social dilemma studies have shown that the more effective people feel their contribution will be, the more likely they will contribute (Kerr, 1989;

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