

Spoilt for Choice? Understanding how Donors choose which Charities to Support

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Introduction

Perhaps the most comprehensively answered question in third sector marketing is ‘why do people give to charity?’ Best summarised by Bekkers and Wiepking in 2011, an exhaustive range of empirical work on what drives charitable giving was consolidated into eight mechanisms. These drivers range from anticipating certain material or immaterial benefits (invites to exclusive events or impact on donor image, for example: Lacatera and Macis, 2010) to what has been labelled the pure concept of altruism (Andreoni et al., 2017). Other drivers are more practical in nature. Before donors will consider acting they must have an awareness of need for donations, and after that a crucial mechanism is solicitation (the act of asking for a donation; Fajardo et al., 2018). Donation behaviour is also influenced by the pro-social values of the donor, the extent to which they believe their donation will make a difference (efficacy) and a broader cost-benefit analysis that in many ways replicates more standard consumer decision making (Bekkers and Wiepking, 2011).

However, far less is known in response to the question ‘How do donors choose with charities to support?’ This knowledge gap has been previously identified as a cause for concern by Bennett (2003), Andorfer and Otte (2013) and Breeze (2013). Thankfully for academia and practitioners alike, in recent years there has been an uplift in work attempting to answer this question. Before we explore this work however, it is critical to appreciate two environmental

factors, competition and disposable income, which have combined to create an intensely competitive marketplace.

Pre-pandemic, the sheer volume of registered charities offers potential donors a significant (and perhaps overwhelming) range of charitable alternatives. Within the UK, there are approximately 168,000 active organisations (Charity Commission, 2018a), with the US being home to 1.5m charities (National Charter for Charitable Statistics, 2019). The range of alternatives in this global arena can be grouped into 12 categories defined by the International Classification of Non-profit Organizations (Figure 1), which has built on the long-established research from Salamon and Helmut (1996) within The Johns Hopkins Institute for Policy Studies. Whereas religious charities enjoy relative dominance in the US, health charities lead the way in the UK, the latter boosted in recent years through greater legacy giving (Legacy Fundraising Market, 2019).

Group	Charity Classification
1	Culture and Recreation (e.g. arts, sports)
2	Education and Research (e.g. education institutions and research bodies)
3	Health (e.g. hospitals, nursing and mental health)
4	Social Services (e.g. income support, emergency assistance)
5	Environment (e.g. planet and animal protection)
6	Development and Housing (e.g. community development and training)
7	Law, Advocacy and Politics (e.g. political organisations, legal services)
8	Philanthropic Intermediaries (e.g. grant making foundations)
9	International Causes (e.g. development work, emergency aid)
10	Religion (e.g. places of worship)
11	Business and Professional Services (e.g. trade unions)
12	Not elsewhere classified

Figure 1: International Classification of Non-Profit Organisations (Salamon and Helmut, 1996).

To understand the significance of the voluntary sector in the UK and its economic contribution, it is worth considering data provided by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO). As part of the UK Civil Society Almanac 2020, NCVO (2020)

provide a powerful overview of the size and scope of the sector. The bottom-line contribution was £18.2bn, or 0.9% of GDP, in 2017/18. As a recognisable part of this, the international and social services sub-sectors provide the most visible contribution, upwards of £3.3bn each. Around 910,000 people are employed across the sector, representing 3% of the UK workforce and a 17% growth in the last decade. The economic value of formal volunteering was estimated at £23.9bn in 2016.

In addition to levels of competition, charities also face a very different economic environment as a consequence of the covid-19 pandemic. In the UK for example, the global pandemic shrunk the economy around 8% (ONS, 2020a), increased unemployment by 1% (ONS, 2020b) and as of December 2020 almost 10 million jobs had been furloughed (ONS, 2020c). Whilst the pandemic has seen more people report wider prosocial behaviours towards others, such trends have put a squeeze on what was already a competitive sector (Wall Street Journal, 2020) and led to 2/3 of charities reducing their service offering at a time when many are most needed (Charities Aid Foundation, 2020). All this in a sector which already saw the largest charities dominant in the race for private donations, leaving the majority of smaller causes to fight for relative scraps.

