

An Empathy-Helping Perspective on Consumers' Responses to Fund-Raising Appeals

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The research examines viewers' actual responses to four televised fund-raising drives by a public television station over a 2-year period. The 584 pledge breaks we studied contain 4,868 individual appeals that were decomposed into two underlying dimensions based on the empathy-helping hypothesis: the appeal beneficiary (self versus other) and emotional valence (positive versus negative). We find that the most effective fund-raising appeals communicate the benefits to others rather than to the self and evoke negative rather than positive emotions. Appeals that emphasize benefits to the self significantly reduce the number of calls to the station, particularly when they have a positive emotional valence.

Nonprofits such as the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), National Public Radio (NPR), the Red Cross, and Body Positive face a unique fund-raising challenge because they provide public goods—products and services that can be consumed for free. Watching PBS or listening to NPR, for example, does not require a consumer to support the station through volunteering or financial donations. Similarly, people receive blood from the Red Cross and HIV/AIDS counseling and services from Body Positive without cost. Public goods create a social dilemma because, from an economic perspective, people's private and public interests are in conflict (de Cremer and Van Dijk 2004). Whereas it is in the collective interest to support public goods or-

ganizations, people maximize their private interests by consuming for free.

The vast majority of people do not support public goods organizations, even when they benefit from the services that are provided. Although 60% of the population is eligible to give blood and more than 40% will need to use blood services during their lifetime, less than 5% of the population actually donates (Bloodcenters.org 2007). For public radio and television, the percentage of viewers or listeners who donate is estimated to be as low as 8% (Behrens 1998). When religious and political causes are excluded, less than one in seven Americans volunteer each year (Corporation for National and Community Service 2007).

The literature on helping provides important insights into the variety of reasons people might donate to public goods organizations (Batson, Ahmad, and Tsang 2002). Some people contribute because they anticipate feeling guilty if they do not, or to alleviate the sadness and distress they experience from seeing people in need (Hoffman 1981). Others donate because they want to feel proud or happy that they supported a worthy cause, or to express their values or beliefs (Arnett, German, and Hunt 2003). A financial gift to the World Wildlife Fund or the local Humane Society expresses a love of animals, while a donation to the Sierra Club indicates a concern for the environment. Others might donate to alleviate the suffering of others without regard to the benefits they receive themselves, though there is overwhelming evidence that in the majority of instances we help for selfish reasons (Batson 1990).

Whereas much is known about why people might help

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others, little is known about how to motivate them through fund-raising activities. In their review of the literature, Bendapudi, Singh, and Bendapudi (1996) identify only 27 studies on all aspects of nonprofit marketing over a 20-year period. Most of the studies on financial donations investigate behavioral-influence tactics such as the foot-in-the-door technique, the “even a penny will help” approach, and labeling (Fern, Monroe, and Avila 1986; Moore, Bearden, and Teel 1985; Reingen 1978). A much smaller proportion examine advertising effects such as the impact of negative emotions on responses to a public service announcement (Bagozzi and Moore 1994), the use of social recognition to increase volunteerism (Fisher and Ackerman 1998), and the effects of temporal framing and involvement on the persuasiveness of charity advertising (Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran 1992). Recently, research on charity appeals has studied gender and culture as moderators of “help self” versus “help other” appeals (Brunel and Nelson 2000; Nelson et al. 2006).

The present research contributes to our understanding of how to motivate support for public goods organizations by decomposing fund-raising appeals into two theoretically relevant dimensions and examining their effects on donation behaviors. The first dimension is whether the beneficiary of the contribution is the donor (i.e., self-benefit appeals) or another person or organization (i.e., other-benefit appeals). We posit that other-benefit appeals are differentially effective in motivating donation behaviors on the basis of the empathy-helping hypothesis, which specifies that people are most likely to help when they vicariously experience the emotions of those in need (Batson 1990). Our logic is that other- but not self-benefit appeals evoke empathy, and the magnitude of the empathetic response should be proportional to the needs of the focal person or organization. Moreover, we posit that self-benefit appeals can actually have a negative effect on donation behaviors because they are inconsistent with socially desirable motivations for helping. The second dimension we examine is whether the emotional valence of the fund-raising appeal is positive or negative. The three versions of the empathy-helping hypothesis—aversive-arousal reduction, empathy-specific punishment, and empathic-joy explanations—vary in terms of whether helping is intended to avoid a negative emotion or to attain a positive one. We develop and test a model that contains a series of interaction terms designed to reflect the three empathy-helping explanations.

We employ a field study design with observational data to examine these issues because the effectiveness of persuasive messages in situ is often quite different from what is found in the laboratory (Wells 1993). First, within a field test we are able to capture the actual behaviors of donors who are unaware that they are being studied. Self-reports of normative behaviors are likely to be contaminated with social desirability bias, which can lead to a variety of unexpected effects, including the attenuation, inflation, and moderation of hypothesized relationships (Fisher 1993; Mick 1996). The observational nature of our design also

enables us to avoid common method bias associated with having measures of the predictor and the criterion from the same source (Podsakoff et al. 2003). Second, although previous research has found that negative-emotion appeals are effective in the laboratory, it is not clear that these same appeals will be successful in the field (Bagozzi and Moore 1994; Passyn and Sujun 2006). Ads that evoke negative emotions are by definition unpleasant and are therefore likely to lead prospective donors to try to avoid them by switching channels, leaving the room, or turning off the television. Thus, a field setting provides important insights into the effectiveness of negative-emotion appeals because consumers can easily ignore or escape aversive stimuli.

The research context is a series of fund-raising campaigns by a public television station. We examine the effects of the fund-raising appeals used by the focal station on viewers' actual donation responses (i.e., telephone calls to donate) over a 2-year period. The model is based on data from four independent sources:

- On-air scripts used during 584 pledge breaks situated between normal programming were coded to provide data on the appeal beneficiary and what was said and done within each pledge break. The pledge breaks include 4,868 individual appeals, as well as various other components such as premium offers, previews of the upcoming season, the on-air hosts, and so forth.
- A panel of 89 judges drawn from the television station's target audience was used to identify the emotional dimensions of the six major types of fund-raising appeals used during the pledge breaks.
- Nielsen data were incorporated into the data set to control for the effects of audience size, gender, and age.
- Station records of the number of calls made by viewers in response to each pledge break were used as the dependent variable.

