

Perspective Taking and Persuasiveness of Charity Advertising Appeals: An Abstract

Guangzhi Zhao, Qiyu (Jason) Zhang, and Lefa Teng

Abstract Charity advertising is prevalent to appeal to individual donors to boost their contributions to charity (Bendapudi, Singh, & Bendapudi, 1996; Brunel & Nelson, 2000). Surprisingly, very little research effort has been devoted to study the effectiveness of different appeals in charity advertising. Charity advertising varies greatly in the ways it characterizes the charitable causes. Such differences can be parsimoniously summarized along two dimensions – focal beneficiary of charitable actions (self vs. others) and reasons of helping (attain benefits vs. avoid costs) (Bagozzi & Moore, 1994; Bendapudi, Singh, & Bendapudi, 1996; Clary, Snyder, Ridge, et al., 1998). Thus, we can differentiate four common appeals in charity ads: help-self-attain-benefits, help-self-avoid-costs, help-others-attain-benefits, and help-others-avoid-costs. Are they equally persuasive? If not, which one is more effective than others?

In this research, we studied the relative persuasiveness of these four charity appeals in the context of volunteerism advertising. We propose the following: (1) a help-self charity ad will be more effective when it highlights benefit-related (vs. cost-related) outcomes of helping, whereas a help-others charity ad will be more effective when it highlights cost-related (vs. benefit-related) outcomes of helping. Our rationale is that ads that adopt different appeals (help-self vs. help-others) can activate contrasting focus of information process and lead viewers to process different types of consequences (benefits vs. costs) differently. (2) This effect will be contingent on viewers' perspective-taking tendency such that, for individuals who are low in perspective taking, the effect will hold, whereas for individuals who are high in perspective-taking tendency, the effect will disappear.

Two experimental studies were conducted in the context of volunteerism advertising to test these hypotheses, and the results were supportive. In study 1, participants were randomly assigned to an experiment with a 2 (help-self appeal vs. help-others appeal) × 2 (attain benefits of helping vs. avoid costs of helping)

G. Zhao (✉) • Q. Zhang
Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore, MD, USA
e-mail: gzhao@loyola.edu; jzhang1@loyola.edu

L. Teng
Jiangnan University, Wuxi, China
e-mail: leteng@jiangnan.edu

between-subjects factorial design. Participants read a letter from a charity encouraging college students to volunteer. Four versions of the letters were created and each condition viewed one version. Thereafter, subjects' likelihoods to sign up for volunteering were measured as one main dependent variable. Study 2 replicated and extended study 1. The design was a 2 (perspective taking, high vs. low) \times 2 (frame of reference, help-self vs. help-others frame of reference) \times 2 (reasons for helping, attain benefits vs. avoid costs) between subjects fully crossed factorial. Participants' perspective taking was measured. The other two factors were manipulated as in study 1.

References Available Upon Request