# CHARITY ADVERTISING: A LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA

**Abstract:**

The authors present an overview of the academic literature on charity advertising. Through systematically reviewing 63 empirical studies on charity advertising, a synthesis of the body of work is framed in a general model. Predominant antecedents in the charity advertising literature include various appeal tactics and victim portrayals. Research streams on moderators and mediators include various ad characteristics and audience characteristics. The audience's intentions to donate was the most used outcome variable. Recommendations for continuing theoretical advancement in the field are presented. Managerial implications are also presented. This literature review contributes a knowledge base to guide future charity advertising research.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Charities use marketing to attract and retain support from stakeholder groups, including politicians and other influential people, to further their missions and carry out their operations (Sargeant & Ewing, 2001; Wenham, Stephens, & Hardy, 2003). The type of support sought is often in the form of donations and volunteering. Charities rely on advertising as an important tactic to present messages to audiences (Wymer, Knowles, & Gomes, 2006).

Charity advertising is an important tool for charities to communicate their messages to large audiences (Grau, 2014). We could find no charity advertising literature review articles that provide a summation of our acquired knowledge on this important topic. We did find a literature review of a charity advertising topic, however. Xu and Huang (2020) conducted a review of the relative effectiveness of gain-framed versus loss-framed messages in charity advertising. We include their article in our charity advertising literature review.

A review of the empirical charity advertising research is important because it provides a synthesis of the state of our knowledge on charity advertising. Robust findings become more

salient and gaps in our knowledge become more apparent to guide future research. This review is also timely because of the growing importance of advertising for charities and the growing interest among scholarly researchers (Xu & Huang, 2020).
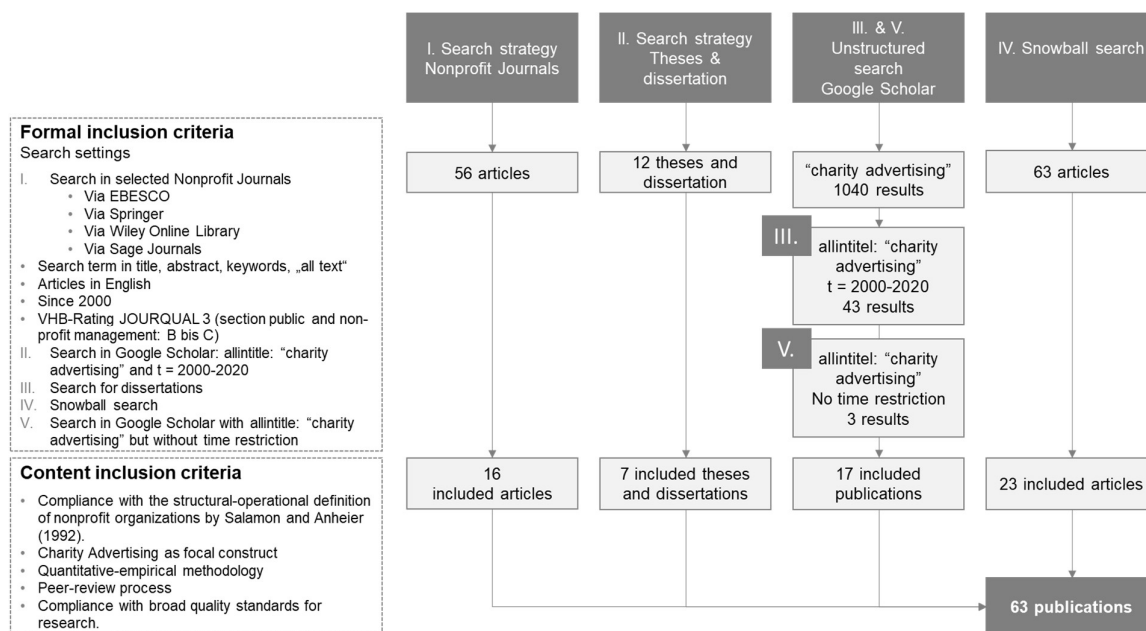
We acknowledge that a mass media outlet may decide not to charge a charity the same rate it might charge a commercial advertiser. Hence, charity advertising is advertising on behalf of a charity for the purpose of helping the charity to attain desired audience outcomes. Television, radio, newspapers, and magazines are some traditional off-line mass media. Banner ads, social media ads, and search engine ads are examples of advertising using digital mass media channels (Mass Media, 2021; Wymer & Grau, 2011).

Hence, in charity advertising a charity uses a mass media channel to send a message to mass audience for some purpose or to attain a goal or objective. Some related topics, but not precisely charity advertising, are excluded from our literature review. For example, direct marketing on behalf of charities is excluded. Direct marketing targets individuals, not a mass audience, an audience reached through mass media (Roberts & Berger, 1999). Advertising promoting cause-related marketing programs is excluded from this literature review. Such promotional advertising is typically aimed at furthering the objectives of the company sponsor (Wymer, 2021a). Fundraising campaigns that do not use advertising to present an appeal to a mass audience, but instead use person-to-person, face-to-face engagement, are also not included in this literature review.

Researchers have examined several charity advertising topics. We provide an overview of empirical findings by developing a framework that identifies and integrates these topics. Our framework includes the most important antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes of the extent body of charity advertising research literature. Finally, our framework helps to identify gaps in the prior charity advertising research, helping researchers to develop research agendas. Next, we will present our literature review methodology and initial analysis.

## 2 | LITERATURE ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

This literature review follows the recommended steps for creating systematic literature reviews (Davies 2000; Tranfield et al. 2003; Denyer and Tranfield 2011), which have been used by other prior reviews in the marketing field (e.g., Gossen et al. 2019; Kumar et al. 2020; Thomas et al. 2020). Figure 1 depicts our systematic search.

| I. Search strategy Nonprofit Journals | II. Search strategy Theses & dissertation | III. & V. Unstructured search Google Scholar | IV. Snowball search |
|---|---|---|---|
| 56 articles | 12 theses and dissertation | "charity advertising" 1040 results | 63 articles |
| | | **III.** allintitel: "charity advertising" t = 2000-2020 43 results | |
| | | **V.** allintitel: "charity advertising" No time restriction 3 results | |
| 16 included articles | 7 included theses and dissertations | 17 included publications | 23 included articles |

**Formal inclusion criteria**
Search settings

I.  Search in selected Nonprofit Journals
      • Via EBESCO
      • Via Springer
      • Via Wiley Online Library
      • Via Sage Journals
  • Search term in title, abstract, keywords, „all text"
  • Articles in English
  • Since 2000
  • VHB-Rating JOURQUAL 3 (section public and non-profit management: B bis C)
II. Search in Google Scholar: allintitle: "charity advertising" and t = 2000-2020
III. Search for dissertations
IV. Snowball search
V.  Search in Google Scholar with allintitle: "charity advertising" but without time restriction

**Content inclusion criteria**
  • Compliance with the structural-operational definition of nonprofit organizations by Salamon and Anheier (1992).
  • Charity Advertising as focal construct
  • Quantitative-empirical methodology
  • Peer-review process
  • Compliance with broad quality standards for research.

**63 publications**

**Figure 1**: Systematic Literature Search and Results

*First step.* Between the 14th of February 2020 to the 8th of March 2020, we conducted a structural search of selected ranked and peer-reviewed journals. Our search included articles published in 9 scholarly journals relevant to the nonprofit research community. These are: *Voluntas*, *Nonprofit & Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, *Journal of Nonprofit and Public Sector Marketing*, *International Journal of Nonprofit & Voluntary Sector Marketing* (renamed in 2020 the *Journal of Philanthropy & Marketing)*, *International Review on Public & Nonprofit Marketing*, *Voluntary Sector Review*, and *Journal for Public and Nonprofit Services*. For the structured search in the listed journals the following research databases were used: EBESCO, Springer, Wiley Online Library, Sage Journals. We did not limit the time span in terms of publication date. Some of the online databases offer the possibility to search explicitly within the title, the abstract, or the keywords of paper. To avoid too many unspecific results, we first searched for our search term "charity advertising" in the full article and finally narrowed down the search by looking for the term in the title, abstract, and, when possible, as keyword. This specification directly excluded those articles that were not relevant to the research topic. All results were documented in search protocols. However, the described specification of the search was not possible for every database, which was recorded in the search protocol as well. We defined the following content inclusion criteria: inclusion of published papers and dissertations, research must apply quantitative methods; qualitative studies and commentaries were excluded. Hence, we included empirical research (e.g., experiments, quasi-experiments)

conducted for the purpose of better understanding inter-construct relationships of charity advertising phenomena. Finally, 56 articles from the nonprofit and marketing journals were included in the content analysis, in which the papers were evaluated for content inclusion criteria.

*Second step.* In addition, we included theses and dissertations on the topic, which were selected according to the criteria for our journal article search. Hence, we searched for empirical studies on charity advertising topics. From this search, we identified 12 dissertations and theses.

*Third step.* To identify research which had not been previously identified, the structured search strategy was followed by an unstructured search via the search engine Google Scholar, generating 1040 results for "charity advertising." To narrow the number of publications down, we limited the publication period between the years 2000 and 2020 (n=887). By applying a snowballing search of the identified paper later, we ensured that no paper published before 2000 was missed. Then, we further narrowed the search to all English-language articles as well as limiting it to publications with the search term in the title. Conference proceedings were still included in that step. In the process of this unstructured search, we found 43 more studies.

*Fourth step*. We used the reference lists of the collected studies to identify additional relevant articles that the previous steps might have missed (snowballing). This search resulted in 63 possible articles, which were screened, resulting in 23 included studies.

*Fifth step.* As a quality check we performed another Google Scholar search during the revision process of this paper without a time limited to ensure we identified all studies possible. Searching Google Scholar for studies having "charity advertising" in their title without a time restriction resulted in 65 references. Of these only three were not included in our sample so far.