Our integration and analysis of multisource field data answers the recent calls for greater diversity in research settings in consumer research (Deighton 2005; Wells 2001).

THE DIMENSIONS OF FUND-RAISING APPEALS

Self- versus Other-Benefit Appeals

A fundamental characteristic of fund-raising appeals is whether they emphasize the benefits to the donor (self-benefit appeals) or to those who are served by the organization (other-benefit appeals; Brunel and Nelson 2000; Nelson et al. 2006). An advertisement for the Red Cross, for example, could highlight the benefits to the blood donor, including the feelings of pride, happiness, or empowerment that come from helping those in need. Conversely, the advertisement could focus on the benefits to others, such as how blood transfusions save the lives of accident victims or why the Red Cross needs support to carry out its mission.

We look to the literature in social psychology on why people help, to develop hypotheses about whether self- or

other-benefit appeals are likely to be most effective. Our logic is that donations to public goods organizations are a form of helping because they are voluntary and are designed to support an organization committed to providing a social good. By definition, a donation is not part of an exchange transaction because people are able to freely consume the goods and services provided by these organizations.

The prevailing view in social psychology is that people are selfish, which implies that self-benefit appeals should be effective because they directly reflect peoples' motives for helping (Eagly and Chaiken 1993). As argued by Batson (1990), the view that humans are essentially selfish is embedded in many contemporary personality and social psychology theories, including self-awareness, self-deception, self-evaluation maintenance, self-monitoring, self-discrepancy, and self-affirmation. He notes that even theories governing interpersonal relationships, such as social comparison, social exchange, and interdependence theories, assume that we are ultimately self-interested. A vocal proponent of the potential for human altruism, he acknowledges that even the most altruistic acts confer egoistic benefits on the helper (Batson 1987). Consider our earlier example of a donation to the Red Cross. A donation is purely altruistic if the motivation is to relieve the suffering of the victims without expectation of personal gain (Batson 1987; Eisenberg and Miller 1987). Yet, such a donation is also beneficial to the donor because it alleviates the aversive arousal or distress that results from knowing that others are suffering (Cialdini et al. 1987), enhances the donor's mood (Smith, Keating, and Stotland 1989), boosts self-esteem (Batson 1987), and creates a good impression if it is visible to others (Arnett et al. 2003; Baumeister 1982). The benefits to the self are inextricably intertwined with benefits to others, even when altruism is the underlying motivation for helping—we help ourselves when we help others.

Indeed, the empathy-helping hypothesis implies that the selfish benefits from helping are a function of the magnitude of the needs of the person or organization requiring assistance. The empathy-helping hypothesis specifies that we are most likely to help those we care about and therefore empathize with (Batson 1987, 1990). Empathy can be defined as “an other-oriented emotional response congruent with the perceived welfare of another” (Batson 1990, 339). The greater the suffering of a person, organization, or cause that is important to us, the more we experience empathic distress and the more likely we are to provide assistance. Appeals that reference the needs of others should be differentially effective because they are more likely than explicitly selfish appeals to create the empathic response that typically precedes helping behaviors.

Some evidence suggests that an emphasis on the benefits to the donor rather than to the beneficiary can actually reduce helping. Although it was not the focus of their study, Pessimier, Bemmaor, and Hanssens (1977) found that the vast majority of respondents to a mail survey indicated that they would be *less* willing to donate blood if financial incentives were offered. One explanation for their finding is that mak-

ing a blood donation for economic gain implies a level of self-interest that is incompatible with basic human qualities related to a concern for others, cooperation, and kindness. Responding to an explicitly selfish appeal means that donors cannot ascribe their actions to a generous or charitable desire to help others. In the extreme, donating blood for money is not helping because it is a transaction that is motivated by self-interest. In support of this perspective, Carlson and Miller (1987) found meta-analytic evidence that when the focus of a negative event is on the self versus the person who is in need, helping is significantly less likely. Formally,

H1: Other-benefit appeals are more effective than self-benefit appeals for donations to public goods organizations.

Appeal Beneficiary and Negative Emotional Valence

The empathy-helping hypothesis provides guidance on the relationship between an appeal's beneficiary and its emotional valence. The empathy-helping hypothesis offers three explanations for helping, two of which rely on the elimination or avoidance of negative emotions, whereas the third relies on the pursuit of positive emotions (Batson 1987, 1990). The two negative-emotion explanations are aversive-arousal reduction and empathy-specific punishment. An aversive-arousal perspective holds that when we care for people, we experience distress when they are in need, and helping is a means by which we can alleviate or cope with that distress (Hoffman 1981). To illustrate, Bagozzi and Moore (1994) find that negative emotions associated with a public service announcement (PSA) lead to empathy and a subsequent willingness to take action on behalf of an abused child. The authors argue that negative emotions occur in response to the PSA because of viewers' appraisals that children are in danger—the viewer recognizes the suffering of the victims and has an emotional reaction to their needs. The resulting aversive arousal can be diminished by avoidance behaviors, such as changing the channel or leaving the room, or by relieving the suffering of the victims.

An empathy-specific punishment explanation asserts that we are socialized to feel an obligation to help when someone we care about is in need, and we anticipate shame or guilt if we do not help. The underlying logic is that when we feel empathy for another who is suffering, we become concerned with “impending social or self-censure” if we do not afford assistance (Batson 1990, 342). We anticipate this censure because we have breached a normative standard (i.e., “I should help other people or causes I care about”). Failing to help when needed leads to shame, which is a powerful negative emotion that is experienced when there is an inconsistency between a person's actual and desired self that is under the control of the individual (Miller and Tangney 1994). Shame is a potent motivational force—to experience shame is to feel inherently deficient as a person (Tangney et al. 1996).