What is clear is that support for the most vulnerable is more critical than ever (Sharfuddin, 2020). Whilst governments and international bodies have responded to some calls for greater investment services often provided by charities, Fuentenbro (2020) questions whether such interventions can deliver across-the-board solutions. Non-profits are thus charged with responding to the crisis with greater innovation whilst experiencing reduced funding and experimenting with previously untested fundraising channels (Maher et al., 2020).

The aim of this chapter is to provide a review of the drivers which may lead to support being made to either a specific type of charitable cause or indeed a specific individual charity. We do at this point acknowledge that ‘support’ can take many forms. Pelozo and Hassay (2007) developed a typology that distinguished between low and high involvement support behaviours. Whilst lower involvement activities may include donating old items and engaging with charity events, more engaged donors may demonstrate their commitment through more significant financial donations and volunteering. The majority of work cited here refers to financial contributions (which reflects the emphasis of much third sector literature), however it is important to appreciate that not all donations are financial: donors will also provide their time, expertise, and personal properties such as their blood (Piersma, et al. 2019). Indeed, it has been suggested that the drivers of donors volunteering their time may be distinct to those for financial contributions (Lee and Chang, 2007). However, for simplicity we will consider all forms of support collectively in the subsequent discussion.

Donor Choice

We define donor choice as an individual’s decision of what type of charitable cause to support and / or which specific charity they eventually donate to. Donor choice decisions may occur separately to the initial decision to donate ‘somewhere’, or indeed the two may be intertwined (for example, should an individual be directly approached for a donation by a specific cause). This convergence of decisions is important given previous work which highlighted that charitable giving is in many cases a ‘limited problem-solving’ decision, characterised by donors spending relatively little time searching for alternatives and reaching a decision (Hibbert and Horne, 1997; Breeze 2013). It is widely accepted that donors are not

'equal' in their generosity (Strombach et al., 2014), which inevitably leads to the notion of some charitable causes being more popular than others.

The earliest observed study into donor choice occurred in Scotland by Schlegelmilch and Tynan (1989). They explored the application of market segmentation to the charitable marketplace through quantitative research and concluded that "people who donate to one charity do not differ from those who donate to another" (p. 8). However as observed by Bennett (2003), their lack of distinction between supporters of different causes may have been a product of the charitable categories used in the study.

Over a decade then passed before a renewed attempt to explore the area. It was the aforementioned Roger Bennett that was approached by a fundraising professional for guidance on the issue of donor choice, and consequently became the next researcher to explore this subject empirically. His 2003 work intended to investigate if variables which were known to explain donating to charity in general (specifically values and personal tendencies towards materialism, individualism and empathy) could also explain preference for certain charitable types. He concluded "personal values have the potential to influence the specific genre of charity that an individual might choose to assist" (Bennett, 2003, p. 26), suggesting that when choosing a charitable cause donors may use it as an opportunity to convey their own personal values. From here, the last decade in particular has seen an increase in research focused upon donor choice. Based on such work, the key drivers of this decision have been summarised In Figure 2 which serves as a structure for the subsequent discussion.