With these four steps, we identified 177 studies published as of 1990 that contained the search term. To avoid uncontrolled threats to validity (Salipante et al. 1982), we prioritized inclusivity (Boaz and Ashby 2003) and included the widest possible range of articles and dissertations. In the next step, we defined our inclusion and exclusion criteria further to determine which studies to include in our review sample (Tranfield et al. 2003). The quality of the research design, conduct, and analyses represented important inclusion arguments (e.g., Popay et al. 1998; Tranfield et al. 2003), so we established four criteria:

(1)   Research focus on charity advertising, complying with the structural-operational definition of nonprofit organizations by Salamon and Anheier (1992) and our definition of charity advertising.

(2)   Quantitative-empirical methodology. Studies applying nonexperimental qualitative methodology were excluded.

(3)   Published studies must come from peer reviewed sources. Hence, unpublished works and monographs did not qualify. Moreover, we had to have access to the full text, hence papers listed in conference databases without granting access to the full paper, were excluded. Theses and dissertations were included because of committee supervision of quality.

(4)   The paper had to be in English.

To improve the quality of the analysis, we further examined the identified studies and determined their ultimate inclusion or exclusion in this literature review. Moreover, our evaluation whether to include or exclude a study included the full text, rather than just the title or abstract. After inspecting all 177 studies individually, we compared the assessments, discussed controversial cases, and made final decisions. Through this we identified 63 articles as the sample for the systematic literature review based on our inclusion criteria.

After the final literature set was identified, we developed a classification system. First, we categorized the articles according to the following criteria: journal, year of publication, type of research, methodology, nationality of samples, antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes. In our analysis we follow the procedure of a systematic literature review by Ritz et al. (2016). With regards to the type of publications within our sample, we found that 55 (88.9%) are journal articles, 6 (10%) are dissertations, 1 (2%) is a master thesis, and one full conference paper (2%). These are cited either in our following analysis or, to form a complete list, included in Appendix 1.

**Publication outlets**. Results show that four journals stand out in the publication of research on charity advertising: *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* (10 articles, 19%), *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing* (7 articles, 13%), *International Journal of Advertising* (6 articles, 12%), and the *Journal of Advertising* (6 articles, 12%) (See Figure 2.). The rest of the sample is spread across various journals from disciplines such as nonprofit management, marketing, social psychology, business

administration, organizational behavior, and psychology.  There appears to be scholarly interest in charity advertising from a variety of social science disciplines. Consequently, a systematic literature review is important to aggregate this body of knowledge.
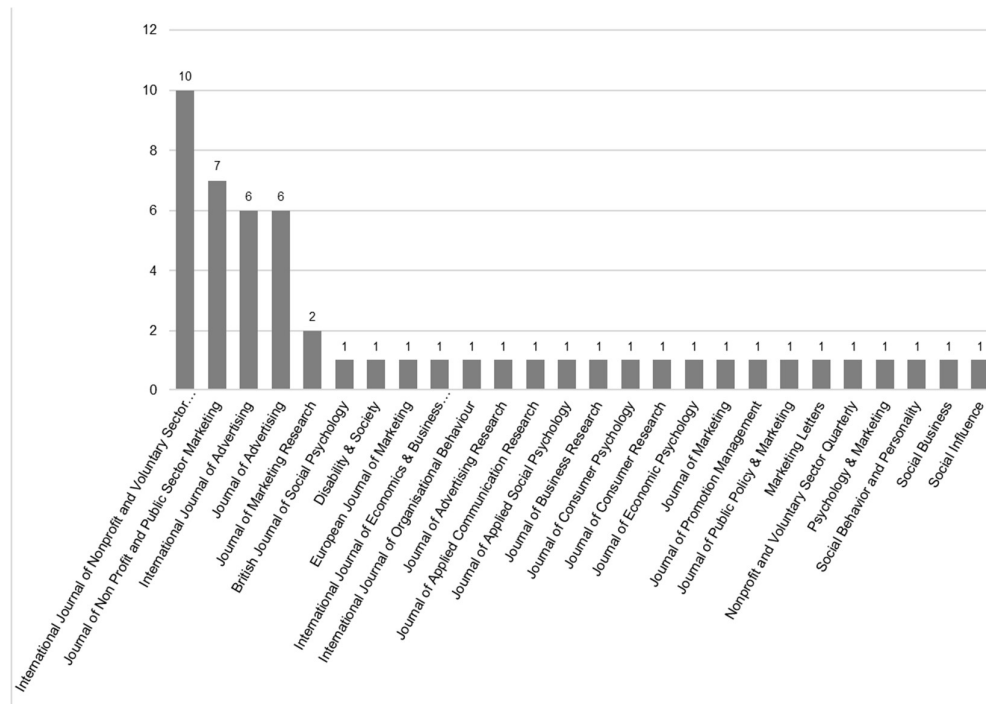


**Figure 2**: Number of Publications on Charity Advertising by Journal

**Number of publications.** The number of publications in Figure 3 shows that charity advertising has been a topic of consistent interest, but without substantial increases and decreases. In the first phase (1990 to 2007) beginning with Eayrs and Ellis's (1990) article, a total of 10 studies were published. In the second phase (2008 to 2013), the number of publications increased somewhat and varied between three and six publications a year. In the current phase (2014 to the beginning of 2021), an additional 28 studies were published, yielding the analyzed 63 studies.
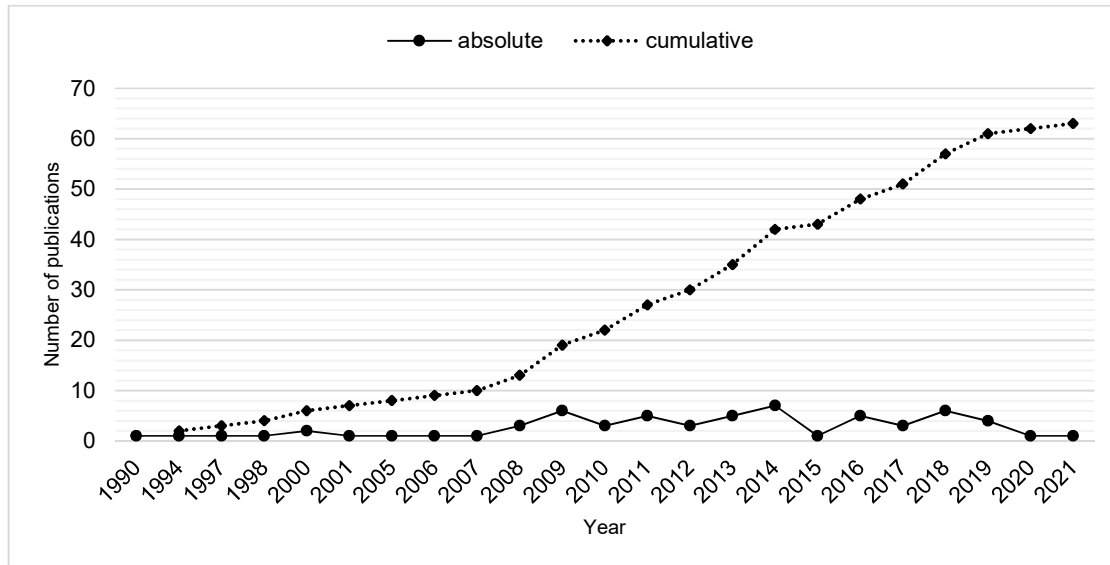
**Figure 3**: Number of Publications on Charity Advertising per Year and Cumulative

**Countries included**. To enable generalizability of results internationally careful sample selection is needed. Findings may be limited if they focus on one specific country or region (Ritz et al. 2016). Table 1 shows that most of the studies rely on samples from the USA, followed by the United Kingdom, and South Korea. We found a few studies with samples within Oceania and South America and no studies with samples from Africa. We found studies in the charity advertising literature that do not identify the nationality of their samples.

**TABLE 1**: Distribution of the Origins of Empirical Data Used in the Studies

| Country[a] | Freq. | % | Continent | Freq. | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| USA | 31 | 44% | North America | 33 | 46% |
| United Kingdom | 11 | 15% | Europe | 20 | 28% |
| South Korea | 4 | 6% | Asia | 10 | 14% |
| Chile | 2 | 3% | Oceania | 2 | 3% |
| China | 2 | 3% | South America | 2 | 3% |
| France | 2 | 3% | not specified | 4 | 6% |
| New Zealand | 2 | 3% | | | |
| Sweden | 2 | 3% | | | |
| Taiwan | 2 | 3% | | | |
| Canada | 1 | 1% | | | |
| Denmark | 1 | 1% | | | |
| Germany | 1 | 1% | | | |
| Greece | 1 | 1% | | | |
| India | 1 | 1% | | | |
| Israel | 1 | 1% | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mexico | 1 | 1% | | |
| Norway | 1 | 1% | | |
| Slovakia | 1 | 1% | | |
| not specified | 4 | 6% | | |
| **Total** | **71** | **100%** | **71** | **100%** |

[a] Multiple classifications per study were possible.

**Analytical methods.** We examined the analytical methods used within the charity advertising literature. We assigned multiple codes, whenever one study used more than one methodology, which was most often the case. Most often studies used descriptive statistics (60 studies, 27%), variance analyses (51 studies, 23.0%), multivariate analysis for reliability assessments or measurements of internal consistency (29 studies, 13.1%), and correlations (22 studies, 9.9%). Some studies used other multivariate methods, such as regression analysis (multiple and logistic) or structural equation modelling (SEM). One study used cluster analysis. Results are summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Distribution of Types of Analytical Methods Used

| Analytical Methods[a] | Freq. | %[b] |
|---|---|---|
| Univariate: Descriptive statistics | 60 | 27.0% |
| Multivariate: Analysis of variance | 51 | 23.0% |
| Multivariate: Factor analysis (and reliability assessment or measures of internal consistency) | 29 | 13.1% |
| Correlations | 22 | 9.9% |
| Bivariate: Measures of association or tests of differences | 19 | 8.6% |
| Multivariate: Multiple regression (including multilevel, panel) | 14 | 6.3% |
| Bivariate: Linear regression (least squares method) | 10 | 4.5% |
| Multivariate: Structural equation modeling (including panel) | 6 | 2.7% |
| Multivariate: Logistic regression (including multilevel, panel) | 6 | 2.7% |
| Multivariate: Other | 6 | 2.7% |
| Cluster Analysis | 1 | 0.5% |
| **Total** | **222** | **1** |

[a] Multiple classifications per study were possible.