Consider the appeals that might be used by a public school in a fund-raising drive for new playground equipment. Both the aversive-arousal and empathy-specific punishment perspectives would assert that people are most likely to respond to appeals that stress the needs of the children (i.e., an other-benefit appeal) and thereby evoke a negative emotional state in the prospective donor. In the former explanation, prospective donors are motivated to contribute to alleviate the empathic distress they experience because the children are in need. In the latter instance, prospective donors recognize that the children require their support and anticipate feeling guilty, ashamed, or embarrassed if they don't contribute. A negative-emotion appeal might focus on how the absence of recreational facilities in the neighborhood makes the children sad, or it might create fear that the children are in danger because they do not have a safe place to play. In either case, the focus is on the children (i.e., an other-benefit appeal) because it is their unfulfilled needs that are the source of distress or anticipated regret in the prospective donor. Accordingly, we expect that the effectiveness of other-benefit appeals will be enhanced by negative emotional content.

In contrast, the effectiveness of a self-benefit appeal is not likely to be enhanced when it is combined with negative emotional content. Helping others for selfish reasons is not socially desirable, particularly when there is an emotional benefit associated with the behavior. Research on attentional focus has found that a negative mood increases helpfulness when the focus is on the misfortunes of others, whereas a focus on the self can actually decrease helpfulness. In one test of this hypothesis, a negative mood was induced by asking participants to imagine that a close friend is dying of cancer (Thompson, Cowan, and Rosenhan 1980). Attentional focus was manipulated by having participants think about either their own feelings or the feelings of their terminally ill friend. They found that helping was significantly greater when participants in a negative mood thought about the cancer victim rather than themselves. On this basis we predict that appeals that reference the benefits to others will be more effective when they evoke negative emotions, but appeals that reference the benefits to the donor will not. Formally,

H2: The effectiveness of other-benefit but not self-benefit appeals is enhanced by negative emotional content.

Appeal Beneficiary and Positive Emotional Valence

Finally, the empathic-joy (reward-seeking) explanation holds that it is the pursuit of a positive emotional state rather than the relief or avoidance of a negative emotional state that is motivating. Smith et al. (1989) propose that the prospect of empathic joy is an essential aspect of the empathy-helping relationship. In support of their position they found that empathetically aroused witnesses offered to help a per-

son in distress only when they expected feedback from the victim that would confirm that the distress had been alleviated. Empathetic witnesses were no more likely to help than were nonempathetic witnesses when feedback was denied, suggesting that it is the anticipated positive emotional experience that is motivating.

Continuing with our playground example, an appeal designed to create empathic joy would make a connection between the act of helping the children and the positive emotions that they will experience as a consequence. In turn, the pursuit of vicarious joy motivates the prospective donor to help. As with the aversive-arousal and empathy-specific punishments explanations, the focus is on the children, but the payoff in this case is the anticipated positive emotion that results from the helping behavior. On the basis of an empathic-joy explanation, we posit that the addition of positive emotional content will enhance the effectiveness of other- but not self-benefit appeals. As argued previously, self-benefit appeals reference the prospective donor rather than those in need, which both attenuates the empathic response and reduces the social desirability of helping. Adding a positive emotional payoff to an appeal that references the self is likely to further diminish the helping response because the egoistic payoff to the prospective donor is made stronger and more salient. Formally,

H3: The effectiveness of other-benefit but not self-benefit appeals is enhanced by positive emotional content.

METHOD

The Research Context

An independent public television station provided access to four fund-raising campaigns conducted during the spring and fall of 2 consecutive years. A typical day in each campaign featured a series of pledge breaks situated between regularly scheduled programming. Unlike some public television stations, the focal station does not interrupt programs with its fund-raising activities and does not allow commercial advertising of any type on the air. The station is known for excellent programming and for being a leader in the production of educational broadcasting, regional news, and current affairs programs, as well as its airing of foreign films and dramas. In addition to on-air fund-raising, the station raises money through government grants, corporate sponsorships of specific programs, and licensing of the station's programs to other broadcasters or networks.

Creating the Database

The primary data source consisted of the scripts used during each break. The hosts read the script from a teleprompter, so what was said on the air is virtually identical to what is written in the script document. After initial instructions on how to code the 584 scripts, two paid coders who were blind to the hypotheses independently coded 10

scripts. They then met with the first author to ensure that they were interpreting the scripts accurately and to address any discrepancies and then independently coded the remaining scripts. The coders met on a daily basis to discuss and reconcile any coding differences.

The coders classified the 4,868 fund-raising appeals within the scripts into six basic types that had been identified through discussions with station management and an initial content analysis of the first campaign period (approximately 25% of the scripts). The six basic appeals were quality programming, commercial-free programming, recognition, premiums or gifts, funding cuts, and financial targets. The intercoder agreement for each of the six appeals was 89% or higher. Representative statements for each of the fund-raising appeal types and their frequency of occurrence can be found in table 1.

The coders also classified the appeals into two mutually exclusive categories on the basis of who received the benefit from the donation. If the primary beneficiary of the donation was the viewer, the appeal was coded as a self-benefit. If the primary beneficiary was someone other than the viewer, the appeal was classified as an other-benefit. Fund-raising appeals that were categorized as self-benefits tended to be commercial-free programming, quality programming, recognition, and premium offers. However, these appeals identified a beneficiary other than the viewer in some instances. For example, quality programming was sometimes presented

as a benefit to the education of children in the region; in these cases the adult being targeted for a donation was distinct from the child receiving the benefit. Other-benefit appeals also included statements related to the station's campaign goals and the need for money because of funding cuts. Here the viewer's empathic response might be with the station's on-air hosts, employees, or volunteers. The intercoder agreement for whether the beneficiary of the fund-raising appeal was the self or other was 93%.