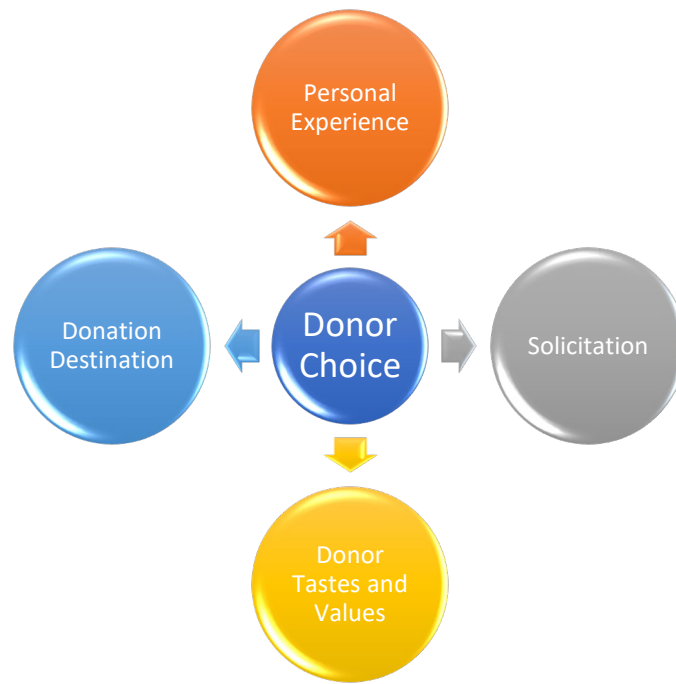


Figure 2: Key Drivers of Donor Choice

Personal Experience

It is perfectly logical that an individual's life experiences, and their subsequent exposure to and usage of certain charities, will influence their charitable preferences. Indeed, Small and Cryder (2008) argue that certain charities receive disproportionate amounts of donations because their cause is related to a cause many donors can relate to. On a primary level, should a donor utilise a charitable service (e.g. adopting a pet from an animal shelter), their personal gain from that offering may inspire future giving. Similarly, Burgoyne et al (2005) argued that potential contact with charity beneficiaries and a wider involvement in the local community may make donors more aware of which charities need their support.

In their 2007 focus group-based research, Sargeant and Woodliffe contended that many charities were experiencing a loyalty crisis amongst donors, with a large proportion of passive donors only maintaining their support through inertia. They did however identify that

more 'active commitment' to a charity arises from personal links to the cause or the issue that it supports. Here then, we use 'life experiences' to refer to any form of direct or indirect exposure to a charity and / or an observation of how their work benefits either the donor or others. As Wolpert (1995) notes, an individual's propensity to help others increases when they are exposed to someone in need, which may impact on the issue of donating to local versus international charities (as discussed later). Payton and Moody (2008) refer to these life experiences as 'philanthropic autobiographies' which result in a connection with or affinity for a particular cause. This presents an interesting dichotomy between those charities that may frequently find themselves entwined in these biographies (e.g. a charity providing support for a common illness) versus a more niche cause that fewer individuals have exposure to.

Solicitation

According to Bekkers and Wiepking (2011), solicitation refers to the simple act of asking for a donation, and the manner in which this is undertaken will impact the chances of a successful outcome (e.g. Yörük, 2009). They also cite data from various nations which shows that the majority of donations received are a direct result of solicitation. Here we will explore to what extent solicitation may impact actual choice of charity, as opposed to intention to donate in general.

One issue to cite here is the increased amount of donations generated through sponsorship, specifically when friends and family may support someone known to them as they undertake a (often sporting related) challenge. By 2003 such work accounted for around one fifth of all donations in Canada (Higgins and Lauzon, 2003), and their global proliferation has been noted elsewhere (Palmer, 2016). In these contexts, the solicitation will come direct from a

known person who is raising money for a cause, and research has demonstrated that such social ties can make it much more difficult to refuse the request (Meer, 2011). This peer-to-peer fundraising (Castillo et al., 2014) can be further intensified when such asks are made on social network feeds, drawing attention to others who have supported the cause in question. The implications of this on donor choice are significant. An individual may in some cases choose to support a cause not because of the charity's purpose / values, but instead because of an obligation to a friend, thus conflating the decisions of whether to donate and who to donate to. The conclusion here then is that personal experience may drive the fundraiser to select a certain cause to raise money for, but their network will provide sponsorship for altogether more social reasons.

Elsewhere, Barman (2008) noted how in many cases donations often come with 'strings attached'. Here, donors to a charitable cause may then state a preference on where their donation is specifically directed (e.g. The United Way in North America). Whilst offering donors such control has the potential to create a more powerful solicitation message, the shift of power in how donations are used has significant implications for charities. Barman (2008) examined this phenomena in the context of a US workplace-based giving scheme, identifying that it was younger and well-educated donors who were most likely to expect such control over where their donation was directed. This has clear implications for other charities who may wish to target similar segments but at the same time retain control over how to invest donations.