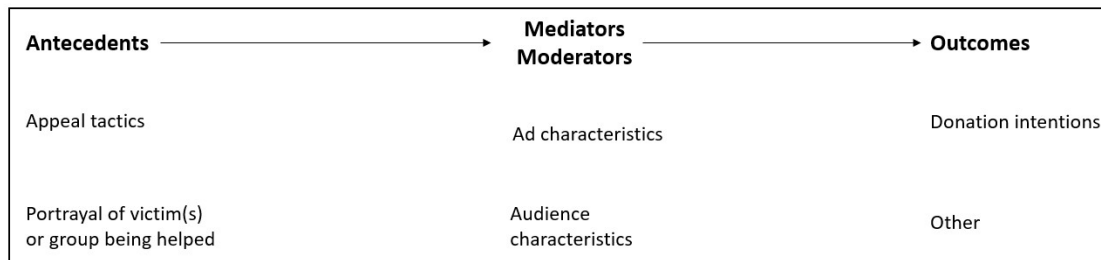[b] Percentages are the share of the total number of times methods were used

Next, we will present our synthesis of the charity advertising literature.

# 3 | LITERATURE SYNTHESIS

After conducting our initial analysis of the charity advertising literature, we organized our synthesis of this body of work according to Figure 4. Characteristics of the ad could either be

positioned as an antecedent or mediator/moderator, depending on a given study's nomological network. Likewise, a construct can sometimes be placed as either a mediator or outcome construct, depending on the conceptual model of a study. Several studies relied upon a factorial design (using analysis of variance to analyze the data) rather than specifying a structural model, making assignment of a factor as an antecedent or moderator subject to interpretation.

| Antecedents → | Mediators Moderators → | Outcomes |
|---|---|---|
| Appeal tactics | Ad characteristics | Donation intentions |
| Portrayal of victim(s) or group being helped | Audience characteristics | Other |

**Figure 4:** Framework for Charity Advertising Literature Review

Advertising is a marketing activity that is implemented for the purpose of attaining desired marketing outcomes. Hence, we believed it would be useful to begin our discussion on the outcomes of charity advertising, then proceed to discussing the antecedents, and then discussing the mediators and moderators.

### 3.1 | Charity Advertising Outcomes

We begin our synthesis of the charity advertising research literature by discussing the outcomes used in the body of empirical studies. The chosen outcomes represent the purpose or objectives of the advertising. The theoretical aspect of scholarly research is aimed at understanding inter-construct relationships. The practical aspect of research emphasizes improving the managerial effectiveness of chosen marketing tactics. The outcome variables indicate the objectives of the chosen marketing tactics.

The predominant outcome variable that has been used is donation intentions (28 studies, 22.4%) or actual donation behaviour (11 studies, 8.8%) (See Table 3.). Attitude towards the ad was the second most used outcome variable (13 studies, 10.4%). Emotional, cognitive, and conative audience responses were also used as outcomes.

**TABLE 3:** Outcome variable summary

| Outcomes[a] | Freq. | %[b] |
|---|---|---|
| Donation intention | 28 | 22,4% |
| Attitude towards ad | 13 | 10,4% |
| Donation behavior | 11 | 8,8% |
| Amount of donation | 9 | 7,2% |
| Intention to volunteer | 8 | 6,4% |
| Behavioral intention, e.g. recommendation | 8 | 6,4% |
| Affective response | 6 | 4,8% |
| Attitude towards advertiser | 3 | 2,4% |
| Cognitive and conative response | 3 | 2,4% |
| Sympathetic state | 3 | 2,4% |
| Ad effectiveness | 2 | 1,6% |
| Charitable commitment | 2 | 1,6% |
| Empathy | 2 | 1,6% |
| Perceived relevance | 2 | 1,6% |
| Purchase intention | 2 | 1,6% |
| Aided recall | 1 | 0,8% |
| Attention | 1 | 0,8% |
| Behavioral consequences of stereotype suppression | 1 | 0,8% |
| Compliance with request | 1 | 0,8% |
| Intention to remain | 1 | 0,8% |
| Interest | 1 | 0,8% |
| Level of stereotypicality | 1 | 0,8% |
| Likelihood to contribute | 1 | 0,8% |
| Likelihood to donate | 1 | 0,8% |
| Low effort intentions | 1 | 0,8% |
| Message persuasiveness | 1 | 0,8% |
| Moral obligation | 1 | 0,8% |
| Motivation | 1 | 0,8% |
| Overall impression | 1 | 0,8% |
| Perceived informativeness | 1 | 0,8% |
| Perceived likelihood of getting reward | 1 | 0,8% |
| Pleasantness, unpleasantness | 1 | 0,8% |
| Pride because of affiliation | 1 | 0,8% |
| Return on advertising spend | 1 | 0,8% |
| Trust | 1 | 0,8% |
| Urge to help | 1 | 0,8% |
| Willingness to recommend a contribution | 1 | 0,8% |
| Other | 1 | 0,8% |
| **Total** | **125** | **100%** |

[a] Multiple classifications per study were possible.

[b] Percentages are the share of the total number of lines of study.

Next, we will examine the antecedents used in prior charity advertising research. These are the primary influencers on audience outcomes.

### 3.2 | Charity Advertising Antecedents

With respect to the empirical charity advertising literature, we found the most parsimonious way to categorize the antecedents of the studies' nomological models was classifying them as either appeal tactics or the way in which victim(s) or the group being helped in the ad are portrayed. (The use of the term victim was chosen because of its common use in the charity advertising literature.)

Given the prevalent use of factorial research designs using analysis of variance, researchers often failed to specify the direction of causality between interacting factors. While the outcome variable in a factorial design is obvious, the distinction between antecedent and moderator was often not specified by researchers. Hence, there will be a certain degree of inconsistency by the dual use of a construct as both an antecedent and as a mediator/moderator across studies. Nevertheless, the influences of these constructs on outcome variables are identified.

#### 3.2.1 | *Appeal tactics*

*Ad framing.* In the commercial advertising literature, ad framing mainly concerns the presentation of positive outcomes of purchasing a brand or negative consequences of not purchasing a brand (Chang, 2008). In the charity advertising literature, ad framing typically refers to communicating to the audience the positive outcomes or negative consequences of donating.

The key difference between a commercial ad frame appeal and a charity ad frame appeal is that in the commercial ad the audience member (consumer) is presented as the person receiving the consequences of buying or not buying the brand. In charity ads, the person or group the charity is helping is presented as experiencing the consequences of the audience member's donation decision. Typically, in a positive frame, the group the charity helps will benefit when the audience donates to the charity. In a negatively framed charity ad, the group the charity helps will have negative consequences if the audience decides not to donate.

Next, we will provide an overview of how the ad framing construct has been used in the prior charity advertising literature. The ad framing construct has been described in various ways in the literature.

The influence of ad framing on the audience represented a substantial interest among researchers of charity advertising. Ad framing refers to the positive or negative perception of the information content of an ad (Balestra, 2011). Balestra (2011) distinguished ad framing from ad tone, which refers to the positive or negative valence the audience perceives from the images in the ad.

Although ad framing is the more commonly used name for the above-referenced construct, Erlandsson, Nilsson, and Vastfjall (2018) referred to the construct as positive or negative ad appeals. Negative appeals are operationalized as advertisements that emphasize the negative consequences of not complying with a donation request whereas positive appeals are operationalized as advertisements emphasizing the positive consequences of complying.

A more accurate way to conceptualize this construct is by thinking of it as either positive or negative ad framing. When the outcome variable is a donation or an intention to donate, positive frames emphasize the potential gains of donating and negative frames emphasize the negative consequences of not donating. An example of a negatively framed message might be 10,000 people will die of starvation if we do not support them. A positive frame would describe the same information as 10,000 people can be saved from starvation with our support (Chang & Lee, 2009).

The findings with respect to the comparative effectiveness of positive versus negative framing is mixed. Balestra (2011) reported that positive ad framing and ad tone had a positive influence on attitude toward the ad and donation intentions. Chang and Lee (2009) reported that negative frames are more effective than positive frames. Xu and Huang (2020) found that positive frames had a slightly better effect than negative frames, but there was little actual difference. In their more nuanced study, Erlandsson, Nilsson, and Vastfjall (2018) found that positive charity appeals are relatively more effective in improving attitudes toward the appeal or toward the charity organization but that negative charity appeals are just as good, or even better, in eliciting actual donations.

*Statistical information.* Das, Kerkhof, and Kuiper (2008) reported that statistical information was more effective when combined with a negatively framed message, whereas anecdotal information was more effective when combined with a positive frame. It is also more effective when combined with a depiction of multiple non-identified (statistical) victims, but it will diminish the intention to help when combined with one identified victim, as Erlandsson et al. (2016) report. Kim (2014) evaluated whether the use of statistical victims is

more effective in motivating money donations whereas the author hypothesized that identifiable victims are more effective in influencing time donations. Neither hypothesis could be supported.

The influence of statistical framing was also examined.  Statistical framing refers to the general presentation of the information being presented with respect to either using a small or large numerator in a ratio (Chang & Lee, 2010).  For example, to express the proportion of children who lack adequate shelter, a large numerator presentation might state that 700 million out of 2.1 billion children in the developing world lack adequate shelter.  This information could also be expressed in a small numerator statistical framing as one out of three children in the developing world lack adequate shelter.

Chang and Lee (2009) found that statistics presented in a format where a small number is employed are found to facilitate effects of the negatively framed message with a negative case story. Alternatively, statistics presented with a large number increase the advertising influences of the positively framed message with a positive case story.

Another way in which the statistical information influences charity ad effectiveness is through temporal framing.  With temporal framing, statistics are presented in a short-term temporal frame, as opposed to a long-term one (Chang & Lee, 2009).  For example, using child poverty as the charitable cause, a short-term temporal frame might be presented as "1,250 children die each hour as a result of poverty." A long-term temporal frame might be presented as "about 11 million children die each year as a result of poverty."