We used an independent set of judges selected from the station's target audience to code the emotion dimensions of the six basic fund-raising appeals for two reasons. First, the large quantity of data in the scripts precluded the use of multi-item measures of the dimensions by the original two coders. Second, it was important to use judges who were members of the target audience because emotional responses to the appeals would be affected by age, educational background, personality traits, and so forth. As a result, we recruited 89 judges from a local community organization who watched the station at least once a week to evaluate the six primary types of fund-raising appeals identified in the first round of data collection. The judges were given the three representative examples of each of the six fund-raising appeals found in table 1 and were asked to rate the level of positive and negative emotions in each appeal. The judges had an average age of 50 years, 57% were female, and 13% were members of the station.

TABLE 1
FUND-RAISING APPEAL TYPES AND CODING EXAMPLES

Fund-raising appeal type	Coding examples	Percentage of total appeals (N = 4,868)
Quality programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To continue to bring you the best, we need you to pledge more dollars than ever before Tried and true television That's just one more reason to support our exceptional educational children's shows 	33.7
Commercial-free programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enjoy the best in commercial-free films By contributing you get more of the outstanding commercial-free programs you love Our children's programming is a lively, commercial-free alternative 	15.2
Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People who donate more than \$500 are called <i>Stars</i> People who donate \$500 or more are [station name] <i>Stars</i> Those who donate \$500 or more are recognized as the <i>Stars of [station name]</i> 	2.9
Premium or gift	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take this chance to pick up a membership premium And we've got premiums for older fans too, like our savory new <i>Two Fat Ladies Ride Again</i> cookbook Give at least \$80 and you can pick up a membership premium 	26.4
Funding cuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government funding has been cut \$20 million over the past 7 years The past 7 years have been difficult ones for this network as a result of nearly \$20 million in budget cuts The days of government grants that covered all of our expenses are over 	3.9
Financial targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We need to reach our year-end targets Help [station name] meet its financial targets Help us reach our fundraising goals by giving generously 	17.9

Emotions were rated on seven-point Likert scales adapted from Chandy et al. (2001). The question stem for the emotion items was "How are appeals of this type designed to make you feel?" Positive emotion was measured with the average of one item for love and one item for pride. The love item was "The statements suggest that those who donate are doing something loving or caring," and the pride item was "The statements suggest that those who donate should feel proud." Negative emotion was captured with the average of one item for fear and one item for guilt. The fear item was "The statements suggest that something bad will happen if the viewer doesn't donate." The guilt item was "The statements imply that the viewer should feel guilty for not making a donation." Although a variety of additional specific emotions could have been included, the magnitude of the coding task led us to focus on two representative emotions for each of the constructs. Also, previous research has found that individual emotional responses can be usefully summarized as either positive or negative (Edell and Burke 1987).

A series of steps were followed to incorporate the judges' perceptions in the database. First, the judges' responses to the emotion questions were grouped across all fund-raising appeals and were factor analyzed. When principal component analysis with Varimax rotation was used, the two hypothesized factors explained 82.6% of the variance. We then derived average factor scores for the two appeal dimensions for each of the six appeals. This is analogous to positioning the fund-raising appeals in two-dimensional space (Hauser and Koppelman 1979). To illustrate, the "funding cuts" appeal is high on negative emotion but low on positive emotion. Thus, each time this appeal was used it increased the negative emotion score for the break (and had a simultaneous but lower effect on the positive emotion score).

The average factor scores were used to create new variables for positive and negative emotion in the full data set. Specifically, these variables were created for each pledge break by multiplying the frequency of each fund-raising appeal by its factor score and summing across all appeals used in the pledge break to create positive and negative emotion scores for each break. The estimated effects of the emotion factors on donation behaviors are independent, as there was a nonsignificant correlation between positive and negative emotion scores at the break level ($r = -.05$, NS).

Beyond the appeal dimensions that are of theoretical interest in the present research, each pledge break has a variety of characteristics that have the potential to affect calls to the station. Although some of these characteristics are idiosyncratic to the focal station, many of them are used in other nonprofit fund-raising efforts. The composition of the characteristics within each break varies dramatically—each might be used multiple times or not at all within a break. Intercoder agreement on these pledge break characteristics was virtually 100% because their presence is unambiguously identified in each script.

Message Source. The message source is the host or celebrity within each pledge break who delivers the fund-

raising appeals. Within the present context, each break features one to three hosts from a portfolio of 19. Donations within a pledge break are affected by host-specific descriptors including gender, age, attractiveness, and similarity to the audience (Byrne 1971; Chaiken 1986). Each of the hosts was operationalized as a dichotomous variable, taking the value 1 if used in the particular break and 0 otherwise. In order to capture host-specific effects while minimizing the complexity of the model, we created dummy variables for the six most frequently used hosts. These hosts delivered approximately 85% of the appeals that were aired. The hosts are typically members of the station's management team, but sometimes a celebrity endorser is used. Celebrity endorsements are taped by the station and are run as a feature within selected pledge breaks.

Promotional Tactics. Promotional tactics used by the station include premium offers, draw offers, corporate challenges, and program previews. A premium offer is a 30–90-second advertisement for a promotional item that is run within pledge breaks. Promotional items include cookbooks, videos, and CDs that are offered at reduced or no cost to viewers who donate above a specific financial level. Management also tries to stimulate donations with draw offers—viewers who call in and exceed a minimum pledge amount during a specified period are entered in a sweepstakes for prizes, such as a weekend for two at a bed and breakfast, theater tickets, or a vacation package. A corporate challenge is designed to stimulate donations by increasing the viewer's effective donation. During a corporate challenge, a named organization matches viewer donations after a minimum financial threshold has been achieved. Finally, program previews are 15–30-second advertisements for one of the station's popular television series, during which viewers are asked to support the program by donating to the station.

Timing. Timing is the temporal aspect of pledge breaks. Pledge breaks are run within campaigns that occur during the spring and fall each year. Donations across campaigns are likely to vary because of differences in the characteristics of the fund-raising environment, such as social, economic, and political events, the ability and willingness of people to give during different times of the year, competition, and so forth. Pledge breaks vary in terms of their order within a campaign, the day of the week, and the time of day. These aspects of timing affect donations by influencing the size and characteristics (e.g., sex and age) of the audience watching a break. Timing also relates to the length of the break itself. The station's pledge breaks ranged from as little as 15 seconds to just over 12 minutes, though the vast majority are between 3 and 10 minutes. Longer breaks, on average, are likely to raise more donations than shorter breaks are.