Donor Tastes and Values

Much like in more standard consumer scenarios, an individual's choice of charitable cause may be a product of either their personal preferences or values. Breeze (2013) reviewed the

limited literature on charitable choice and determined that giving decisions are highly reliant on personal taste, which leads to the notion of some causes being more popular than others. Body and Breeze (2016) provide a fascinating insight into what they describe as ‘unpopular causes’. They argue that this is a concept that not only applies to smaller charities (who lack the resources to pitch for donations against more established competitors) but also causes which may struggle to generate sympathy from the wider public, such those supporting ex-offenders or those fighting addictions. Based on media coverage, their top ten types of unpopular cause covered mental health, refugees, domestic violence and the travelling community. In terms of removing the unpopular tag, the authors suggested communications that aroused greater feelings of sympathy and minimised perceptions that the beneficiaries are responsible for their predicament.

Of course, tastes change. Recent years have witnessed, for example, a surge in awareness of and support for promoting better mental health with a corresponding increase in registered charities, largely inspired by the attention drawn to male suicide rates (e.g. Project84, a guerrilla marketing campaign promoting awareness of male mental health: CALM, 2018) and the impact of lockdown on wider wellbeing (ONS, 2020d). The UK has also witnessed increased (albeit not complete) empathy towards domestic violence and refugee related charities. Recent work by Bennett and Vijaygopal (2019) specifically focused on mental health charities as an example of an unpopular cause. Their research uncovered that whilst stigmas negatively impacted willingness to donate, having close contact with a sufferer of mental illness increased donation intention, as did altruism and empathy.

There is mixed evidence on the issue of whether donor preferences are informed by perceptions of which charities have the greatest need for financial support. Utilising a dictator

game experiment (where participants receive a fee for taking part but are then prompted to consider donating some of this payment to charity: Fielding and Knowles, 2015), Bachke et al (2014, p. 463) concluded that donors give “most to projects benefitting groups and regions that they perceive as the most vulnerable and poor”. Their experiment attempted to identify preferences for giving based upon recipient group (i.e. the intended charity beneficiary) and project type (loosely mapped the ICNPO classification of charities outlined earlier). What is interesting is that recipient neediness (the notion that donors will direct funds towards those causes where the need is perceived most acute: Singer, 2009) appeared to be the strongest driver of donor preferences, whereas it has elsewhere been observed that the majority of private donors do not align their choices with this principle (Cryder et al., 2017).

Even when a donor is clear on which specific project they wish to support, the plethora of charities requesting assistance to serve said cause can be overwhelming. Zhuang et al., (2014) illustrated this using the example of the devastating 2010 earthquake in Haiti, which took the lives of around 250,000 people. They concluded that the extent to which charities disclosed value-relevant information to donors (such as how previous donations have been utilised and other financial / performance data) positively impacted charitable contributions. Similarly, Williams (2007) identified that younger donors tended to be less concerned with charity efficiency than the ‘baby boomers’ generation (born between 1946-64), but more concerned with the outcomes of their donation. Such disclosure appears logically linked to the concept of trust, which can be viewed at either a sector-wide or individual-charity level and has been previously demonstrated to correlate with giving (e.g. Bekkers, 2003; Naskrent and Siebelt, 2011).

An individual's values also have potential to influence donor choice. Values can be viewed as somewhat abstract constructs (Prince et al., 2020), but can translate into specific attitudes and behaviours (Schwartz, 1992). Much as values have been found to influence consumer choice across pro-social behaviours such as sustainable produce (Nguyen et al., 2017), gift giving (Beatty et al., 1991) and responses to CSR activity (Park et al., 2017), "the type of charitable organisation a person donates to might tell us more about his or her values and preferences than merely whether or not he or she donates at all" (Erlandsson et al., 2019, p. 814.).