Temporal framing is a construct that can be used as both an antecedent and a moderator, depending on the study's conceptual model. Chang and Lee (2009) reported that temporal framing will moderate the relationship between message framing and advertising effectiveness. Statistics in a long-term temporal frame will be more effective in a negatively framed message, but those in a short-term temporal frame will be more effective in a positively framed message.

*Urgency of need.*  Closely related to the temporal framing concept is the relative urgency in a charity ad.  Donors also typically respond first to urgent appeals for humanitarian aid in response to large-scale natural catastrophes before they will donate to less urgent appeals such as economic development or a capital campaign. This suggests that people categorize situations on a temporal basis (Dedeaux, 2009).

Baek et al. (2015) argues that in some situations, a message that emphasizes the urgency of the need may influence audience members' donation motivation. Moriuchi and Chung (2018) argue that in the context of urgency, the influence of emotional versus practical ads is probably negated. Zhou and Xue (2018) argue that, in the context of disaster relief print ads, black and white images rather than color images encourage viewers to focus on the damage from the disasters and evoke a greater sense of urgency.

*Emotions.* Charity ads often contain a blend of factual and emotion-evoking content. Moriuchi and Chung (2018) found that emotional charity ads were more effective than factual messages. Several charity ad studies examined the influence of evoking audience emotions on ad effectiveness.

Ads contain elements that evoke negative emotions, positive emotions, or a combination of both (mixed) emotions (Bennett, 2015). Advertisers can alter the valences of the images included in charity ads to evoke the desired negative or positive audience emotions (Chang & Lee, 2009). Some research has found that negative emotions were more effective in influencing donation intentions (Burt & Strongman, 2005; Lyrintzis, 2017). Balestra (2011) found that positive emotions were more effective in influencing attitudes toward the charity ad and donation intentions. Given the complexity of how an ad can be composed and the variety of evoked audience emotions, a simple positive versus negative heuristic is probably not helpful.

Some researchers examined the influence of audience-evoked guilt on audience outcomes. Hibbert et al. (2007) and Huhmann and Brotherton (1997) found that feelings of guilt influences audience donation intentions. Eayrs and Ellis (1990) found that the greatest commitment to give money are those most closely associated with feelings of guilt, sympathy, and pity.

Charity appeals often attempt to evoke feelings of sympathy among audience members for the individuals the charity intends to help. This appears to be an effective tactic. Studies have reported that evoking feelings of pity for a victim influences sympathy, which influences donate intentions (Baberini et al., 2015; Bae, 2019).

*Altruistic versus egoistic appeals*. When asking for donations, is it more effective to appeal to potential donors' altruistic motives or egoistic motives? In the prior literature, there has been a debate between those who believe that charitable donations are based on altruism

(e.g., Batson, 1990) and those who believe that donors are motived by their desire to receive personal benefits (e.g., Hassay & Peloza, 2005).

Researchers have compared the relative effectiveness of using altruistic or egoistic appeals. This appeal dichotomy attempts to match charity ad type with audience motivation. Egoistic motives are ultimately based on donors' desires to enhance their own welfare, while altruistic motives are based on donors' desires to enhance the welfare of others in need (Lee et al., 2018). An egoistic ('help-self') appeal implies that a donation will help oneself, perhaps by improving society in general, by potentially helping one directly at a future time, or simply by implying that one will feel good after donating. An altruistic ('help-others') appeal implies only that the donation will help other people, with no clear benefit to oneself (Chang & Lee, 2011).

In attempting to persuade the audience to engage in a prosocial behavior, should charities appeal to an audience's self-interest or an audience's interest in helping others? Prosocial behavior or helping behavior, as it's sometimes called, has been defined as voluntary behavior intended to benefit another, such as helping, sharing, and comforting others (Wilson, 2014).

 Altruistic appeals appear to be the type of appeal most used by charities (Sherra, 2017). This reliance on altruistic appeals is supported by prior research which has found altruistic appeals to be effective (Chang, 2014; Chang & Lee, 2011; Nelson et al., 2006; Xu, 2017).

White and Pelosa (2009), reported an exception to this general finding. They reported that self-benefit appeals are more effective when consumers' responses are private in nature; in contrast, other-benefit appeals are more effective when consumers are publicly accountable for their responses. Peloza and White (2007) explored potential moderators of the influence of altruistic and egoistic appeals on donation intentions. They found that egoistic appeals were more effective than altruistic appeals when asking people to donate time volunteering compared to donating money. They also investigated the setting in which people were asked to donate. In a private setting, people were more motivated by egoistic appeals; in a public setting, people were more motivated by altruistic appeals.

*Efficiency ratings*. The use of a charity's efficiency ratings has also been examined in prior charity advertising research. The efficiency rating of a charity refers to the proportion (e.g., cents per dollar) of donations that are spent directly on the cause (Ryazanov & Christenfeld, 2018). Watch dog organizations are often sources of charity efficiency ratings. Hence, a

charity with a high efficiency rating can use that rating as an endorsement of its integrity and management acumen.

Presumably, audience members are influenced by higher efficiency ratings because they believe that their donations will be used to help the people served by the charity instead of supporting the charity's other expenses (e.g., administration and marketing). Prior research has found that efficiency ratings influence which charities receive donations, but not the amount of the donations (Ryazanov & Christenfeld, 2018).

*Inclusion of goal attainment information*. Goal attainment information refers to including information about the importance of an individual's contribution for reaching a charity goal as well as stating that others are already contributing. This can be done is two general ways: presenting a charity's expectations about the number of people already contributing to a charity's campaign success, and presenting a charity's expectations about each donor contributing to the probability of successful campaign (Das et al., 2008). Das et al. (2008) reported that the inclusion of goal attainment information increased an audience's intention to donate.

Das et al. (2008) provide illustrative examples. An example of expectations about the number of participants already contributing to the probability of success is as follows: ''Thanks to our 165,000 supporters, 150,000 patients are detected and treated each year.'' An example of expectations about each individual donor contributing to the probability of success would involve demonstrating that one single donation can make a difference: "Of course a lot of money is needed to continue all projects. It only takes 50 Euros [approximately 70 USD] to detect, treat and rehabilitate one patient. For the even smaller amount of 15 Euros [approximately 20 USD] a patient can be helped."

*Other*. We found two studies that were distinct and independent of other literature streams. For example, Alonso Do Santos et al. (2018) examined audience's attention to certain features of a charity ad (logo, text, image) and the influence of attention to the ad on donation intentions. They found that images attracted more attention than the logo or text, particularly negative images. However, attention paid to the ad did not appear to influence donation intentions.

Zhou and Xue (2018) examined the differential influence of text, photographic images, and color in disaster relief print ads. They found that the use of photographs, particularly

black and white photographs, increased audience empathy, attitudes toward the ad, and donative intentions.

### 3.2.2 | Portrayal of victims

The prior section examined types of ways in which the charity ad appeal could be constructed and their influence on outcomes.  In this section, we will discuss prior research which examined the influence of how victims are presented.  The use of the word victim refers to the individual or group receiving benefits or help from the advertising charity.  This word was chosen because of its common use in the extent research literature.

*Shock appeals*.  Related to the construction of ads to evoke a desired audience emotional response is the use of shock appeals.  For some types of charities, the use of shocking images is used to make the charity's work more dramatic and meaningful.  Showing images of physical injury, deformity, or carnage is often used to evoke audience shock.  Animal welfare charities or child welfare charities may show images of abused animals or children, respectively, that have been physically maimed.  Breast cancer charities may show images of women with mastectomy scars (Jansen, 2015).

Prior research has found that the use of shocking images in charity ads, compared to informative ads, increases audience ad engagement (Auxtova, Munzel, & Andreas, 2015).  The use of shock appears to be effective in gaining audience attention to the ad, but not on how the ad is processed or on the audience's donation intentions (Jansen, 2015).

Even though charities are increasingly constructing their ads to evoke audience shock (Parry et al., 2013), the use of shock in charity ads needs to be implemented with care.  Some amount of shock may dramatize an issue and enhance its perceived importance for an audience.  However, if not implemented carefully, the use of shocking images can offend an audience (Dahl et al., 2003; Jansen, 2015).  Cockrill and Parsonage (2016) reported that the use of shock in charity advertising is most effective when it evokes surprise, interest, and compassion.

*Children and their expressions*.  The use of images of children, where appropriate, in charity advertisements is a common practice.  Images of children in charity ads evoke stronger emotional audience responses than ads not using images of children (Burt & Strongman, 2005).  Bennett (1997) investigated the differential audience effects of various parings of

children with adult announcers. Bennett found that pairing children with facial deformities with an attractive female announcer to be most effective in evoking positive affective and empathetic response in an audience. However, Bennett (1997) did not examine whether the images evoked some level of audience shock.

Li and Atkinson (2020) examined the differential effects of evoking negative versus positive audience emotions on donation intentions. They found that featuring happy children versus sad children in ads enhanced the audience's donation intentions.

*Victims' facial expressions*. Like Li and Atkinson (2020), other researchers have examined the influence of featuring sad versus happy victim expressions in charity ads. Some prior research has found that happy expressions are more effective than sad expressions. Happy expressions improve attitudes toward the ad and perceived efficacy, allowing the audience to anticipate the positive results of their donations, improving donation intentions (Taylor & Knibb, 2013; Zemack-Rugar & Klucarova-Travani, 2018). Prior research has reported that sad expressions cause the audience to have negative attitudes, reducing donation intentions (Van Kleef, van den Berg, & Heerdink, 2015; Choi, Rangan, & Singh, 2016). Septianto & Paramita's (2020) research shows that happy faces combined with strong sad messages most effectively influences prosocial behavior.

However, other researchers have found sad expressions to be more effective than happy expressions. Small and Verrochi (2009) reported that sad expressions evoked sadness and sympathy in the audience and influenced the amount donated.