We reflect timing with three dummy variables for campaign and six for the day of week. We also included the day number within the campaign (natural log transformed to reflect diminishing returns) to reflect any buildup that might exist within each campaign. The time of the pledge

break within the day was captured by centering the hour at 8:00 p.m.—the start of prime-time viewing—and including a quadratic term for the centered time variable so as to capture nonlinear effects (peaks and troughs in viewership). Finally, we included the duration of each break (in seconds and natural log transformed) as a predictor of donations. Because of the effect of timing on audience characteristics, we included Nielsen audience data to reflect total audience size for each break, the proportion of the audience that was male, and the proportion of the audience age 55 years or older.

Number of Calls. The final data component, taken from station records, was the number of telephone calls received for each break. We focus on the number of calls to the station because they are the most proximate response to the appeals contained within each break. Whereas the number of dollars raised is the ultimate goal, the telephone call is the first and most critical response to the fund-raising efforts. Further, the act of calling is uncontaminated by the income of the caller and the ability of the station volunteer who takes the call to influence the donation amount. The station attributes to each break all calls made from the beginning of the break to the start of the subsequent break. Thus, the dependent variable reflects all calls until approximately 50 minutes after a break ends. On the basis of call volumes, station management indicated that in the vast majority of cases the effect of a pledge break occurs within 10 to 15 minutes after the end of a break. Telephone lines remain open for approximately 1 hour after the final pledge break of the evening. Descriptive statistics for the study are displayed in table 2.

MODEL SPECIFICATION

We conduct our analysis at the level of the individual break. This level is most relevant to station management because each break is considered a separate execution designed for a specific audience. Analyzing the data at this level allows us to examine the effects of each of the multiple breaks run each day. Moreover, specifying the response model at a disaggregate level facilitates more efficient and less biased estimates (Judge et al. 1985).

The data set has two major advantages relative to previous studies. First, the absence of pledge breaks outside the station's normal hours of operation means that the possibility of truncation bias in the dependent variable is low. Consequently, we are able to avoid the use of dummy variables to differentiate between pledge breaks that were aired when the station was open versus when it was closed. Second, pledge breaks for the focal station were not run on any other television station. In most traditional settings, ads are run on multiple stations simultaneously, so it is difficult to isolate the effects of individual placements.

The station ran multiple fund-raising breaks within each day of the four campaigns, resulting in an unbalanced panel data set with 584 breaks over 107 days. Given that each break comprises several (often repeated) appeals, it is pos-

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS (MEAN AND SD)

Variable	Mean	SD
No. of calls	30.8	32.54
Break duration (in minutes)	6.8	1.90
Percentage of breaks that used:		
Premium offers	92.6	. . .
Program previews	62.7	. . .
Celebrity appearance	64.9	. . .
Corporate challenge	3.3	. . .
Draw offers	46.0	. . .
Adult audience (in thousands)	59.41	58.31
Proportion of audience that is male	.63	.71
Proportion of audience age \geq 55 years	.49	.30

sible that a more complex nonlinear relationship exists between the number of calls and the appeals used (Baumgartner, Sujan, and Padgett 1997). We therefore tested the fit of semi-log, exponential, and negative quadratic transforms (to capture diminishing returns, recency effects, and “middle peak” returns to repetition, respectively) of the beneficiary and emotional valence predictors of number of calls. The results were robust to the various specifications, but the simple “linear effects” specification was chosen because of its superiority based on the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and the Consistent Akaike Information Criterion scores.

Baumgartner et al. (1997) find that people prefer television ads that have increasingly positive affective experiences over time. To test for the possibility that our results were influenced by affective trends within the pledge breaks, we randomly selected 50 breaks from the original data set and coded the order of the 405 appeals contained within those breaks. We then ran a within-break mixed-effects regression model in which we regressed the number of calls on the positive and negative emotionality trends produced by the sequence of the appeals within each break. We found no significant effects of the order of the positive or negative emotionality within the breaks on the number of calls (p 's $>$.90). Consequently, the effects we report do not appear to be influenced by affective trends within the data.

We also tested for carryover effects by including the lagged number of incoming calls by break; this was not a significant predictor and hence was dropped from the model. To distinguish between autocorrelation and carryover effects, we ran six alternative error-covariance structures. In no case did we find a significant autocorrelation coefficient. Nonsignificant likelihood-ratio test statistics across three alternate panel structures suggest that the assumption of homogeneity of variance attributable to these characteristics is appropriate. We are thus able to pool the observations across campaigns while controlling for campaign-specific fixed effects. Our model specification explicitly allows for unobserved heterogeneity.

In addition, it is important for us to account for (a) the dependent variable comprising nonnegative count data and

TABLE 3
REGRESSION PARAMETER ESTIMATES (DEPENDENT VARIABLE = NUMBER OF CALLS)