Bennett (2003) reviewed evidence that values such as harmony and freedom were most prevalent amongst charity volunteers, and in his own empiric work concluded that not only do certain values drive interest in particular charities, but that donors also seek a fit between their personal values and that of the charity itself. More recently, a cross-national study from Sneddon et al. (2020) provides a comprehensive understanding of how values influence donor choice. Their work with both American and Australian samples looked at the role of values (specifically universalism and tradition) on donation intentions towards nine categories of charitable cause, and concluded that values clearly influenced respondent's preferred causes (for example, values surrounding tradition were associated with support for religious causes). Chapman et al. (2020) explored different motives for giving and eventually clustered their resulting nine themes under 'self', which drove donations to religious and research charities, and 'other', which explained support for animal, international and educational causes.

It has also been acknowledged that an individual's political values may impact on their choice of charitable cause (Atkinson, 2009; Winterich et al., 2012). For example, Lee et al. (2020) noted how those with conservative political values prefer charitable messages which

focus on individual attributions and failing, whereas liberal voters are more responsive to messages which blame inequalities on societal factors. Indeed, Wiepking (2010) has associated liberal voters with support for more cosmopolitan charitable causes. This appears particularly applicable to the following section, where we consider donation destination.

Donation Destination

Existing research points to a notable distinction in donor preferences to support causes relative to their geographic distance from recipients. Whilst some make the distinction simply between causes which are domestic versus international in scope, others have split the former into local and national level alternatives (Hall et al., 2013; Robson and Hart, 2020a).

Charitable ethnocentrism represents a positive disposition towards domestic donation alternatives compared with a negative viewpoint for international equivalents, whilst charitable cosmopolitanism represents the opposite perspective (Hart and Robson, 2019). In the USA, Lee et al. (2003) indicate that nationalism and internationalism are significant predictors of ethnocentric behaviour from the standpoint of general consumer activity.

Demographic factors including age, gender, educational attainment and income influence the extent of this ethnocentrism. In a US-Chinese comparison, Tsai et al. (2013) identify American consumers as the more ethnocentric, with the most significant determinant of consumer ethnocentrism being nationalism across both consumer groups. Country-level differences were also identified as part of a German-Chinese comparative study from Strombach et al. (2014), particularly regarding beneficiaries who are more closely located.

This view of nationalism differs slightly from that reported by Hart and Robson (2019), where donor levels of internationalism relate positively with international charity choice but

negatively with respect to domestic equivalents. Greater donor nationalism aligns with disposition towards domestic options, but its links to international charitable options are non-significant (Hart and Robson, 2019). Interestingly, Yildiz et al. (2018) identified that consumers with greater regional commitment have higher propensity to purchase local produce than others who simply display greater ethnocentrism.

This ethnocentrism-cosmopolitanism spectrum influences charitable destination choice. For charitable options that are “politically sensitive”, donor attitudes toward charity in general influence donation intention, with specific political attitudes offering a relatively limited role in explaining donor behaviour (Robson and Hart, 2020b). Distinct segments of donor exist, differing in their donation intentions, policy perspectives and preferred charitable choices. Evidence does support private donor willingness to donate overseas, but there is an extent to which the actions of Government through aid policy can inhibit such private donation, and as such, public policy must be responsive to such donor predisposition (Atkinson, 2009).

In their New Zealand based study, Knowles and Sullivan (2017) identified that a majority of study donors expressed preference for donation to a named local charity ahead of an equivalent international development comparator, with Micklewright and Schnepf (2009) similarly reporting preference for national rather than international alternatives (although the latter suggests that international donations may be less frequent but of higher value). Domestic interventions were also seen to yield greater returns than international causes by Einolf et al. (2013), with appeals responding to natural disasters resonating more than fundraising for human-made concerns.

Whilst relative popularity for domestic campaigns dominates, examples exist of international donation being more popular (Lwin et al., 2014). Donor inclination towards both destinations can be determined by a combination of trust, favoured charitable cause and donation channels. Robson and Hart (2020a) suggest commonality exists in the determinants of intention to donate locally and nationally, with those for international donation being relatively distinct. Much as observed in other countries, national and local alternatives are more popular with UK-base donors than international offerings.