Choi (2013) conducted a series of studies to better understand the differential influence of evoking negative versus positive audience emotions. Choi (2013) reported that featuring a single victim versus a group (singularity effect) or an identified victim versus an unidentified victim (identification effect) was more effective when negative emotions were evoked. However, these effects were nullified when positive audience emotions were evoked.

As discussed previously, some prior research used factorial designs and did not specify whether a factor was an antecedent or moderator/mediator. Next, we will discuss prior research in which the identification of mediating and moderating constructs was more apparent.

*Poverty porn.* There has been some debate in the literature about the ethicality of how victims are presented in charity ads. Some argue that charity ads often portray the intended

recipients of charity aid in a demeaning manner. Poverty porn is a term that refers to exploiting the poor in charity ads to generate sympathy to increase donations (Poverty porn, 2021). Similar terms like famine porn or disaster porn are used to refer to using victim images to influence donations.

Some argue that presenting charity aid recipients in a sympathetic manner is exploitive, creates stereotypes, and fails to educate audiences (Ong, 2015; Quist-Adade & van Wyck, 2007). Others counterargue that evoking audience sympathy is important in motivating donations that can be used to help victims (Homer, 2021; Radley & Kennedy, 1997). As discussed previously, presenting images that evoke audience sympathy has been shown to be effective in influencing donations. In their analysis of charity ads, Mittelman and Neilson (2011) reported that the ads tended to show the hardships faced by victims but did not exceed the limit into what might be considered exploitative. For practitioners, the challenge is to present the intended recipients of charity aid in a positive an empowering manner without lessoning the effectiveness of the ad's ability to attract donations. More research in this area is needed.

### 3.3 | Mediating and Moderating Influences

*Emotions*. We discussed emotions as antecedents previously. Prior research sometimes positioned audience emotional responses as antecedents and at other times prior research did not distinguish emotion constructs as antecedents or mediators or moderators in their factorial research designs. We believe it is more supportable, theoretically, to position emotion constructs as mediators or moderators in conceptual models. The causal influence would be more rationally supported by positioning constructs related to the charity ad as antecedents, then the emotional response of the audience as a downstream mediator or moderator, and finally the outcome variables such as intention to donate. We will now discuss prior literature which more properly dealt with emotion constructs as mediators or moderators.

Bennett (2015) used an interesting construct called affect intensity. Affect intensity refers to the variability of emotional acuteness individuals experience to similar stimuli. A person with high affect intensity (HAI) may experience an emotive advertisement in a more deeply emotional manner than a person with lower levels of affect intensity. The use of affect intensity is interesting because it reminds researchers that audience members may have differing levels of intensity with respect to their emotional responses to charity ads.

As an antecedent, ads can vary with respect to the degree to which they appeal to the audience's altruism or the audience's egoism. An ad that appeals to audience altruism communicates the neediness of others who need help. Egoistic ads communicate how supporting the charity can benefit the audience member. Bennett and Kottasz (2001) found, unsurprisingly, that egoistic ads that emphasize the benefits of volunteering had greater influence on less altruistic people and altruistic ads that emphasize the need to help others had greater influence on more altruistic people. Ranganathan and Henley (2008) found that altruism by itself doesn't create behavioral intention, but only exerts its influence when people have a favorable attitude towards charitable organizations and towards the advertisement

Most studies, instead of examining the effects of audience altruism, use audience empathy. The causal explanation is that a charity ad that evokes empathy in the audience will motivate the audience to donate to the charity (Bae, 2021; Bartsch & Klob, 2019). It is reasonable to believe, then, that the more empathy that an ad evokes in an audience, the more motivated audience members will be to donate to the charity.

Prior research treats the empathy construct as an emotional response to the charity ad stimulus rather than as a personality trait. Whether empathy was a mediator or moderator was often not elucidated and, in the case of factorial designs, would have been statistically treated as a continuous moderator. Using empathy as a personality trait would place the construct as a moderator. Using empathy as an evoked emotional response to the ad would place the construct as a mediator. Generally, the literature treats empathy as an audience emotional response to the ad, which mediates the ad's influence on audience donation intentions. Empathy has been consistently found to act as a mediator to the ad's influence on donation intentions with the exception of when the requested donation is intended for the charity organization rather than an individual in need (Ein-Gar & Levontin, 2013).

Guilt is another emotion that has been examined in the prior research. Like empathy, it's nomological position has toggled between serving as an antecedent and as a mediator. We believe that the theoretical argument for positioning evoked audience emotions as mediators is stronger than positioning audience emotional responses as antecedents. We also believe that audience personality traits are more properly positioned as moderators.

Chang (2014) found that egoistic ads are more effective when the audience experiences guilt emotions. Hibbert et al. (2007) reported that evoking guilt was more effective when the audience has favorable attitudes toward the charity. However, the influence of a guilt appeal

is attenuated when the audience believes that the charity ad is being manipulative (Hibbert et al., 2007).

*Gender*.  Prior research has positioned gender as a moderator of the influence of a charity ad on the outcome variables, typically donation intentions.  Most prior research has found that females are more likely to donate than males (Alonso Dos Santos et al., 2017, 2018; Chang & Lee, 2009, 2010).  Ranganathan and Sen (2012) reported that males were more likely to donate than females using a sample from India, arguing for a cultural influence on the gender moderating effect.

Other research explored the gender moderation effect of the influence of charity ads on an audience.  Chang and Lee (2011) reported that females are more influenced by altruistic appeals and that males are more influenced by egoistic appeals.  Winterich, Mittal, and Ross (2009) examined the interacting influence of moral identity and gender on audience responses to charity ads.  Moral identity is the extent to which notions of being moral (e.g., being fair, just, kind) are central, important, and essential to one's self-identity.  They found that for an audience in which moral identity is high, females are more likely to donate to help out-groups (people in another country) and males are more likely to donate to help in-groups (people from their own country).

Balestra (2011) investigated the moderating effect of gender on the influence of ad tone (antecedent) on the outcome variables (attitude toward the charity ad and intention to donate. Balestra (2011) found that for positive ad tone, females had higher ad attitudes and donation intentions and for negative ad tone, males had higher ad attitudes and donation intentions. Brunel & Nelson (2000) argue, that differences between sexes in their ad preferences are explained through a full mediation of world-view values.

*Culture*.  One way in which culture has been examined as a moderator of charity ad effectiveness is applying the collectivist versus individualist dichotomy.  In using this cultural dichotomy as a moderator of the influence of an emotional versus rational charity ad appeal on donation intentions, Kim (2016) found that the emotional appeal had more influence on audience members from a collectivist culture (Korean student sample).  The rational appeal had more influence on audience members from an individualistic culture (U.S. student sample).

Xu (2017, 2019) examined the moderating role of self-construal, as an alternative to the collectivist versus individualist cultural dichotomy.  Self-construal refers to individuals' overarching conceptualizations of the self-in-relation-to-other, which represents self-schema that guides thoughts and actions in a variety of social contexts. Individuals with a high interdependent self-construal define themselves in large part based on their relationships with other people. People with a high independent self-construal, in contrast, have a self-definition that emphasizes their uniqueness and autonomy from others.  Xu (2017) reported that independents were more influenced by egoistic appeals and interdependents were more influenced by altruistic appeals.  Xu (2019) reported that interdependents were more influenced to support social causes.

Nelson et al. (2006) examined the interaction of gender and culture on moderating audience responses to charity ads.  They examined the masculine versus feminine cultural dichotomy.  A masculine culture values achievement and competitiveness.  A feminine culture values relationships and nurturance (van den Bos et al., 2010).  Nelson et al. (2006) presented audience members from masculine and feminine cultures with egoistic or altruistic ads.  Their outcome variables included the degree to which audience members favored an altruistic versus egoistic ad and audience members' perceived moral obligation to help others. They found that in masculine cultures, men preferred the egoistic ad and women preferred the altruistic ad. In feminine cultures, where women are agentic and men can be nurturing, the opposite was the case. Exposure to both types of ads activated a sense of personal obligation among men in feminine nations and women in masculine nations.

*Political orientation*.  One stream of research examined the moderating influence of liberal versus conservative political orientation (Lee et al., 2018; Lee, Seo, & Yoon, 2020; Lee & Yoon, 2018).  Liberals tend to embrace humanitarianism, egalitarianism and progressive social changes that encourage equality and general welfare.  Rather than blame the poor for poverty, they tend to blame situational causes such as the lack of educational opportunities and biased governmental policies. Further, finding reasons for poverty from unequal social system and injustice justifies their support for progressive social changes for greater equality and welfare.  Conservatives accept the societal status quo, rationalize the social order, and resist social change, which leads to system-justification, the process by which existing social arrangements are legitimized.  They also embrace individualistic values such as self-discipline and self-reliance, which aligns with internal/dispositional attributions for poverty.

To legitimize the social system, they attribute poverty to dispositional characteristics such as laziness and immorality.

Lee and Yoon (2018) found liberals tend to more positively evaluate the charity ad and more likely participate in a charity event when the ad message includes structuralistic attribution (e.g., the society caused homelessness), while conservatives tend to more positively evaluate the ad and more likely participate in a charity event when the ad message includes individualistic attribution (e.g., the homeless people caused their homelessness).

Lee et al. (2018) examined the moderating influence of political orientation on the way in which a drawing was framed in a charity ad. In their study, a charity ad offered audience members donating to the charity an opportunity to be entered into a prize drawing. In one condition, each donor has an equal chance of winning (equality-based reward). In the other condition, a donor's chances of winning are proportional to the size of the donor's donation (proportionality-based reward). Audience members who were liberal favored the equality-based reward; conservatives favored the proportionality-based reward. In responding to fundraising premium drawings, liberals preferred all donors getting an equal chance at winning. Conservatives preferred the top donors to win the drawings.

Lee, Seo, and Yoon (2020) also examined the moderating influence of political orientation. They found that liberal donors respond more favorably to appeals that use external attributions blaming social causes, and conservative donors respond more favorably to appeals that use internal attributions blaming individual failings. Conservatives are also more influenced by the perceived outcome efficacy of helping.

