

Russell Ackoff Doctoral Student Fellowship Proposal

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Project Title: Moral Identity and Unpleasant Donations of Time versus Money

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Project Description and Contribution

People can contribute to charities in two ways: they can donate money, or they can donate time (i.e., volunteer). At first, it might seem that if consumers are considering economically equivalent amounts of money and time (i.e., \$5 of money versus \$5 worth of time), they should be indifferent between donating the two resources. Standard utility theory would also support this prediction: \$1 is \$1 whether it is expressed in monetary or temporal units (Okada & Hoch, 2004).

However, a growing body of recent research has shown that consumers view time and money very differently. Specifically, time is a more personally meaningful resource than money is. When consumers are induced to think about time rather than money, they feel more connected to their products and hence evaluate them more favorably (Mogilner & Aaker, 2009). Moreover, time is used in more intimate interpersonal situations than money is: people use money in transactions with everyone from close friends to perfect strangers, but they use time almost exclusively for the people and things that really matter to who they are (Foa & Foa, 1980).

Because time is so much more connected to the self than money is, donating time to charity entails greater personal sacrifice than donating money does. What might make consumers more attracted to donating in a manner that entails more personal sacrifice? Recent research suggests that moral identity, that is, consumers' views of themselves along dimensions commonly associated with highly moral people (e.g., kindness, compassion, honesty), may make consumers more concerned for others' wellbeing (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Reed & Aquino, 2003). When consumers are focused on their moral identity, perhaps because they have recently seen a photograph of Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., or some other highly moral historical figure, they seek to act in a manner consistent with that identity. And acting consistently with moral identity means being willing to sacrifice for others. Consistent with this idea, consumers are more likely to donate in time, the higher sacrifice option, rather than money, when they have recently been prompted to think about their moral identity (Reed, Aquino, & Levy, 2007).

The present research picks up where past work on moral identity and donations of time and money left off. We now seek to delve more deeply into the properties of donating time compared to donating money, and into the role that moral identity might play in consumers' views of these properties. Donating time differs from donating an equivalent amount of money in one additional way: the potential for variation in the donation task. Whereas donating money always involves taking out a wallet and giving up dollars, donating time can entail a wide variety of tasks, which could differ in their degree of unpleasantness as well as in the degree of sympathy they elicit for the victims receiving aid. Indeed, these two dimensions of the donation task are often correlated: more unpleasant tasks often afford the possibility for greater contact with victims and hence for greater sympathy with victims.

For example, hospital volunteers might be asked to rearrange chairs in the waiting area (neutral task), or they might be asked to spoon feed patients, cleaning them up if they spit up, vomit, or soil themselves (unpleasant task). Cleaning patients elicits far more disgust but also more sympathy with patients than rearranging chairs does. If consumers dwell on the disgust, they should be less likely to donate in time compared to money when their donation task is unpleasant rather than neutral. This is because people are presumably less willing to behave prosocially when doing so is costlier. By contrast, if consumers dwell on the sympathy, they should be more likely to donate in time compared to money when their donation task is

unpleasant. This is because sympathy with victims increases consumers' likelihood of helping (Small & Verrochi, 2009).

What might motivate consumers to prefer donating in time versus money, given that donating time can be both more unpleasant but also more sympathy eliciting than donating money is? That is, when and why might people dwell more on the higher sympathy rather than on the higher unpleasantness of donating time compared to money? Moral identity might help us answer these questions. Because moral identity increases consumers' willingness to sacrifice for distant others' wellbeing (Reed & Aquino, 2003), we propose that it will also increase their willingness to donate time in unpleasant but more sympathy eliciting ways. Whereas those for whom moral identity is not important are likely to donate time only when doing so requires relatively little sacrifice compared to donating money (i.e., only when donating time is not unpleasant), those for whom moral identity is important are likely to donate time even when doing so requires great sacrifice compared to donating money (i.e., even when donating time is highly unpleasant).

This effect, we believe, will be driven by the emotions that high versus low moral identifiers focus on when faced with the more unpleasant but more sympathy eliciting time donation task. Those for whom moral identity is unimportant will focus on the disgust they experience when they consider this time donation task, and hence they will be less likely to donate in time compared to money when the time donation task is highly unpleasant but also highly sympathy eliciting. By contrast, those for whom moral identity is important will focus on the sympathy they experience when they consider this time donation task, and hence they will be more likely to donate in time compared to money when the time donation task is highly unpleasant but also highly sympathy eliciting.

We will test these hypotheses across a variety of laboratory and field experiments. In the Wharton Behavioral Lab, we will present undergraduate participants with both hypothetical and real opportunities to donate to charity. They will choose between donating in time and donating in money. We will manipulate how salient moral identity is as well as how unpleasant and how sympathy eliciting the time donation task is. We will then examine the choice shares of donating time versus donating money among participants in the different conditions. We predict that making moral identity salient will increase the choice share of donating time compared to donating money, and that this will be especially true when the donation task is highly unpleasant but also highly sympathy eliciting.

In the field, we will run an experiment similar to the one just described, but will do so with a broader cross section of the population. We will recruit participants through online samples and through actual charities interested in increasing volunteering. When we collaborate with charities, we may try to incorporate our moral identity salience manipulation into an actual advertisement for the charity. We aim to show that increasing moral identity salience in this externally valid manner will increase the proportion of donors who opt to volunteer rather than give money, and that this is particularly true when the donation task is highly unpleasant but also highly sympathy eliciting.

I am requesting funding to help defray the cost of recruiting and paying participants, as well as to fund travel to a conference to present this research. I would appreciate any assistance the Ackoff Fellowship can provide.

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