There are various forms of international donation research that merit attention. Charitable research is dominated by work focused on countries with robust donation profiles and assessment is overwhelmingly based on individual donors. In doing so, the effect of social and environmental interventions is relatively underplayed (Denis et al., 2018). There is a call here for work on public policy, the role of institutions and responses to ad-hoc events. Recent examples include government aid allocations that assess donor priorities against beneficiary requirements and capacity for the recipient state to utilise aid allocation effectively (Feeny et al., 2019). There is also assessment of the expectations of individuals from company-level giving, where individuals favour equitable giving by organisations to domestic and international beneficiaries or exclusively to the latter, a perspective at odds with organisational action (Schons et al., 2017).

Notwithstanding the need for more research on policy and institutions, individual donor research still remains prominent. Aligned to this is the extent to which popularity of donation destination relates in various ways to donor demographics. From a US perspective, Casale and Baumann (2015) indicate predisposition to international donation is independent of donor income, but foreign-born donors with postgraduate education and religious beliefs

demonstrate greater inclination to give overseas. Higher levels of institutional trust and engagement in activities such as youth volunteering are significantly aligned to relatively greater international donation. Income, donor education and gender influence on international destination, with greater contribution from women and the more highly educated (Micklewright and Schnepf, 2009). From a Canadian perspective, Rajan et al. (2009) further indicate that both higher education attainment and religious beliefs drive a preference for international over domestic giving, with international donations being further influenced by perceptions of personal financial security.

Contrasting demographic findings also exist. Whilst Knowles and Sullivan (2017) report no gender or age-band differences and Robson and Hart (2020a) only a partial demographic influence, increases in ethnic diversity are seen to decrease private charitable donation, with equivalent outcomes being identified between greater religious diversity and donation (Andreoni et al., 2016). Lwin et al. (2014) found conflicting findings from their Australian perspective. For an older, less educated and less religion-influenced donor base, international options were more popular, diverging sharply from the studies presented above. Where a donor audience comprises the younger and more educated, international donation support may only be conditionally endorsed and come with expectations (Stevenson and Manning, 2010). There is beneficiary poverty driven by educational deficit identified by young, educated New Zealand non-donors (Dalton et al., 2008). They perceived giving as being limited by donor immunity, further exacerbated by perceptions of recipient self-help and self-responsibility, aligning to the donor-held international priorities (natural versus non-natural) reported by Einolf et al. (2013).

Whilst stakeholder segmentation underpins successful not-for-profit relationship marketing, demographics contribute, but so does the capture of additional psychographic and attitudes-based characteristics (Rupp et al., 2014). Whilst charitable giving relates to donors' preferences and individual attributes, Breeze (2013) indicates that donors may recognise giving focused on recipients with greater need, but show propensity to support organisations aligning with personal preferences and will champion causes that chime with personal experiences. The overriding choice to donate and associated destination are driven by compatibility between donor values and those set out by the not-for-profit beneficiary (van Dijk et al., 2019). Whilst financial investment remains insignificantly different according to political ideology, differences emerge for breadth and depth of giving, although these actions can be fluid (Farmer et al., 2020). Neumayr and Handy (2019) suggest subjective measures including empathy, trust and religious belief determine donation occurrences, with income and donor education influencing donation values.

Summary and Implications

Our review of existing knowledge on donor choice highlights three key conclusions:

- 1, Whilst work in understanding donor choice is developing, there appears much still to learn;
- 2, There is however ample evidence to suggest that donor choice is driven by multiple factors and thus further complicates the charitable giving decision-making process;
- 3, Charities (particularly those without huge fundraising budgets) need further guidance on how convert this learning into effective fundraising activity.

The key to addressing the final point appears to be effective donor segmentation, a vehicle used to improve fundraising efficiency for charitable organisations (De Vries et al. 2015). An ability to segment donors (or potential donors) on shared characteristics allows for critical decisions around which groups to target with limited budgets (Boenigk and Scherhag, 2014; Tsiotsou, 2007). The creation of donor segments is useful not only for nurturing existing donor relationships but also for the targeting of ‘lookalike donors’, as successfully employed by social media advertisers such as Facebook. Some donors may be responsive to the donation decisions of their peers and can be attracted accordingly (Drouvelis and Marx, 2020).