*Values*. Prior charity ad research supports the influence of connecting to the audience's core values. Galvez (2006) reported that the effectiveness of a charity ad is influenced by the alignment between the abstract values inherent in a charity ad appeal and the values to which donors adhere. In examining the influence of values expressed in a charity ad on audience's willingness to volunteer, Bennett (2013) reported that the value congruence between audience members and the charity, as expressed in the ad, influences the ad's outcomes. Value congruity has been found to influence attitudes toward the charity (Supphellen & Nelson, 2001) and attitudes toward the charity ad (Brunel & Nelson, 2000).

*Psychological distance*.  Psychological distance refers to a subjective mental formation of how close an object or an event is perceived.  There are four dimensions of psychological distance: time, space, social distance, and probability (Chen, 2020).

In the antecedent section of this paper, we discussed statistical framing.  Probability or hypothetical distance can be construed in a similar manner.  It is the perceived distance between certain and hypothetical events (Fiedler, 2007).  Altering a charity ad in a manner that influences the degree to which the audience perceives the charity's objective as being more likely or probable would be an example of manipulating the probability construct.  Bennett's (2013) perceived effectiveness construct was found to be influential.  Bennett (2013) reported that featuring a charity's success influenced the audience's attitude toward the charity.

With respect to social distance, Dedeaux (2009) found that social closeness (friends/family versus strangers) interacts with temporal framing (urgent versus future need) to influence an audience's donation intentions.  Ein-Gar and Levontin (2013) found that people are more willing to donate to a charitable organization serving a population temporally or socially distant. In the case of advertising for a specific person in need, the willingness to donate is higher when donors are temporally or socially close to the beneficiaries.

*Other*. Some prior studies did not appear to be an extension of a charity ad research stream. For example, Lee (2014) examined the moderating influence of incidental similarity. Audience members could perceive a trivial similarity between themselves and the victim or announcer in a charity ad.  The similarity could be first name, birth date, hometown, and so forth.  The argument for an incidental similarity effect is that people are more sympathetic to people they perceive to be like themselves.  Lee reported this effect.  Ads that had incidental (or trivial) similarities positively influenced the degree to which the audience was more sympathetic and, thus, more willing to donate.

As another example, Van Steenburg (2013) found that the moderating influence of audience involvement with the ad influenced donation and volunteering intentions.  Van Steenburg found that when an ad featured others supporting the charity, the audience's involvement with the ad interacts with their attitudes towards donating to influence their likelihood of donating and the donation amount.

Finally, Cao (2016) examined the moderating influence of perceived susceptibility to the negative consequences of not donating. The audience was presented with either a gain-framed or a loss-framed message encouraging donations to a charity hospital featuring a child with cancer. The audience's perceived susceptibility to the negative consequences of not donating indicated the degree to which they believed a friend or family member might also suffer from cancer like the victim in the ad. Cao (2016) reported that as perceived susceptibility increased, the loss-framed message had greater influence than a gain-framed message on donation intentions. Hence, for issues related to harm which many people may experience, loss-framed messaging may be more effective.

## 4 | RESEARCH AGENDA

### 4.1 | Theoretical advancement

One way to improve the theoretical advancement of charity advertising research is to better ensure the use of sound scientific methods in developing research questions that make contributions to the literature and develop appropriate testable models. Including conceptual models (nomological nets) and carefully defining focal constructs would help other researchers better integrate their studies with other charity advertising research. Arriving at a consensus on the conceptualizations of constructs would help lead to better scales to measure those constructs, improving the validity and value of research.

A salient issue surfaced in our analysis of the literature. That is the use of factorial research designs and the related issue of failing to distinguish the nomological position of constructs. Researchers often failed to provide a meaningful explanation for the causal relationships of operationalized studies. In many factorial designs, antecedents were often not distinguished from moderators/mediators. Our theoretical understanding of charity advertising phenomena would benefit by specifying the direction of influence in inter-construct relationships rather than simply examining the main and interaction effects of proposed factors.

*Antecedents*. With respect to antecedents, generally they would include features of the charity ad. Here we include two categories of constructs: appeal type and ad elements. Appeal type refers to the overall theme of the ad. Prior research examined positive versus negative ad framing, a loss or gain appeal, an emotional or rational appeal, and statistical versus anecdotal framing.

The ad elements category refers to all the features of an ad that might influence the audience. Examples of prior literature include the use of color or black and white pictures, including charity efficiency ratings, and including goal attainment information. Aspects of the ad that signal to the audience the urgency of the charity's need would be another example.

Prior research has examined the emotions evoked by ads, but this research stream needs to better classify the ad features (antecedents) that influence an audience's emotional response to the ad (mediator). Prior research examined the use of shock (versus informative) ads. However, we need to better understand what ad elements (antecedents) evoke audience shock (mediator).

Prior research has examined the portrayal of victims and, sometimes, announcers, as ad element features. This includes the portrayal of facial deformities, the use of children, the perceived attractiveness of announcers, and the announcer's gender. In the case in which two ad elements interact, then one of them is acting as a moderator, such as when an announcer's level of perceived attractiveness (or expertise) interacts with the use of children's facial deformities. When there is an interaction between two ad elements, the antecedent or moderator identification will need to be supported by theory and prior research.

*Moderators*. Inherent audience characteristics that alter the strength of the influence of the antecedent-outcome relationship are moderators. Prior research using factorial designs predicted significant interaction effects but usually omitted presenting a theory for the interacting relationship. Inherent audience characteristics like gender or personality traits are not antecedents that can be varied, nor are they influenced by antecedents. Therefore, they serve as moderators of the influence of the antecedents on the outcome variables. Other audience characteristics can be empathy, altruism, and affect intensity. Affect intensity is interesting because it refers to how people differentially experience emotional responses to charity ads.

Some prior research examined the effects of culture or political dispositions in charity advertising studies. These constructs are not manipulated by the researchers but are endemic in the audience. Hence, constructs such as these are properly positioned in conceptual models as moderators.

*Mediators*. Mediators are helpful in understanding more about how the antecedents influence the outcome variables. Much of the prior research presents the influence of charity ads on

outcome variables as a consequence of the audience's emotional response to the ads. Some prior research conflated the emotional response of the audience with the ad, labeling the emotional response as the type of ad appeal. It is flawed theory construction to conflate antecedents with their consequents. Researchers need to identify the characteristics of the ads that influence the evoked emotional response in the audience.

The typical explanation in prior charity advertising research is that the ad evokes an emotional response in the audience. The emotional response motivates the audience's behavioral intentions, typically intentions to donate. The most used emotions are sympathy, empathy, pity, and guilt.

The degree to which an audience can be shocked by elements of a charity ad have also been examined in prior research. The shock response can then, itself, influence audience's attention and processing of the charity ad. Shock can also influence audience surprise, interest, and compassion (Cockrill & Parsonage, 2016).

It is interesting to note that empathy can be a personality trait (moderator, e.g., Bennett, 1997) or evoked audience emotion (mediator, e.g., Ein-Gar & Levontin, 2013). Researchers need to be clear in how they define constructs their placement in conceptual models.

Attitudes are interesting constructs that are influenced by charity ads. Attitudes can serve either as a mediator (e.g., Van Steenburg, 2013) or as an outcome (e.g., Moriuchi & Chung, 2018), depending on the scope of the researcher's conceptual model. Ultimately, charity marketers would like to stimulate a behavioral response from the audience, like donations (e.g., Erlandsson, Nilsson, & Västfjäll, 2018), volunteering (e.g., Van Steenburg, 2013), or advocacy (e.g., Bebko, Sciulli, & Bhagat, 2014). However, improving audience attitudes are often an intermediatory step toward influencing a behavioral response. Attitude objects can be the advertised charity (e.g., Chang, & Lee, 2011), charities in general (Ranganathan & Sen, 2012), the charity ad (e.g., Zhou, & Xue, 2018), some features of the ad (Lee, 2014), the charity's cause/mission (Cockrill & Parsonage, 2016), or the people served by the charity (Kennedy & Hill, 2009).

Overall, charity advertising research and examining inter-construct relationships in a nomological net is a rather recent research sub-field. Although, the oldest paper conceptualizing a mediation relationship was published in 2000, most of the studies including a mediation model were published in 2012 and after. In total, we identified 20 studies conceptualizing a mediated model or even a moderated mediation. Of these 20 studies, 12 applied the available Hayes conditional process software or a Sobel test to verify the

robustness and significance of their proposed mediation effects. Three studies used structural equation modelling (SEM) and the goodness of fit statistics provided by the analysis software AMOS. The remaining five studies did not analyze the proposed mediation further, but rather went on with a factorial design. Hence, most of the prior literature may be considered inadequate in meeting current methodological procedures for evaluating mediations, multiple mediations, and moderated mediations (e.g., Nitzl et al., 2016; Zhao et al., 2010) which is needed in future research.

*Outcomes*.  Whereas some prior research limited the outcome audience constructs to attitudes or emotions, we believe these would be better positioned as mediators.  Since charities typically desire a behavioral response from the audience, research designs that feature emotions and attitudes as mediators, and behavioral intentions or actual behaviors as outcomes, are theoretically preferable.

Behavioral intentions are more convenient to measure than actual behaviors, although actual behaviors might be preferred.  It is reasonable to believe that intentions are predictive of behaviors, but imperfect surrogates.  We believe in many cases measuring intentions are valid and acceptable because they are predictive of actual behaviors, and because individuals who have not engaged in the actual behavior can be sampled.  This is appropriate because charities are often interested in attracting support from persons who have not previously supported them.

As we previously discussed, intention to donate was the most used outcome variable in prior research, followed by attitude toward the ad (more properly positioned as a mediator), and intention to volunteer.  We believe that researchers would make greater contributions and have richer findings by increasing the number and variety of outcome variables (Wymer & Rundle-Thiele, 2016).