Variable	Term	Coefficient	Standard error	t-value
Intercept	α	-5.03	.38	-13.30***
Other-benefit appeal	b_1	.01	.00	3.20***
Self-benefit appeal	b_2	-.03	.00	-9.84***
Negative emotion	b_3	.06	.01	7.20***
Positive emotion	b_4	-.01	.02	-.80
Other-benefit appeal \times negative emotion	b_5	.01	.00	5.04***
Other-benefit appeal \times positive emotion	b_6	.01	.00	1.45
Self-benefit appeal \times negative emotion	b_7	-.00	.00	-.60
Self-benefit appeal \times positive emotion	b_8	-.02	.00	-6.38***
Host 1	b_9	.09	.04	2.25*
Host 2	b_{10}	-.21	.04	-5.42***
Host 3	b_{11}	.24	.05	4.82***
Host 4	b_{12}	-.18	.04	-4.05***
Host 5	b_{13}	.28	.05	5.35***
Host 6	b_{14}	-.08	.05	-1.75
Celebrity endorsement	b_{15}	-.01	.00	-3.82***
Corporate challenge	b_{16}	.07	.04	1.72
Premium offer	b_{17}	-.03	.05	-.70
Draw offer	b_{18}	.14	.02	6.04***
Program previews	b_{19}	-.05	.03	-1.67
Campaign 2	b_{20}	.16	.11	1.47
Campaign 3	b_{21}	-.28	.11	-2.60**
Campaign 4	b_{22}	-.20	.11	-1.84
ln(Day of campaign)	b_{23}	.71	.04	.28
Monday	b_{24}	.55	.14	4.94***
Tuesday	b_{25}	.31	.14	3.95***
Wednesday	b_{26}	.20	.14	2.11**
Thursday	b_{27}	.46	.14	1.37
Friday	b_{28}	.51	.13	3.47***
Saturday	b_{29}	.53	.13	3.78***
Time of day	b_{30}	.15	.01	18.52***
(Time of day) ²	b_{31}	-.07	.00	-17.96***
ln(Break duration)	b_{32}	1.31	.06	21.65***
Adult audience	b_{33}	.01	.00	17.88***
Male audience (%)	b_{34}	.00	.01	.01
Audience age \geq 55 years (%)	b_{35}	.07	.04	1.67

NOTE.—The log likelihood ($n = 584$) is -3,439; the AIC statistic is 6,948.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$ (all two-tailed tests).

(*b*) unobserved heterogeneity in call response across breaks, so as to provide unbiased estimates of the hypothesized predictors. We address both of the preceding issues with a random-intercept Poisson regression model (Goldstein 2003). Specifically,

$$Y = \alpha + \mathbf{A}\beta_A + \mathbf{B}\beta_B + \mathbf{C}\beta_C + \mathbf{D}\beta_D + u_j + \varepsilon_{ij} \dots \quad (1)$$

where Y is a vector of the number of calls pledging support in response to each break, α is the intercept, \mathbf{A} is a matrix of fund-raising appeal dimensions, \mathbf{B} is a matrix of message source descriptors, \mathbf{C} is a matrix of promotional tactics, \mathbf{D} is a matrix of timing identifiers, β_K are vectors of coefficients to be estimated, u_j is a vector of day-specific error terms, and ε_{ij} is a vector of break-specific error terms.

In the interest of minimizing multicollinearity, we mean-

centered all the elements of the matrix \mathbf{A} (Aiken and West 1991). As such, the coefficients b_1 through b_4 represent the impact on the criterion variable of a 1-unit change in the predictor variable, holding the other first-order effects at the mean.

RESULTS

Table 3 presents the estimated coefficients for the model specified above. Our model specification does not permit a straightforward assessment of fit as inferred from a R^2 -type statistic (Snijders and Bosker 1999, 99). Instead, the pseudo- R^2 fit statistic (Dobson 2002, 154) of 0.54 and the rejection of the null hypothesis that the β -coefficient vector is equal to 0 ($H_0: \beta = 0$) indicate satisfactory explanatory power for the specified model. In addition, our proposed model de-

viance d (computed as $-2 \times \log$ likelihood) and AIC statistics ($d = 6,878$, $AIC = 6,948$) compare favorably with the null model ($d = 14,996$, $AIC = 14,996$), indicating a good fit with the data.

Hypothesis Tests

Beyond the statistical significance of the coefficients in the regression model, we report the relevant effect sizes, using the Cohen's f^2 test. The f^2 F -statistic estimates the proportion of systematic variance accounted for by the predictor relative to the unexplained variance in the criterion (Cohen 1988). We found that, as a group, the predictors related to the hypotheses had a moderate to large effect size ($f^2 = 0.06$) in a model with 27 control variables.

We find confirmatory evidence for our hypotheses regarding the importance of the beneficiary identified in the fund-raising appeal. Fund-raising appeals in which someone other than the viewer receives the benefit had a significant, positive effect on the number of calls pledging donations ($b_1 = 0.01$, $p < .001$; $f^2 = 0.01$). In contrast, an emphasis on self-benefits resulted in a significant decrease in the number of calls ($b_2 = -0.03$, $p < .001$; $f^2 = 0.02$). The combination of the two findings lends support for hypothesis 1. To put the effect sizes into perspective, a standard deviation increase of 1 (+1 SD) in the other-benefit variable would increase call volume by 3.6%, while a +1 SD in the self-benefit variable would decrease call volume by 11.4%.

Hypothesis 2 specified that the effectiveness of other-benefit, but not self-benefit, appeals is enhanced when negative emotions are evoked. We found support for this hypothesis with a significant effect of the other-benefit by negative-emotion interaction term ($b_5 = 0.01$, $p < .001$; $f^2 = 0.01$) and no effect of self-benefit by negative-emotion interaction term ($b_7 = -0.00$, NS). Figure 1 illustrates this interaction at the mean of all other variables. The results indicate that for breaks in which there is high negative emotionality (+1 SD), the station would generate 17% more calls by emphasizing other-benefits (+1 SD) relative to low other-benefits (-1 SD).