Previous work on donor segmentation ranges from using demographic and behavioural data through to more lifestyle, psychographic and values-based approaches. Whilst demographic data is naturally easier to obtain and charities may have behavioural data of previous donors at hand, it is often the more values-based data that is key to effective segmentation. For example, Sargeant et al. (2004) argued that understanding a donor’s motive for donating was the single most important issue.

Robson and Hart (2019) undertook what appears an interesting piece of donor segmentation research that has notable implications for practitioners. Their work on a nationally representative UK sample sought information on respondent’s charitable giving (covering past donations, preferred causes, trust and future intention), political attitudes, newspaper readership and various demographic factors. Their resultant cluster analysis revealed six distinct donor segments as outlined in Figure 3:

Cluster Name	Size	Core Characteristics
Educated Liberals	124	Typically highly educated, with a global perspective on politics and charity and left-wing political tendencies
Young Urban Altruists	149	Remain voters, aged 18-44, with positive attitudes towards both domestic and international charities and highest donation intentions
Cautious Pragmatists	327	Usually report higher levels of nationalism, give modest amounts to charity but have negative views on ODA
Disengaged Cynics	100	Tend to distrust all charities, hold more right-wing political beliefs but are less likely to be politically engaged
Home-first Casuals	119	Display a clear preference for domestic over international charities but typically do not donate large amounts to any charity
Anti-EU Nationalists	185	A group dominated by men with the strongest 'pro-country' tendencies, readership of right-wing newspapers and mistrust of international charities

Figure 3: Donor Segments Based on Political attitudes (Robson and Hart, 2019)

Of course, such detailed psychographic segmentation is difficult to achieve for the vast majority of charities. There remains though some more tactical implications of such work that charities may wish to employ as part of their fundraising activity:

- **Political Views and Charitable Giving:** If donors can indeed be segmented by their political attitudes, this may assist charities in effective targeting. Even without individual level data, charities may wish to target activity towards specific regions / political constituencies based upon recent voting behaviour. For example, an area in the UK which voted strongly in favour of Brexit and has higher support for right-wing political parties is a more logical target for local or domestic causes, particularly surrounding health or animal welfare.
- Linked to the above, never underestimate the value of the social network. Extensive research has demonstrated that social media users often operate in so-called 'echo

chambers’, where they deliberately seek ties with users who share their values and political beliefs and thus provide opinion reinforcement (Garrett, 2009; Wollebæk et al., 2019). The opportunity here then is not necessarily around paid social content, but encouraging more organic sharing of a cause by existing donors that may naturally reach like-minded individuals.

- Whilst political values may drive donor segmentation, the safest way to ensure charities do not alienate potential donors is by staying clear of political messaging. In an age where political ‘affective polarisation’ is clearly on the rise (Reiljan, 2020), any references that allude to political leanings may risk putting off donors who may otherwise have been potentially interested. An interesting case here surrounds the growth in foodbanks across the UK, which some argue have become a more necessary resource owing to various austerity measures (Loopstra et al., 2015). Major food bank charities such as the Trussell Trust strike a delicate balance between identifying the growth in food poverty that acted as the catalyst for their growth, whilst stopping short of attributing blame to government policy.
- According to the Charity Commission (2018b), trust in charitable causes is decreasing and impacts donation behaviour. Research also suggests that trust is highest for smaller local causes (Robson and Hart, 2020a), which may be attributed to perceptions that they do not waste money on expensive marketing activity or highly-paid executives. This has clear implications for solicitation messaging: whilst smaller charities can play on their ‘local’ status by showcasing credible volunteers and beneficiaries in the community, larger charities clearly have a bigger challenge in changing perceptions through demonstrating impact and providing full disclosure of how donations are distributed, especially for those with an international remit.

In summary, it is heartening to see an emerging body of knowledge that not only considers why people donate to charity but where they choose to donate to. There are no signs of the charitable sector becoming any less competitive in the short to mid-term future, so a fuller understanding of donor choice is of potentially critical value to academics and practitioners alike. The sector would especially benefit not only from more understanding of what drives donor choice, but guidance on how to best target the most promising prospective donors, and what messaging will provide the greatest return on their fundraising investment.

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