## 4.2 | Future research

*Progressive research streams*.  Like many marketing fields, the advancement of our knowledge of charity advertising has been impeded by the lack of progressive research streams that extend prior research incrementally.  Too many studies are independent, one-off studies that add little incremental value to the body of charity ad research.  We need more research that clearly identifies gaps in the prior literature and fills those gaps by predicting a nomological net of inter-construct relationships, and then tests those predictions using

structural modeling or path analytic procedures. There are many future research ideas on charity advertising that can be examined to fill gaps in our extent knowledge base.

Charities engage in marketing activities to attract and retain resources to carry out their operations. How well do we understand influences on audiences in directing their support? Do audiences want to support the charity, its cause, or the victims needing help? Or, are audiences desiring egoistic benefits from their support? Audiences are heterogeneous and there is much we do not yet understand about audience factors that account for their varying responses to charity advertising.

The charity advertising's influence on an audience appears to be that the ad evokes audience sympathy, and a sympathetic audience is influenced to donate to the charity to help the victim group. Practically, child welfare and disaster relief charities are often the types of charities using mass advertising, so this research emphasis is somewhat well-founded.

Since prior research is generally cross-sectional instead of longitudinal, the accumulated influence of enduring advertising using repeated exposures is not examined. Consequently, cross-sectional research that features substantial human misery may evoke greater influence on the audience than other types of charity advertising for other types of charities. The mere exposure effects on audiences has received little attention.

Hence, it is important that future research take into consideration a variety of charity types and, indeed, other types of nonprofit organizations. For example, Bennett (2003) in a non-charity-advertising study, interviewed 250 individuals in central London to distinguish their intentions to donate to one of three types of charities. Bennett reported that personal values and inclinations influenced their selections. It is reasonable to believe that the type of charity might be an influential antecedent for investigating in future charity advertising research.

Atypical charity advertising may not be as emotive or dramatic as the typical disaster relief advertising, but all charities desire benefits from advertising and, hence, should be accounted for in charity advertising research. Some causes, like improving care for the mentally ill, or providing aid to veterans tend not to experience good outcomes from advertising perhaps because their causes lack a sense of urgency. One charity advertising campaign that sought to raise donations for a disaster in Japan was unsuccessful, perhaps because Japan is perceived to be an advanced, capable nation (van Leeuwen & Wiepking, 2012). Indeed, we need to learn more about how to increase advertising effectiveness for a variety of charity types having diverse advertising objectives.

With respect to the examination of antecedents, we could learn more about the influence of spokesperson characteristics (expertise, attractiveness, gender), organization characteristics (charity type, reputation, size, longevity, brand familiarity), or victim characteristics (gender, age, perceived personal culpability).

With respect to mediators, we could examine the influence of brand preference, brand identity, brand loyalty, donation risk (perceived likelihood that donation will not be used in a manner intended by the donor), or affinity with charity/cause. We could examine the audience's commitment to the charity, and its affection or attachment to the charity. Moreover, Zhou and Xue (2018) suggest other mediating variables that could influence the effectiveness of visual content in nonprofit marketing campaigns, such as family and peer influence, source credibility, and personality factors.

With respect to moderators, van Steenburg (2013) recommends taking branding into account. We could examine the influence of charity watchdog ratings, audience characteristics (religiosity, attitudes toward charity sector, empathy, education). The exploration of audience values and supporting the charity can serve as a pathway for expressing important values. As discussed previously, gender has been found to differentiate audience response to charity ads in prior research. Too often, however, researchers have simply used gender as a control variable and merely noted any significant statistical differences. Wymer (2017) discussed the use of gender as a control variable in prior nonprofit marketing research. He advises that if researchers suspect that there are gender differences present in the data, then gender should be modeled as a moderator that predicts heterogeneity in the data. A theoretical explanation should be provided for this prediction, leading to a testable hypothesis. Wymer (2011) used prior gender differences from the neuroscience field to generate a series of testable hypotheses to predict gender differences in volunteering. This research might serve as a means of understanding gender differences in responses to charity ads. Besides gender, other variables such as education, economic status, and age can serve as variables that explain differences in audience responses to charity ads (Alonso Do Santos et al., 2017).

With respect to outcomes, in addition to donation intentions, we could examine the influence of charity ads on supporter retention, the audience's intention to make a monthly bank transfer, WOM, and its commitment to the advertising charity/cause. Enlarging the pool of appropriate outcome variables may produce more interesting results and more fully account for the influence of antecedent and mediating constructs (Wymer, 2021b).

*Indirect effects*. Consumer advertising generally assumes that advertising effects are incremental, progressive, and indirect. That is, consumer advertisers understand that enduring, regular advertising is needed to enhance consumer attitudes toward the advertised brands and to familiarize consumers with the brand. Consumer advertisers understand that a single ad is relatively ineffective. Multiple exposures over time are needed. Even for a dominant brand, regular reminder advertising is needed. Consumer brand advertisers also know that an ad is unlikely to motivate direct consumer brand purchases. Instead, consumer brand advertisers hope that when consumers are making a brand choice in the relevant product category, their prior advertising will ensure that the advertised brand is in consumers' consideration sets and that the advertised brand is perceived favorably.

In contrast to consumer advertisers, charity advertisers advertise as if they expect a single or a few exposures of an ad to motivate a behavioral response from the audience, such as a donating to the advertised charity. There has been too much emphasis on charity advertising aimed at influencing immediate donation behavior. We need more charity advertising research that examines indirect effects of the ads on attitudinal variables not leading directly to donation intentions.

Future research should examine the effectiveness of advertising with a brand management strategy. Enduring advertising aimed at strengthening the charity brand, may have a mediation effect on future fundraising advertising. When the charity is a familiar brand, one with an excellent reputation, will that charity more effectively gain and retain donor support? Does it make sense to invest in building brand strength prior to fundraising appeals or do fund raising appeals accomplish brand building and fundraising simultaneously?

*Methodological issues*. As discussed in the previous section, advertising's effectiveness is often influenced by the degree to which audiences have been presented with multiple exposures to ads. The mere exposure effect is well-known in psychology and in advertising research. The mere exposure effect refers to the influence that repeated exposure of something has on familiarity and, consequently, attitudes and other outcomes (Hopper, 2019).

Hence, we recommend that there be greater emphasis on multiple exposure effects and greater use of longitudinal designs. The effects of advertising are often progressively

incremental, and we need to better understand the influence on audiences of enduring charity advertising.

We recommend the use of structural model designs, specifying the nomological net, rather than simply testing a factorial model. Specifying a structural model presents a more precise explanation for the inter-construct relationships. Many studies in the charity advertising literature used simple factorial designs and failed to specify whether the interacting constructs were antecedents or moderators/mediators. This practice hinders the theoretical contribution of these studies.

The use of structural equation modeling (SEM), including partial least-squares (PLS) modeling is recommended. The use of either modeling technique allows for the testing of the hypothesized structural model as well as the validation of the measurement model.

Other important methodological recommendations include more representative samples. The charity advertising literature too often relied on university student convenience samples. Moreover, samples were drawn from only a few geographic regions. Hence, greater diversity in samples from various geographical and cultural backgrounds will enhance the generalizability of research findings. Furthermore, there should be more emphasis on reporting and interpreting effect sizes of significant findings. It is important to understand the relative strength of an inter-construct relationship, not just its statistical significance.

## 5 | IMPLICATIONS

In this section, we will present the practical implications of prior charity research. Then we will synthesize those practical implications into some general guidelines.

### 5.1 | Practical implications from prior research

Table 4 summarizes practical implications stated most often in the charity advertising literature. Authors advise managers to adapt to audience factors, such as their motivational orientation and norms (5 studies, 9.4%). The use of negative emotions in advertisements is advisable in the short-term. But studies show that in the long-term positive appeals are advisable to encourage an "exchange of favors" (5 studies, 9.4%). In general, the use of photos or pictures is advisable in comparison to using only text (5 studies, 9.4%).

**TABLE 4**: Practical Implications Summary

| Practical Implications[a] | Count | % |
|---|---|---|
| Be aware of the norms and motivational orientation across a range of potential situations and target audiences and adjust appeal strategies accordingly. | 5 | 9.4% |
| Use negative appeals that evoke negative emotions such as sadness, guilt, anger, and general aversion in the short run to alleviate negative feelings. | 5 | 9.4% |
| Use positive appeals in the long run to encourage an "exchange of favors" between the organization and the donor. | | |
| Use photos or physical objects in comparison to text ads to create a more positive attitude by the viewer and a higher intention to participate. | 5 | 9.4% |
| Build (transactional) trust with potential donors. | 3 | 5.7% |
| Note that a digital advertising strategy is becoming increasingly important. This requires targeted advertising campaigns, highly targeted posts, and an engaging Facebook page. | 3 | 5.7% |
| Use negative images of victims to increase the willingness to donate. | 3 | 5.7% |
| Show ads with victims and attractive announcers. | | |
| Communicate information about the voluntary activity and the emotional and practical benefits of volunteering. | 2 | 3.8% |
| Involve volunteers in the CA development to find out what elements are congruent between volunteers and the charity. | | |
| Achieve effective CAs through loss-framed messages and through presenting the negative consequences of not donating. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Achieve high CA effectiveness at low cost with a targeted strategy. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Be aware of in-group and out-group perceptions and strive to dismantle these perceptions with regard to international affairs. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Be sure to create positive awareness among your audience so that they are more likely to donate. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Consider the power of feedback and thank every donor, regardless of his or her donation amount. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Create a simple processing of the charity ad to increases the attention of the viewer and the intention to help the victim. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Create a positive attitude about advertising by the donor. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Create negative emotions through story-telling that can be alleviated through a donation. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Emphasize donor motives and social responsibility to reinforce ethnic identity and generate more empathy toward CA. | 1 | 1.9% |
| First, perform a pre-test with the ad to check its desired effectiveness. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Focus a donation target and match it to the psychological distance of the audience. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Handle high memorability carefully if your organization has an awareness-raising goal. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Invest in organizational image building, 'corporate identity' and reputation management programs. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Involve the public in the theme of the ad to make the message more relevant and to increase behavioral intent. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Message priming should match appeal type. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Note that a mixed emotional appeal of a happy victim image and a strong sad message appeal is effective across Asian and Western countries. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Note that any commentary evoking feelings of loneliness can decrease sympathy toward victims portrayed in a subsequently viewed negative charity appeal. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Note that explicit appeals for donations can also be a barrier, so use images of victims or personalized descriptions. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Note that fundraising appeals are most successful when they communicate a need that is congruent with the salient values and cognitive styles of the viewers (e.g. Liberals & Conservatives) | 1 | 1.9% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Note that growth mindsets donate more to controllable causes (benefit-framing), fixed mindsets to less controllable causes. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Note that socially included consumers/ growth mindsets respond more positively to egoist appeals, socially excluded consumers / fixed mindsets to altruistic appeals. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Note that using altruistic appeals and showing helped beneficiaries can attract more volunteering, whereas using egoistic appeals and showing needy beneficiaries can attract more monetary donations. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Notice, that religiosity is an important antecedent variable for predicting charitable donation intentions and can increase the effectiveness of the ad. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Pay attention to the environment in which you place the ad. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Use black-and-white photos to focus on damage caused by natural disasters and to create a greater sense of urgency. | 1 | 1.9% |
| When using shocking material in charity advertising you have to be careful and should get to know the culture's societal norms in order to understand how far they can stretch the line for this particular type of controversial advertising. | 1 | 1.9% |
| Win over non-donors with messages of community support. | 1 | 1.9% |
| **Total** | **53** | **100%** |

ᵃ Multiple classifications per study were possible.