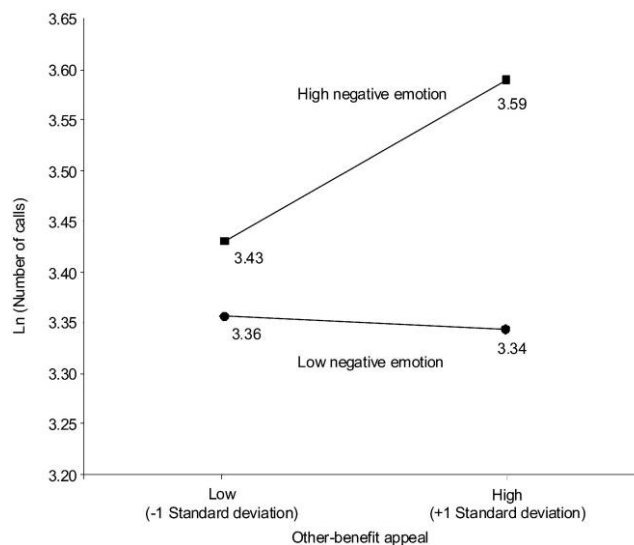
Hypothesis 3 specified that the effectiveness of other-benefit, but not self-benefit, appeals is enhanced when positive emotions are evoked. This hypothesis received mixed support, with no significant other-benefit by positive-emotion-appeal interaction effect ($b_6 = 0.01$, NS) but a highly significant negative effect of the self-benefit by positive-emotion interaction term ($b_8 = -0.02$, $p < .001$; $f^2 = 0.01$). The results indicate that for breaks in which there is high positive emotionality (+1 SD), the station would decrease calls by 35% by emphasizing self-benefits (+1 SD) compared with low self-benefits (-1 SD).

Additional Findings

We found a variety of effects related to the control variables. We observed significant variations in the effectiveness of five of the six most frequently appearing hosts ($b_9 = 0.09$, $b_{10} = -0.21$, $b_{11} = 0.24$, $b_{12} = -0.18$, and

FIGURE 1

INTERACTION EFFECT OF APPEAL BENEFICIARY AND NEGATIVE EMOTIONAL CONTENT



$b_{13} = 0.28$, all significant at $p < .001$; $b_{14} = -0.08$, NS). Interestingly, the use of celebrity endorsements has an adverse impact on the number of calls ($b_{15} = -0.01$, $p < .001$). We found no significant effects on call volume for corporate challenges ($b_{16} = 0.07$, NS), premium offers ($b_{17} = -0.03$, NS), or program previews ($b_{19} = -0.05$, NS). However, we found a significant and positive relation between the use of draw offers and pledge calls ($b_{18} = 0.14$, $p < .001$).

In reference to the timing variables, other than campaign 3 ($b_{21} = -0.28$, $p < .01$) there were no significant differences in response across campaigns ($b_{20} = 0.16$; $b_{22} = -0.20$; both NS), nor was there any evidence of a buildup within campaigns ($b_{23} = 0.71$, NS). We found evidence of significantly higher call volume on most days relative to Sunday ($b_{24} = 0.55$; $b_{25} = 0.31$; $b_{26} = 0.20$; $b_{28} = 0.51$; $b_{29} = 0.53$, all significant at $p < .01$; $b_{27} = 0.46$, NS). Our expectation regarding the impact of the time of day when the break is broadcast is confirmed. Longer breaks and breaks that were aired between 7:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. received the most calls. Break duration ($b_{32} = 1.31$, $p < .001$) had strong effects on pledge calls, as did the time of day when the break was aired ($b_{30} = 0.15$, $b_{31} = -0.07$, $p < .001$).

We found a significant relation between audience size and call volume ($b_{33} = 0.01$, $p < .001$), but there do not appear to be significant differences in responses attributable to the proportion of the audience that was male ($b_{34} = 0.00$, NS) nor to the proportion of the audience age 55 years or older ($b_{35} = 0.07$, NS).

DISCUSSION

Some previous research has suggested that the appeals used to motivate helping behaviors are unimportant. Radley

and Kennedy (1995) assert that people respond to a variety of requests for help from recognized charities as long as the target audience believes they are making free-will donations that are needed by the recipient. They argue that fund-raising success requires only that organizations communicate their needs and avoid high-pressure sales tactics. From this perspective the critical issue is simply “getting the word out” to the right audience—that is, people who care about the focal cause. Despite the fact that people do tend to help when asked, and that those who identify with a particular cause are most likely to help, the present study finds that fund-raising effectiveness can be enhanced by the use of specific types of appeals. This is an important contribution because even small improvements in fund-raising effectiveness can significantly affect a nonprofit’s ability to carry out its social mission. For example, a 10% improvement in fund-raising during the 2007 Jerry Lewis Labor Day Telethon would have raised an additional \$6.4 million (Muscular Dystrophy Association 2008).

Self- versus Other-Benefit Appeals

We find evidence of dramatic differences in the effectiveness of self- versus other-benefit appeals. The more frequently the station used other-benefit appeals, the greater the calls to donate during the break. It appears that viewers were more likely to support the station when they believed they would be assisting others (i.e., society at large, other viewers, and the station itself) rather than themselves. In contrast, fund-raising appeals that focused on what viewers would personally gain from helping were actually counterproductive. The results are perhaps surprising because of the underlying assumption in social psychology, neoclassical economics, evolutionary biology, and psychoanalysis that individuals are ultimately selfish even when they are helping others (Miller and Ratner 1998).

If people help for selfish reasons, why do they respond positively to unselfish (i.e., other-benefit) appeals and negatively to explicitly selfish appeals? One explanation is based on the social desirability of helping—not only are people expected to help others when asked, but they are supposed to do so for noble rather than base reasons. Helping should be a response to the needs of one’s children, grandchildren, other people in the community, or the station rather than explicit self-interest. Paradoxically, it is by helping others that we derive self-benefits in the form of enhanced self-esteem and social approval—serving others connotes valued human traits, including compassion, cooperativeness, and kindness. The negative effect of self-benefit appeals on donations also supports a normative interpretation of the results. Breaks that emphasized the benefits to the viewer elicited a negative response to the station’s efforts. When the fund-raising appeals focused on the personal or selfish benefits associated with contributing to the station, the donation became a payment in exchange for commercial-free entertainment rather than an act of giving. This type of donation does not have the same potential to enhance self-esteem or create a favorable impression because it is simply

part of a transaction. Indeed, making a donation for explicitly selfish reasons is likely to be associated with unfavorable personal traits and motivations that have negative consequences for donors.