## 5.2 | Synthesis of practical implications

In the previous section, we discussed areas for productive future charity advertising research. We should note that a good proportion of charity advertising research has featured a charity that helps people. Often the people who are being helped are blameless, meaning they have no or little responsibility for their needy condition. Often the people who are being helped are children.

For those charities that need to solicit audience donations to help victims, prior research has provided practical guidance. For example, the use of negative or positive framing is less important than an ad's ability to evoke audience sympathy for the victims. Given the tactic of evoking audience sympathy to influence its desire to donate to the charity, altruistic appeals appear more effective than egoistic appeals.

Evoking some minor level of shock at the plight of the victims can be useful in gaining the audience's attention. (However, this must be done without harming the victims' dignity.) Communicating the urgency of the need can also help to influence the audience. When the ad's message communicates that donors can make a meaningful difference rather than giving the audience a sense of hopelessness, the ad can have greater effectiveness.

The charity literature review discussed previously provides a more nuanced understanding of conditions under which combining the type of ad framing with the presentation of statistical information are differentially more effective. The prior discussion also includes how audience gender may interact with ad framing and the type of appeal.

# 6 | CONCLUSION

Finally, it is important to note that traditional mass advertising from charities typically featured large, complex national or international charities. Often the media choice was television advertising. Television viewership is changing (Choi, Rangan, & Singh, 2016). The proportion of audience share viewing noncommercial online streaming services (e.g., Netflix or Prime) is growing at the expense of traditional commercial broadcast or cable television networks (Fitzgerald, 2019).

Advertisers are increasingly relying on social media platforms (Rubens, 2020). The social media platforms may use algorithms and artificial intelligence software to carefully select which audience members to target with a specific ad, offering advertisers more specific audience targeting than with traditional mass media (Nonprofit Times, 2016).

Smaller charities and charities with causes less likely to evoke mass audience sympathy may benefit from the greater ability to target a responsive audience more carefully on social media platforms (Lepper, 2021). This is a particularly opportune time for charities and for researchers.

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## Appendix 1: Literature analyzed but not included in the article:

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**Appendix 2: Construct definitions from the charity advertising literature**

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| Ad framing (Balestra 2011) | The positive or negative perception of the information content of the ad's voice-over (if there is a voice-over) in the TV ad. If there is no voice-over this is coded "absent" |
| Ad appeal (pos or neg) Erlandsson, Nilsson, & Vastfjall (2018) | Negative appeals are operationalized as advertisements that emphasize the negative consequences if not complying with a request whereas positive appeals are operationalized as advertisements emphasizing the positive consequences if complying. |
| Ad framing (Chang & Lee 2009) | Positive frames emphasize the potential gains of donating. Negative frames emphasize the negative consequences of not donating. (e.g., "With your help, an unfortunate child can have an opportunity for a bright future") or negatively framed ones (e.g., "Without your help, an unfortunate child will remain living in the dark") An example of a negatively framed fundraising message is: ''10,000 people will die of starvation if we do not support them.'' A positive frame would describe the same facts as: ''10,000 people can be saved from starvation with our support.'' |
| Ad tone (Balestra 2011) | The positive or negative valence the viewer assigns to the nature of the images in the TV ad. |
| Affect intensity (Bennett 2015) | Affect intensity refers to the variability of emotional acuteness individuals experience to similar stimuli. A person with high affect intensity (HAI) may experience an emotive advertisement in a more deeply emotional manner than a person with lower levels of affect intensity. |
| Appeal type: altruistic vs. egoistic (Chang & Lee 2011) | An egoistic ('help-self') appeal implies that a donation will help oneself, perhaps by improving society in general, by potentially helping one directly at a future time, or simply by implying that one will feel good after donating. An altruistic ('help-others') appeal implies only that the donation will help other people, with no clear benefit to oneself. |

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| Efficiency rate of charity (Ryazanov & Christenfeld, 2018) | This refers to the proportion (e.g., cents per dollar) of donations that are spent directly on the cause. Watch dog organizations are often sources of charity efficiency ratings. |
| Goal attainment Das et al. (2008) | Expectations about the number of participants already contributing to the probability of success were addressed as follows: ''Thanks to our 165,000 supporters, 150,000 patients are detected and treated each year.''<br><br>Expectations about each individual donor contributing to the probability of success were addressed by demonstrating that one single donation can make a difference: Of course, a lot of money is needed to continue all projects. It only takes 50 Euros [approximately 70 USD] to detect, treat and rehabilitate one patient. For the even smaller amount of 15 Euros [approximately 20 USD] a patient can be helped. |
| Helping mode (Li & Atkinson, 2020) | Helping mode refers to the way in which individuals offer resources to those who need it (e.g., donations, , volunteering, buying cause-related products). |
| Image valence (Chang & Lee 2009) | …presenting vivid pictorial information either positively or negatively in a framed message. |
| incidental similarity Lee (2014) | A perceived trivial similarity between a viewer of a charity ad and the victim or announcer in the ad. The similarity could be first name, birth date, hometown, and so forth. People are more sympathetic to people they perceive to be similar to themselves. |
| Mixed Emotions (Bennett 2015) | An emotional response in an individual viewing an ad in which both positive and negative emotions are evoked. |
| Moral identity Winterich, Mittal, & Ross, 2009) | Moral identity is the extent to which notions of being moral (e.g., being fair, just, kind) are central, important, and essential to one's self-identity. |
| Mortality salience (Wilson 2014) | Mortality salience (MS) is defined as an individual's awareness of his or her own inevitable death. |

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| Movie liking (Balestra (2011) | A summary evaluation of how much the viewer likes the movie. |
| Motive (altruistic vs. egoistic) Lee et al. (2018) | Egoistic motives are ultimately based on donors' desires to enhance their own welfare, while altruistic motives are based on donors' desires to enhance the welfare of others in need. |
| Movie style Balestra (2011) | The affective valence of the movie shown prior to the charity ad. The pos/neg emotion impact the movie has on the viewer. |
| Prosocial behavior Wilson (2014) | Prosocial behavior or helping behavior, as its sometimes called, has been defined as voluntary behavior intended to benefit another, such as helping, sharing, and comforting others. |
| Psychological distance Chen (2020) | Psychological distance is defined as a subjective mental formation of how close an object or an event is perceived. 4 dimensions (time, space, social distance, and probability) |
| Self-construal Xu (2017) | Self-construal refers to individuals' overarching conceptualizations of the self-in-relation-to-other, which represents self-schema that guides thoughts and actions in a variety of social contexts. Individuals with a high interdependent self-construal define themselves in large part based on their relationships with other people. People with a high independent self-construal, in contrast, have a self-definition that emphasizes their uniqueness and autonomy from others. |
| Self-referencing (Chang & Lee 2011) | Self-referencing as what is induced when an ad prompts individuals to focus attention on themselves while providing them with a link to a stimulus. Self-referencing is considered as an information processing strategy and it occurs when information is processed by relating it to aspects of oneself (Burnkrant & Unnava, 1989,1995). |
| Social distance Dedeaux (2009) | Socially close vs. distant. Family or friends vs. strangers. (Dedeaux 2009). |
| Statistical framing (Chang & Lee 2010) | (statistical framing: larger numerator vs smaller numerator) |

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| | 700 million out of 2.1 billion children from the developing world live without adequate shelter' is mathematically equivalent to '1 out of 3 children from the developing world live without adequate shelter'. |
| Temporal framing (Chang & Lee 2009) | …statistics are presented in a short-term temporal frame, as opposed to a long-term one.

Example: short-term temporal frame (i.e., 1,250 children die each *hour* as a result of poverty) or a long-term temporal frame (i.e., about 11 million children die each *year* as a result of poverty). |
| Dedeaux (2009) | Donors also typically respond first to urgent appeals for humanitarian aid in response to large-scale natural catastrophes, before they will donate to less urgent appeals such as economic development or a capital campaign. This suggests that people categorize situations on a temporal basis. |
| Terror Management Processes Wilson (2014) | Terror management processes refer to the progression a person goes through to alleviate the fear of death once they have become mortality salient. |
| Cultural Dichotomy Individualism vs. Collectivism (Kim, 2016) | One of the most frequently used cultural dichotomies is *individualism–collectivism*, which is defined as the degree to which the member identities of a particular culture are shaped by either personal choices or by the group to which they belong (Hofstede, 1980). *Individualism* is the tendency to hold an independent view of the self that emphasizes separateness, internal attributes, and the uniqueness of individuals, whereas *collectivism* is the tendency to hold an interdependent view of the self that emphasizes connectedness, social context, and relationships (Singelis, 1994; Triandis, 1989). |