It is also possible to argue that responding to explicitly selfish appeals for public goods organizations is irrational because viewers are able to capture most egoistic benefits without donating. Viewers already receive the station’s programming without making a donation, so why should appeals that focus on the benefits of this programming persuade them to call and provide their credit card number? By definition, public goods are free, so the rules that govern persuasion in traditional exchange relationships simply do not apply. It is useful to note, however, that donating to a public goods organization is rational if not doing so jeopardizes the organization’s survival or specific ability to provide the benefits desired by the donor (de Cremer and Van Dijk 2004).

Emotional Valence Effects

We tested all four possible combinations of beneficiary and emotional valence, but only the other-benefit by negative-emotion interaction term had a significant positive effect on the number of calls to the station. Accordingly, it appears that viewers were stimulated to call as a way of either coping with the distress they felt (i.e., the aversive-arousal explanation) or to avoid the anticipated self- or public censure associated with not helping when asked (i.e., the empathy-specific punishment explanation). Although the present research does not have individual-level data that would enable us to disentangle the two perspectives, the empathy-specific punishment explanation is most tenable given the ease with which aversive arousal can be avoided within a field context. Prospective donors are able to evade or escape any distress they might experience because of a fund-raising appeal by changing channels, leaving the room, starting a conversation, or focusing on one of a thousand other things in the viewing environment. Prior research has found that people tend to escape aversive stimuli rather than undertake costly helping when helping is motivated by egoism rather than altruism (Batson 1990). Given that the station’s viewers were largely self-interested and could easily escape any aversive arousal they experienced, it appears that the combination of other-benefit and negative-emotion appeals was effective because viewers anticipated guilt or shame if they did not donate.

We did not find support for the empathic-joy explanation based on the lack of a significant other-benefit by positive emotion interaction. Our findings suggest that viewers were not stimulated to call in because they wanted to vicariously experience the joy or happiness associated with helping the station, other viewers, or the community. Moreover, the combination of a self-benefit appeal and positive emotion actually had a significant negative effect on donations. The best explanation appears to be based on the social undesirability of donating. If self-benefit appeals combined with a positive emotion had only a null effect on donations, the

result could be attributed to the fact that self-benefit appeals do not reference those in need and therefore do not create empathy. However, the strong negative interaction effect implies that viewers actively distanced themselves from self-benefit appeals that scored high on positive emotional content. This type of appeal is arguably the most explicitly selfish because it makes a direct connection between donating and receiving something in return, such as recognition in the form of an on-air presentation of donor names or membership in the station's "inner circle" of donors.

Control Variable Findings

Although exploratory, the findings that relate to the variety of control variables included in our analysis should be of interest to nonprofit organizations. At the very least these results provide initial hypotheses about factors that warrant further study. As well, the strength of some findings and the unexpected nature of others highlight the importance of monitoring the effectiveness of these factors. Consider the following findings and their implications for the focal station and other organizations that rely on televised fund-raising:

- Significant effects were found for day of the week, time of day, and break duration. We found that break length had a positive effect on the number of calls with diminishing returns—longer breaks tended to be more effective, but only to a point. The time of the break within the programming day also affected the number of calls (see table 4), as did the day of the week.
- We found significant differences in the effectiveness of five of the six most frequently used hosts relative to the remaining hosts. It appears that host-specific characteristics (at present unobserved) significantly impact fund-raising efforts.
- Celebrity endorsements had a significant adverse effect on calls, and show previews had no effect. One explanation is that watching these types of promotional segments is interesting and therefore distracting. Viewers would rather watch these features than phone in during the break.
- Draw offers had a significant, positive effect on the number of calls, but premium offers did not. It is interesting to speculate on the reasons why these types of (selfish) incentives had such different effects. The tactics differ on a variety of characteristics that might explain the findings, including: (1) draw offers occur much less frequently than premium offers and typically are found at the end of the viewing day, (2) the magnitude of the offer is much greater for draw offers, and (3) winning a draw offer is probabilistic and therefore might be easier to justify as an unselfish act. It would be useful to better understand the distinction between draw offers and premiums in future research.

The richness of the results implies the need for more research in the area but also underlines the practical value of models of this type to guide the fund-raising activities

TABLE 4
REGRESSION PARAMETER ESTIMATES
(DEPENDENT VARIABLE = NUMBER
OF CALLS)

Time of day (p.m.)	Hour slot	No. of calls
2:00–3:00	1	27
3:00–4:00	2	31
4:00–5:00	3	145
5:00–6:00	4	290
6:00–7:00	5	2,593
7:00–8:00	6	3,375
8:00–9:00 ^a	7	4,844
9:00–10:00	8	3,562
10:00–11:00	9	2,439
11:00–12:00	10	685

^aPeak calling hour.

of nonprofit organizations. Such models can be used to more accurately determine staffing needs, the appropriate components within each break, and the message appeals that are used.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As with any research, there are limitations that should be considered. The study context and data are confined to a single public television station and the fund-raising appeals it used during four pledge drives over a 2-year period. It is not clear that the results will generalize to other public goods organizations or charities. Further research is needed to test the robustness of our findings in other contexts and to explore boundary conditions for our results.

A weakness of the present research design is that it does not capture the psychological responses of the viewers. Instead, the underlying process that led donors to respond during a pledge break is inferred from the association between appeal dimensions and the number of calls to the station (for another example of this approach, see MacInnis, Rao, and Weiss [2002]). Further research is needed to capture process measures of participants' emotional responses and their assessments of the appeal beneficiaries. Also, we are unable to identify whether specific types of viewers are differentially responsive to the appeals. It seems likely that viewers who are dedicated to the station and its mission will donate at some point during the pledge drive regardless of what is said or done on the air. In contrast, viewers who do not feel any attachment to the station will not contribute under any circumstances. Accordingly, the characteristics of fund-raising appeals seem most likely to affect those who feel a moderate connection to the station. Research is needed to understand who is being affected by which fund-raising appeals and also the traits and characteristics of donors versus nondonors.

The nature of our research design precludes any strong conclusions about causality. Future research is needed to replicate the present results with both field and laboratory experiments that enable researchers to systematically vary

pledge break characteristics to evaluate their effects on actual donations. Experimental designs would also help to eliminate the alternative explanations that are inherent in correlational methods.

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